

and the Internet to become effective as a tool of political socialization. This is a point that could be applied in the Philippines, with its deep ethnic, religious and class divisions. So far only the computerization of elections has drawn significant interest instead of the much broader issues of communication technology and political consciousness.

In general, therefore, Loader's book stands as a highly informative resource regarding the intersection between ICTs and young people's political participation. Its insights would be useful in a

variety of fields. What Loader's work could benefit from, however, is a look at the trends observed in developing countries and comparing them with other contexts. Despite the choice of locations studied being mainly developed countries; however, it is still important in a global context that is increasingly relying on ICTs for various cultural practices. Furthermore, it is one way to understand, and perhaps reframe, the so-called lack of political participation that is increasingly observed among young people, even in the Philippines.

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***Ling, Rich. 2008. New Tech, New Ties – How Mobile Communication is Reshaping Social Cohesion. London: MIT Press. xiii – 224, Hard Cover.***

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Raul Pertierra

I enjoyed Rich Ling's book very much. It is the first time that a book connects classical sociological theorists such as Durkheim, his later interpreters like Goffman and Collins, to the very contemporary phenomena of mobiles. A major deficiency of the literature dealing with mobiles is its generally non-theoretical nature - most studies are mainly descriptive and lack any attempt to theorize beyond simple narratives. This is partly because the mobile has been taken up so quickly and has penetrated so many aspects of everyday life that theorists can barely catch up with its effects, let alone reflect on its significance.

As others have noted, the mobile has resulted in an explosion of banality, as people send greetings and other ordinary messages to relatives and friends. This banality has blinded us to the more profound changes accompany these messages. Rich Ling has correctly identified these banalities of everyday life provided by mobiles as an attempt (not always successful) to recuperate earlier intimacies, traditionally provided by ritual expressions and actions.

Interestingly, Ling draws on Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, a text better known to anthropologists than sociologists because it deals with supposedly archaic and

primitive cultures. Durkheim deliberately chose Australian Aborigines as his examples because their culture and practices best showed the essential elements of ritual and sociality. Least encrusted with secondary features, their society directly expressed collective representations in social relationships. Ritual was an essential aspect of these collective representations. Modernity seems a long way away from these conditions and the mobile appears hardly comparable to ritual chants or message sticks. But Durkheim knew what he was doing in using this example; to understand the significance of religion and ritual in social life, including its contemporary case. Ling is performing a similar task. How can an ordinary device such as a mobile, mostly used for simple and often banal messages, express essential conditions of contemporary life?

This book reminds us that the changes charted by Durkheim, Simmel, Weber and other early theorists are proceeding even more vigorously today and that, like them, we have to theorize their significance. The mobile has without doubt been the most popular and significant communication tool invented since the telegraph and may even exceed the latter's importance. While the Internet may attract more attention and certainly has produced more theoretically oriented scholarship, it is the mobile that has made it possible for billions of poor people to participate in global communication.

While mobile messages are mostly banal and apparently uninteresting, they reveal a need previously provided by

ritual, to enrich everyday life by connecting its practices to notions of the sacred or the numinous. Under the regimes of modernity, ritual has been debased and the sacred consigned to the sphere of spirituality. But the practices of everyday life still have to provide meaning and purpose for most people and the mobile is its unpretentious purveyor. Durkheim recognized this when he stated that science is unable to replace religion until science itself becomes a religion. A rational attitude has to be complemented by corresponding norms usually provided by ritual. In the meantime we only have the banalities of everyday life to provide us with the certainties earlier provided by conventional religion and its rituals. Rich Ling brings us back to the classical theorists by reminding us of the importance of finding significance in the ordinary.

The book is full of examples illustrating the points above. It describes how mobiles are used in public, requiring corresponding protocols to coordinate its requirements within given contexts. Should we dissimulate a mobile conversation in public places? Texting is easily conducted without disturbing other people but what if we are with friends? Does the cellphone impose private behaviour in public spaces? Because of the rapid spread of cellphones in the Philippines, their use in public spaces is still uncontrolled. We can all provide Philippine examples where cellphone use in public spaces such as cinemas, churches and buses constitute a nuisance.

A major point in the book deals with a phenomenon Durkheim could not have possibly foreseen: mediated communication and the case of an absent presence. Much of our communication is now mediated through intervening technologies such as print, radio, television and the mobile. The banal exchanges mentioned earlier indicate that co-presence is no longer necessary for sharing petty, ordinary or significant information. Filipinos overseas can keep in close touch with their village families. The exchange of texts allows kin to maintain and even strengthen existing relationships. Filipinos are even more forthcoming in these mediated exchanges than they are face-to-face. Not only are existing relationships reproduced, new identities are forged in the process of these exchanges. This insight is the principal point of the book. The mobile generates new ties and novel socialities. This became obvious early in our research on cellphones in the Philippines. But Ling does all of us a great service by connecting this discovery to its Durkheimian sources.

The book ends with an interesting discussion of the individuating consequences of the mobile. Does being able to remain perpetually in touch with significant and even non-significant others, strengthen small group solidarity at the cost of broader loyalties? Is the steady march towards individualism the final effect of cellphones? While close ties are certainly reinforced by the mobile, it seems that other factors also allow for wider networks of communication. In the Philippines, close networks of kin and friends are certainly effects of the cellphone but the entry of the stranger is also another feature of this technology. The role of mobiles for political and other social mobilizations has also been noted among Filipinos but the data is still too raw for definite conclusions to be drawn. Once more Ling has done us a favor by linking these important sociological debates to everyday practices associated with mobiles. I recommend this book highly not only for enthusiasts of the mobile revolution but also for those looking for contemporary links with the classical sources of our discipline.

***Horst, Heather A. and Daniel Miller. 2006. The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication. New York: Berg. 212 pp***

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Lidia Pola

The book is based on extensive ethnographic research in Jamaica, as part of a project sponsored by the UK Department for International

Development aimed at exploring the relationship between new communication technologies and poverty alleviation in four different countries—