

Contexts of Media and Communication

This issue of *Plaridel* brings together simultaneously distinct and similar views about media and communication. The views are distinct in the sense that each essay investigates particular social practices in media in the context of contemporary Philippine politics, culture and economics. They are similar in the sense that the essays, when collected in one issue, manifest a certain degree of criticality that underpins the conceptual frames in which the media and the varied social contexts of communication are appraised. The essays are specific to the Philippines, but implications of their investigations extend to wider horizons of theory building and methodological approaches to the study of media and communication in some, if not several, social settings.

Gerry Lanuza's research, "Hybridization, Youth Subculture, and the Self-making of Senior Muslim Students in a Philippine Public High School," emphasizes the agency of the self to recompose the body to escape from what he calls the "panoptic view of the school." He looks into how migrant Muslim youths craft techniques of self-making that recast their presence and identities in a public high school in the Philippines. The self-making process affords them a culture – a porous subculture – that is marked not by an open confrontation of contrary signs, but by a circumspect shading of the self that blends well with the mainstream culture. The self-making process also turns the remodeled self imperceptible to both dominant culture and authorities of discipline. Stereotypes of fashion and body accessories – identified by the author as technologies of the self – can open identities to the public, or make

them inaccessible to authorities. In this sense, agency is “a kind of social and semiotic facility” (Kockelman, 2007), and the degree and extent of agency relate to ways in which their re-signified community is constituted in such spatial contiguities – inaccessible to and undetected, albeit constantly threatened, by the surveillance of school authorities.

“Camera EDSA Obscura” by JPaul S. Manzanilla looks into the lost promise of the 1986 ‘people-power revolution’ as it is reconstructed by Filipino independent filmmakers in *ImaheNasyon*, a collection of twenty short films by twenty young filmmakers twenty years after the ouster of the dictator. The essay coalesces the film project’s disparate images of unfulfilled hopes and frustrated dreams into a singular metaphor, which is the denial of the power of the people – indeed, a camera obscura that negates that which has been imaged and imagined. Manzanilla’s camera obscura metaphor of the admired EDSA phenomenon betrays the filmmakers’ *imahenasyon* (imagination) of the *ImaheNasyon* – the imagined nation of the filmmakers, on one hand, and the holders of political power, on the other. *ImaheNasyon*, as both a film project and a political nation-building scheme, is the apparent collapse of a dream. Both film and nation-building projects only made transparent – darkly – the inverse of everything that was about EDSA.

If everything about EDSA is an illusion, the article “Bridging Health: Exploring Participatory Communication among Health Communication Planners and Implementers in the Philippines” by Randy Jay C. Solis brings to the fore a promise of empowerment through participatory communication processes that put a premium on grassroots communities in addressing specific social concerns. The article describes participatory media, particularly the approaches and characteristics of participatory communication in health programs and projects. The public – local communities and their ‘outside’ allies – is central in the intersection between communication and development. Apart from the arguments raised by Solis, I add that a situational theory of publics may help partly explain people’s communicative responses as well as cognitive resources in a particular problem (Kim & Grunig, 2010), e.g., health issues.

Two important documents are presented in this issue. The first document is the lecture delivered by University of the Philippines *Gawad Plaridel* Awardee for 2011 Eloisa Cruz Canlas, a.k.a. *Lola Sela*, during the awarding ceremonies on 20 July 2011. Here she shared her life as a radio drama voice talent. The lecture is an oral narrative that hopes to seek in place the voice – or voices – of less acknowledged artists of the radio broadcast industry. Elizabeth Enriquez provides us with a biographical note of *Lola Sela* to understand and situate the context of both the award and *Lola Sela’s* life.

The common theme of the second document and the three reviews we have for this issue points to an interrogation of media's mediation of the world. The media plagiarize the untruths of *our* world and render them truthful in *their* accounts of those worlds. Or the media mediate the truths of our world and render them untruthful to an extent that the media have turned the qualified untruths into normative truths that distinguish the becoming of human societies. It is no longer the absence of information that makes media audiences misinformed *or* disinformed. It is precisely because of the presence of information in media that makes audiences misinformed *and* disinformed, an argument that has also been asserted by Andors (1996). We can no longer rely on the media – corporate media in particular – for the truth, and we now demand criticality in our consumption of the media's handling of the truth it mediates. Indeed, the media themselves are mediated by contending and contesting stakeholders and publics whose claims over certain truths and untruths are nested in various sources of power and hierarchies of benefits derived from power.

Two recent incidents that racked the minds and emotions of media audiences are (1) the Rizal Park hostage taking on August 23, 2010 that unfortunately killed eight Chinese tourists and the hostage-taker, a suspended police officer, and (2) the Janjan macho dance controversy in Willie Revillame's daily program, *Willing Willie*, aired on TV5 on March 12, 2011, which, surprisingly, delighted studio audiences. The ethically questionable performance of broadcast journalists and network executives in the first example and the equally dubious attitude of a popular television host and the program's anesthetized audiences who seemingly saw no harm inflicted on the child contestant in the second example forced the *Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas* to review and amend some articles of the Broadcast Code. Rosa Maria T. Feliciano presents in this issue the amendments to the Code that pertain to the handling of these unfortunate incidents.

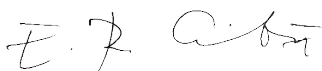
Another instance is the *Poleteismo* case that disturbed in 2011 the art world and its observers. The review of this incident by Maria Portia Olenka Placino underscores the power of the media to claim authority over a discourse which it is not qualified to examine, given the media's inclination to sabotage intelligent discussions, either unknowingly or in full awareness of its incompetence to engage in informed analyses. The media, Placino contends, has not provided significant discourses on the visibility – and ironically the eventual disappearance of the visibility – of the art of *Poleteismo*. The media, indeed, is an unqualified mediator, albeit a stakeholder, of the particular truths of this object of art – and criticism.

We also present in this issue JPaul S. Manzanilla's review of a business newspaper's validation of a protest movement in the aftermath of the assassination of Ninoy Aquino. The book and Manzanilla's review of the book

frame the Filipino *masa* not as an unthinking mob but as a critical public. The photographed images of this critical public during a significant moment of our tumultuous history of betrayal and assertions make clear some media scholars' contention that it is mainly the public, not the media, that makes and unmakes heroes. The media, as both spectator and participant, only rely on the public for the making and unmaking of heroes. The public – regardless of the media – demands and creates its heroes at the most opportune time. The media – regardful of the public – demands and creates images of the public in the making and unmaking of heroes.

The review by Angela Mhae R. Herrera and Albert A. San Diego of Coca-Cola advertisements implicates cultural representations of a popular soft drink into the dynamic of globalism. Shifting and changing global conditions homogenize the narratives and images of the product. The review investigates how the linked network of capital, media and consumerism negotiates the terrain of identity making in a globalized world. Coke, the review argues, represents itself as an icon of the contemporary globalized culture that unifies, yet devalues, place-specific and multi-scalar cultural differences. In the end, the review exposes the cultural logic of capital and globalism that is anchored on the dissolution, not the unification, of places.

The articles, documents and reviews in this issue of *Plaridel* attempt to locate the different contexts of the centrality of media in the reinvention of discourse and in the representation of empirical truths that shape our contemporary social lives.



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