Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

PERTIERRA, RAUL., EDUARDO F. UGARTE, ALICIA PINGOL, JOEL HERNANDEZ, and NIKOS LEXIS DACANAY, *Txt-ing Selves: Cellphones and Philippine modernity*. Manila: De La Salle University Press. 2003, vii + 197 p. + index.

The ways in which new technologies affect our everyday lives is a topic that has been of great interest to scholars and policy makers in the past decade. Most research has focused on developed countries, in particular, the U.S.A. Recently, with increased penetration of new technologies in the developing world, interest in its impact on these countries has been growing. However, the majority of studies produced so far have had a narrow focus, looking at either penetration rates or economic development. *Txt-ing Selves* is unique in that it aims to further our understanding of how Filipinos use new technologies in everyday life and how the unique context shapes the social effects of these technologies on Philippine Society.

A second contribution of *Txt-ing Selves* is its focus on the cell phone, a welcome change from the Internet-focused majority of the literature on new technologies. Examining the cell phone is particularly relevant in the context of developing countries. In the Philippines alone there are 10.5 million cell phone users, as opposed to 2 million Internet users. An important strength of the book is that instead of examining cell phone use in a vacuum, the authors include the context of other media, such as television, radio, the Internet, newspapers and magazines. This discussion of other media is helpful to the reader because it provides the necessary background to place cell phone use in the Philippines in its historical context.

Moreover, the authors present a series of case studies, thereby placing the discussion of cell phone use in the context of users' everyday lives, instead of examining the technology as an external artifact that has fundamentally changed the way people work, live and play. The case studies consist of rich and detailed descriptions of the uses of the cell phone by specific user groups: for example, they examine how the cell phone has empowered Vilma, a retired woman who uses her cell phone as an alternative way to keep in touch with friends and relatives. The authors use the case studies to inform a number of central themes in the technology and society literature. For example, on the basis of various case studies, the authors conclude that cell phones are typically used for maintaining existing relationships, not for creating new ones. This finding is in agreement with recent work that

shows that new technologies are adding on to – rather than transforming or diminishing – social relationships.

In parallel to the case studies of the uses of cell phones by individuals, the authors discuss the role of the cell phone in the context of recent political events. The authors focus primarily on EDSA 2, which refers to the large scale protest organized at one of Manila's most central avenues, "Epifanio de los Santos Avenue." This protest was pivotal for removing former President Joseph Estrada from power and the media depicted the cell phone as playing a key role in mobilizing, through text messages, large numbers of people to join the protest. However, the authors of *Txt-ing Selves* content the role assigned to the cell phone in staging the protest. They argue that in these discussions the cell phone was perceived as the principal agent of *tex-ting,* leading ultimately to the mobilization of the masses and the demise of ex-President Estrada. In their opinion, a critical analysis needs to go beyond the technology and its capabilities, and ask questions about the origins of *tex-ting*: "who their authors and initial disseminators were, and how such messages facilitated the coordination of the actions" (p. 107). By describing these historical events the authors of *Txt-ing Selves* give the study grounding.

While many extant studies focus on the impact of technology on development and economic growth, *Txt-ing Selves* takes a less deterministic view of technology, seeing it as blending in and becoming a natural part of modernity in the Philippines. The book represents a good starting point for the investigation of the complex interrelationship between technology and Philippine society, although its broad focus leaves many issues open for future exploration. Some of the questions raised in the book need more detailed and systematic analysis. For example, the authors use a sample comprised primarily of middle class students between the ages of 17 and 24. Future research should focus on larger and more representative samples, as well as on in-depth studies of sub-groups, such as the elderly, homemakers and diasporas.

Anabel Quan-Haase, *The University of Western Ontario*