

beneficial effect seems to be counter-weighted by drawbacks brought about by the new opportunities offered by the tool. If the balance is generally positive in the field of "health," the picture is contradictory in the case of "crime" and cellphones seem to be more detrimental than beneficial in "schooling." This makes it difficult, but not impossible, to formulate suggestions for public action, with the caveat that ethnographic finding must be constantly updated and monitored, since any policy action can lead to unforeseen effects. The authors have in fact compiled policy recommendations for their sponsoring agency, which would be very interesting to peruse (unfortunately, the provided web link is not active at the moment this review is written).

Horst and Miller have produced an excellent piece of anthropological work, while at the same time fulfilling their obligations toward their sponsoring

agency, in the form of an assessment of cellphone consequences for low income Jamaicans.

The double task they were faced with permeated the book with a constant dialectical shift among disciplines, methods, languages and perspectives. The richness of ethnographic evidence presented by the authors allowed them to go beyond ethnography and contribute to the anthropology of communication, the anthropology of media as well as the centrality of networking relationships. They participated in the contemporary debate on new technologies and society, while remaining coherently faithful to their academic assumptions and ethics. They actually built bridges between academia and the multiple actors outside it, which are part of our contradictory, ever changing world. Finally, Horst and Miller provide a model for other scholars interested in this field, thereby stimulating a collective effort for comparative research.

***Pertierra, Raul. 2007. The Social Construction and Usage of Communication Technologies – Asian and European Experiences. The University of the Philippines Press. xi - 228 pp.***

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Tomasito T. Talledo

There are eleven essays collected in this book that includes the Introduction by the editor. They were remarkable papers read at a conference of international scholars on communication

technologies that was ably supported by Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), Asia Foundation and the Embassy of Finland in the Philippines. As gathering like this rarely happens in the country, the editor

underscores its significance by stressing that this is “the first attempt to discuss the new global media, with Asia as its focus despite predominance of the West” (p.x).

The contribution of Filipina sociologist, Czarina Saloma-Akpedonu, “Doing IT in Developing Societies: Varying Contexts, Similar Epistemic Practices,” (pp. 1-19) deals with the differences in the contexts of knowledge work in Malaysia and the Philippines and inquires if they can be globally competitive producers of knowledge based societies. Insiders note that Malaysia’s Multimedia Superior Corridor (MSC) and its effort to move from low value-added manufacturing to high-skill activities is an exemplar of state-propelled policy compared to the Philippines’ inchoate, unsystematic and “laissez faire” IT development model. Saloma-Akpedonu’s contribution establishes the parameters for the succeeding essays.

### **The sublime and the banal in ICT**

An engaging philosophical reflection on Information Communication Technologies (ICT) is in Leopoldina Fortunati’s “Understanding Mobile Phone Design” (pp. 20-47). Her assertions are no idealistic extrapolations grounded as they were on experiential investigation and observations. Whereas typical consumer activists may decry the invincible power of producers, the author views ICT products “as artifacts in a society that they help to change and that, in turn, changes them” (p.21). Her close analysis of Telecom Italia Service Lab (Telcos), as case study on consumers’

reactivity, reveals that “the power of the user have been able not only, as it is generally stressed, to completely transfigure the design of the artifact over time, but also to reconfigure the architecture and/or the meaning of many organizational bodies inside the firm [Telcos]” (p. 35). Consumers or users of ICT, as Fortunati suggests, are not passive subjects but are in the position to influence producers and inventors.

As counterpoise to Fortunati’s reflections on technological processes and products, Ilpo Koskinen’s “Managing Banality in Mobile Multimedia” (pp. 60-81) shows how tawdriness and banality are traded between sender and receiver of messages via multimedia messaging services (MMS). And how is this mundane kind of connectivity managed? This is accomplished when the interests of the receiver is purposely aroused, when the message is presented as something “extraordinary,” when fun is generated and when the message is a sign of a more significant pattern. It is the credence of subject matter being essayed in this contribution as well as the author’s peculiar interest in employing the tools of micro-sociology on a topic such as MMS.

### **Examples from Northern Europe and Asia**

Finland’s examples in Timo Kopomaa’s paper “Affected by the Mobiles: Mobile Phone Culture, Text Messaging, and Digital Welfare Services” (pp.48-59), and Sakari Taipali’s piece “The Cellphone: Is it an Urban

Phenomenon?" (pp. 82-99) exhibit the adaptability of this communication apparatus. Still, Timo Kopomaa validates the varied use of mobile phones that young Fins are into and finds that those of the older generation are not that hooked as "they are less driven by the need to be at the center of things" (p54). For his part, Sakari Tipali notes that in Finland's countryside the cellphone is a tool for creating and maintaining social contacts or to set up what Simmel termed "sociations" to satisfy their users' interests. Thus far, in urban areas, cellphones are used for privacy. Beyond geographical location, "technologic identities" (p.90) and/or one's sense of belonging with telephonic connection is now interestingly shifting from physical place to network. Supposedly, in a society like Finland, layered over the category of age, gender and geographical residence is another identity and that is "technologic identity."

Additional country studies set in Asia are Bui Hoai Son's "Vietnam and the Internet: A Brief History" (pp. 165-188), Patrick Law and Yinni Peng's "Cellphones and the Social Lives of Migrant Workers in Southern China" (pp. 126-142) and Reevany Bustami and Elisha Nasruddin's "Three Technological Paradoxes: Power Manifestations of Mobile Phone Usage among Malaysians on the Run" (pp143-164). The study in Vietnam shows that "young users do not regard Internet as a reason to reduce face-to-face communication; Internet users, in fact, have more opportunities to make friends through chatting and e-mailing" (p.182). The mushrooming service cafés in

Vietnam have played an important role in popularizing the use of internet, according to Bui Hoai Son. In southern China, the two investigators observe that with aid of cellphones, migrant workers' traditional kinship relation may gave way to civic fellowship or instrumental relationship or may also increase face-to-face connection. They surmise that among Chinese workers, "this modern form of communication has generated feelings of dependency as much as connectivity or generated a need for synchrony" (p.135). The Malaysian case easily grabs readers' attention as it seeks to identify the paradoxes of power dimension embedded in the use of mobile phones. These paradoxes are of control, of boundaries and of informality. As reviewer, I will refrain from disclosing too many details for the readers' curiosity concerning this contribution. It suffices to say that the mobile phone's feature is also a contradiction of empowerment and disempowerment. Probably, the apt metaphor for new telecommunication technologies in Asia is the dragon, a mythical creature that is both benign and perilous.

### **Focus on the Philippines**

In this collection, there are two essays that spotlight on the Philippines, they are Itaru Nagasaka's "Cellphones in the Rural Philippines" (pp. 100-125) and the editor Raul Pertierra's own "The Transformative Capacities of Technology: Computer-Mediated Interactive Communications in the Philippines – Promises and the Present Future" (pp. 189-225). In the rural setting of Salpad, Ilocos, the Japanese

researcher confirms previous observations that cellphones reproduce existing social ties as those make possible new relationship with strangers. He observes cellphone texts become "exchange gifts" or "gift exchanges" where balanced reciprocity prevails, with reference to 2002 study by Pertierra. And that among women of middle-age in Salpad, having a cellphone makes for flexible sexual identities, even if only virtually.

Raul Pertierra's piece is placed last in the collection. In this contribution, the author is rather guarded with his assertions about the projected transformation of subjectivity when prevailing social constructs still remain as parameters of new communication technologies such as cellphones. But he is enthusiastic about what future the computer-mediated-interactive-communication technology (CMICT), the linking of cellphones with computer, can offer. Pertierra betrays his exhilaration here when in an example he waxes, "one

can say that corporeal limitations have been transcended through CMICT" (p. 223). With new communication technologies, while the past is history, the future appears as a seductive mystery.

### Concluding words

This book does not only supply the readers' need for fundamental information concerning new communication technologies but may fire their imagination as to its societal implications in the future. Since even as the convenience of its products is being enjoyed now, given the fast process of its evolution, the generation of newer models and versions requires that both producers and consumers keep up their knowledge, skills and valuation. Yet contributors like Leopoldina Fortunati cautions by quoting Sombart: "technological interpretation of history, which sees the history of humankind in the light of technology, is another celebration of **technological determinism**" (p. 28, underscoring supplied). Thus, in weighing the worth of this book, I could not add more.