

Playful Pushback and Routinary Resistance

Huge malls in Metro Manila have quiet parking curbs and dusty pocket pathways where the workers, in between shifts, congregate. You would see salesclerks and waiters squatting, or leaning against a barrier, while staring at the screens of their phone, so focused, as if slipping into a kind of trance, or losing themselves in the world of their own. Once in a while, they smiled, or laughed briefly, which, in a way, was a real break from their routine and exhausting work inside the mall. There is nothing extraordinary about momentary amusement of drained or bored workers scrolling their mobile phones. Of course, everybody scrolls and laughs; we do the same all the time. However, it is through such flashes of fun and a plethora of similar contingencies that mall workers have managed to cope with the bleak conditions of their employment. In certain respects, we are no different.

Ivan Illich, in his 1973 book, *Tools for Conviviality*, offered a critique of society which values efficiency, accelerated growth, and surrender to the power of modern and industrial technologies, that end up stifling our freedoms and creativity, and affecting our human relationships. He proposed the creation of a convivial society where everyone is free to shape tools and technologies according to one's needs and tastes and put them to use in caring for and about others (Illich, 1973/2011, p. 19).

Conviviality is the opposite of curtailment and negation of a person's right to the creative use of her or his energy. It's a condition that gives priority to the protection, maximum use, and enjoyment of resources and technologies that are otherwise controlled for profit and power,

which Illich collectively termed “managerial fascism” (Illich, 1973/2011, p. 20, 102). For Illich, a “modern society, bounded for convivial living, could generate a new flowering of surprises far beyond anyone’s imagination and hope” (Illich, 1973/2011, p. 23).

Illich (1973/2011) believes that a convivial society can be created through political inversion, which is facilitated by tool-enabled dialogues and political participation to decide who can lay claim to limited resources and say, enough, it is no longer business as usual. Illich’s concept of political inversion mirrors Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of carnivalesque which refers to routinary subversion of official hierarchies, where fun and playfulness becomes political action and a new way of imagining the world. To invert is to flip things upside down. The spark of contingency through inversion points to the serious role of humor, playfulness, and joy in social change that social movements could harness.

The emphasis on capacity of users in shaping the function of technology, in Illich’s work, grants users the ability to make sense of and shape the technologies designed by others. This means that active use and the meanings derived by users from technologies are crucial in asserting agency and working out political possibilities in this age of algorithmic control. Active engagements may break up platform logics, not overnight but through sustained, situated, and evolving processes of resistance.

Over these past few months, *Plaridel* Journal received a number of submissions that mirror Illich’s idea of convivial conditions and futures. There seems to be abundant theorizing over user-generated and audience-oriented engagement with digital media technologies from social media, artificial intelligence (AI) applications, and gaming platforms. Many of the articles account for the dynamic interplay between technological control and user’s agency. Their combined arguments are premised on the possibility of undermining tech platforms’ logic. They were also keen to explore how particular attributes of digital media and platforms are conducive to political, personal, and community actions around issues of freedom of speech, government accountability, and tolerance of differences. Put together, the submissions allow *Plaridel* to create two issues under the same theme, “Playful Pushbacks and Routinary Resistance,” starting this issue that attempts to flesh out the relationship between digital technologies and user’s autonomy through articles that parse concepts and offer empirical work.

John Rovic Catangay starts the conversation by asking in what way does TikTok, where people create, watch, and share short videos, become a space for digital resistance? He argues that an affective public can emerge among users of TikTok, not through the hashtagged posts of their advocacies but via the intensification of emotions derived from the content which they shared together. In other words, behind the dancing and selling of Gen Zs' impulse merchandise, there is a chance for TikTok users to construct a politics of hope towards a future other than the seemingly despairing present.

We won't miss the analogy of Philippine politics in Christoffer Mitch C. Cerda's examination of the video game, "Political Animals," which is turn-based strategy game to win the elections at all cost. Created by Filipino game developer Squeaky Wheel, it was released in 2016, the year that Rodrigo Duterte became president and tore the fabric of our political life to shreds. In the game, the contest is between corrupt crocodiles and meritorious mice in a politics built on patronage, scandals, and violence. It's a pity that reptiles and rodents carry the burden of ignominy associated with politicians. Cerda's piece walks us through the election strategies resorted to by the characters in the game but more than winning the game, he hoped that political awareness could emerge among gamers. Perhaps it is not too much to ask the gamers to leave their screens behind and join the parliament of the street.

Cris Lanzaderas provides an interesting discussion of how the Filipino teleserye was fused with anime in *Barangay 143*, which shows the Filipinos' fascination with basketball. The anime brought a moment of pride when it was aired in the country, on free TV, in 2018, because it was produced solely by Filipinos. Lanzaderas argues that the *Barangay 143* was more teleserye than anime in its form but, in the end, its distinctiveness is intended to draw more viewers because it is suited to their experience and taste as a Filipino audience.

The Pokemon game has legions of fans the world over but its recent iteration as *Pokemon Go* and *Pokeon Sleep* changed the way we looked at places and regard sleeping patterns. Mariyel Hiyas Liwanag walks us through the basics of Pokemon which the hard lockdown in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic failed to stop. Pokemon playing simply shifted online to build massive gaming communities on social media. It also did not stop the trading of Pokemon cards that became prohibitive because of the pandemic. Whether onsite or online,

Pokemon players, according to Liwanag, invest their time and energy in exchange for free access to unlock other features of the game. Pokemon Sleep is intended to be a wellness app that promotes healthy sleeping habits towards an eight-hour goal. Sadly, it turns sleeping into a strategy game, which rewards the player who puts her or his phone away, all of it under the watch of Pokemon distribution platforms like Google and Apple Play that are tracking sleep patterns. At least, Pokemon is there to help the Gen Zs' bedtime issues like doomscrolling and "bed rotting," which is the term for lying in bed for hours while passively consuming media.

As gaming technology improves to become more fantastic and sophisticated, video games underwent remasters, remakes, and revamp. Luthfie Arguby Purnomo, Ichwan Suyudi, Agung Prasetyo Wibowo, and Ahmad Juma Khatib discussed the resexualization of video games, to adjust the narrative and representation of bodies and gender identities. The authors argued that two things could come out of the revision: first, gender bending to accommodate gender pluralities and second, sexual objectification and de-objectification, which both may result in intertextual losses on identity and belonging. They say such issues should be considered by game developers when rebooting or revising old video games.

Duterte's damage to the Filipino child is still unaccounted for, argues Kathleen Keisha Constantino and Erickson Magno Maclid in their study on the threats to children during President Duterte's response to COVID-19 pandemic. Their review of documents and laws related to children and their families during the pandemic reveals a systematic neglect of the plight of children. Duterte's cavalier attitude towards the well-being of children during the prolonged lockdown violated their rights. However, the authors' argued that Duterte's critics were not doing a good job either by likening Duterte to a child based on his demeanor and actions – "*parang bata*." The unwarranted comparison is "childist," and thus avoided.

The Gen Zs are in the spotlight but Yuyun Wahyu Izzati Surya focused on Indonesia's female millennials. The study is on the expression of everyday politics by female millennials on social media through a discourse analysis of their posts over Twitter and Instagram where they critique the government's policies. Results of the study reveal that female millennials in Indonesia are creative in expressing their political views on social media that provided them a platform.

Millennial women announced their participation in rallies by posting their close-up and medium shots photos. The handwritten messages about their skincare routine and cosmetics also contain their political views. In fact, they draw an analogy between the make-up they wore and the political climate. In both cases, it must be melting. One of the playful slogans read: *Gapapa make upku luntur asal bukan keadilan yang luntur* [wearing smudgy make-up is fine, annihilating justice is not fine]. The lines were written on a placard with numerous red lipstick marks.

Kathleen Mae Valencia and Ulderico Alviola's study explores the role of communication for forge anti-mining alliances headed by *Alyansa Tigil Mina* (ATM), which is a network of NGOs, people's organizations (POs), and other civil society groups opposing the aggressive promotion of large-scale mining in the Philippines. Alliance building is important in any political action because it widens awareness, support, and participation in an advocacy like anti-mining. The support for the alliance rests on the following beliefs: protecting the environment, defending human rights, supporting indigenous people communities, seeking help, and securing the future of the next generation. The basis for non-support are: the public or government's apathy, corporate intimidation, loss of members, disunity. The challenge then is how to overcome the factors leading to non-participation and support and build a formidable alliance through a brave and effective communicative strategy.

Filipino tennis player Alex Eala is collecting world tennis titles, to the delight of her compatriots, in the Philippines and in diaspora. Her games and post-match interviews are sure to go viral. Inez Ponce de Leon problematizes Eala's national identity through her choice of language, which is Filipino, in her post-match interviews. The study looks into social media comments on Eala's post-match interview as a test of Filipino identity. The comments were also made to bear on the public appearances of other Filipino sports celebrities, such as Manny Pacquiao, who conducts his post-boxing matches in English. Ponce de Leon noted that English speakers were mocked for being awkward, while Filipino speakers were praised for being both humble and proud of their language. But Eala's language choice of post-match interview might surprise social media commenters because she was recently heard speaking fluent Spanish.

There are enduring love teams and ephemeral love teams in Philippine cinema and television that are the mainstays of gossip

columns and blind items in entertainment news. “*Kilig*” is a bankable factor that draws out the tedium of watching forgettable movies. Andrea Anne Trinidad’s review of Chrishandra Sebastiampillai book, *Stardom, Film Couples and Love Teams in 1970s Philippine Cinemas* highlights the neglected historization of the love team phenomenon. Interestingly, the fascination with love teams predates the beginning of the cinema in the Philippines, with the introduction of moving pictures at the turn of the twentieth century. Love teams, as a fixture of the entertainment industry, are rooted in *zarzuela*, which had an anti-colonial intent, and continued under the cinema’s boom during the Marcos’ dictatorship years. The book presents a new way of looking at on-screen romance awaiting its transformation.

Finally, this issue includes an award citation and a write-up by Louie Jon Sanchez on Mr. Manuel Salazar Urbano Jr., receiving the 2023 Gawad Plaridel in the field of television, advertising, and film (p. 319). Both articles sum up the idea that mirth has character and nation-building function. Mr. Urbano created his character, Mr. Shooli, in the award winning comedy show *Mongolian Barbecue* where he roasted presidents, politicians, and celebrities alike when he interviewed them or performed comedy skits to discuss corruption, poverty, fake news, and the price of onions. The award’s citation recognized Mr. Urbano’s contribution to television and film by “elevating the substance and form of comedy that future generations of Filipino media practitioners can look up to as models for creating media production with superior quality and social commitment.” Toward the end of his acceptance speech during the awarding rites, Mr. Urbano dropped his character, Mr. Shooli, to address young people among the audience: “*At sa [huli], kayong mga kabataan, isipin niyo ang bayan. Kayo ang kinabukasan ng bayan. Maraming salamat po.*”



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Reference

Illich, I. (2011). *Tools for conviviality* (ebook edition). Mario Boyars. (Original work published 1973)

