

Raul Pertierra, **Transforming Technologies: Altered Selves – Mobile Phones and Internet Use in the Philippines**. Manila: De Salle University Press, 2006, 158 pp, \$20.00 (paperback).

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The transformative effects of new media and information and communications technologies have probably had as much or more impact in Asia as in any other region of the world. Within Asia, the Philippines is well-known as the “texting capital of the world,” referring to the very high per capita rates of text-messaging via mobile phones. For a number of years now, Raul Pertierra has been a leading chronicler of this phenomenon. *Transforming Technologies* is a follow up to Pertierra’s earlier co-authored book *Txt-ing Selves: Cellphones and Philippine Modernity* (2002, Manila: De Salle University Press).

In the present volume, Pertierra provides wide-ranging commentaries on Philippine society, culture, science, and technological transformations. He opens the book, in unconventional fashion, with a chapter entitled “Conclusions and Extrapolations,” which provides an outline of the themes of later substantive chapters as well as a number of “extrapolations” consisting of short theoretical commentaries on the transformative effects of mobile telecommunication. Pertierra’s primary emphasis here is on the effects of “virtual” experience and the extent to which cellphones have become integral to everyday life for many Filipinos as well as being the contemporary primary signifier of Filipino modernity (displacing the jeepney; vehicles still commonly used for public transportation, manufactured by modifying the design of American military jeeps of World War II vintage).

Following these “conclusions and extrapolations,” chapters 1 and 2 provide broad perspectives on cellphones and the Internet in the context of the Philippines. In chapter 1 on “Science, Technology and Culture,” Pertierra offers a pessimistic assessment of the former fields (science and technology) in the context of the latter (Filipino culture). His position is that Filipino culture is very open to receiving and consuming technologies produced elsewhere (such as cellphones), but that a cultural aversion to excellence and specialization has proven a general impediment to the development of basic science and therefore local production of innovative technologies. Filipino society, he argues, can take technologies from elsewhere – jeeps or cellphones, for instance – and refashion them for use in the local context, but due to the discouragement of specialization is less adept at more fundamental scientific or technological originality.

Chapter 2 follows with a more empirically grounded overview, focused on the results of a number of surveys of mobile phone and Internet use. For the most part, these surveys confirm the very high diffusion and rates of use of cellphones (and relatively low rates of Internet use). Among discussion of a variety of other findings, from gender differences to the establishment of authentic relationships via ICT, the most significant remarks are those on politics. Much has been written (including in the prior volume *Txt-ing Selves*) about the role of cellphones in mobilizing mass demonstrations that brought down the government in Manila in a “coup-d’text.” In this context it is notable that the surveys Pertierra draws on found that cellphones are not widely used in the context of local level elections.

The four remaining chapters of the book turn to a series of case studies, placed in the context of theories of identity and gift exchange. Chapter 3 offers first-person case studies of Filipinos (or in at least one case a foreign resident of the Philippines) relating the role of the Internet and cellphones in their everyday lives, with relatively limited commentary. Chapters 4 and 5 are stronger, more theoretically developed chapters. Chapter 4 "Without a Room of Your Own? Buy a Cellphone" revolves around the ways in which cellphones transform senses and practices of intimacy (including, but not limited to, sex-texting). Chapter 5 places texting within Mauss's classic framework of gift-giving. Chapter 6 discusses the ways in which cellphones (and to a lesser extent the Internet) provide a medium that extends "the senses beyond body to body communication." The chapter opens with a particularly interesting discussion of texting and Filipino deaf, but subsequently broadens the scope to include transnational romance and supernatural encounters. While interesting as cases, these make the chapter seem somewhat less focused than those preceding it.

Compared to *Txt-ing Selves* or Pertierra's earlier ethnographic and theoretical work *Philippine Localities and Global Perspectives* (1995, Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press) and *Explorations in Social Theory and Philippine Ethnography* (1997, Manila: University of the Philippines Press), *Transforming Technologies* does not contain as strong or coherent a narrative framework. Nevertheless, researchers interested in Filipino modernity and comparatively in mobile phones as an emergent, socially transformative technology, will want to consult this book for two things. First and probably the book's lasting strength, it contains a wealth of first-hand material in the form of case-studies that are presented in a much fuller form than one finds in most contemporary scholarship. Second, Pertierra offers a wide range of theoretical commentaries on the mobile communications and information and communications technology more broadly, especially within the context of the Philippines. While some of these arguments are more solidly supported than others, they suggest many points of departure for further research and theoretical development.