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Published on: 01 Sep 2003 - Public Culture (Duke University Press)

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Publication Date

2003-09-01

The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines

Vicente L. Rafael

This essay explores a set of telecommunicative fantasies among middle-class Filipinos in the context of a recent historical event: the civilian-backed coup that overthrew President Joseph Estrada in January 2001. It does so with reference to two distinct media, the cell phone and the crowd. Various accounts of what has come to be known as “People Power II” (distinguished from the populist coup that unseated Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos in 1986) reveal certain pervasive beliefs of the middle classes. They believed, for example, in the power of communication technologies to transmit messages at a distance and in their own ability to possess that power. In the same vein, they believed they could master their relationship to the masses of people with whom they regularly shared Manila’s crowded streets and utilize the power of crowds to speak to the state. Thus they imagined themselves able to communicate beyond the crowd, but also with it, transcending the sheer physical density of the masses through technology, while at the same time ordering its movements and using its energy to transmit

My thanks to Pete Lacaba and the contributors to Plaridel, to RayVi Sunico, Tina Cuyugan, Lita Puyat, Karina Bolasco, Eduardo Calasanz, Jose Buenconsejo, and Jose and David Rafael for providing me with many insights into the nature of texting in the Philippines. I am also grateful to those who read and commented on different versions of this essay: Rosalind Morris, Michael Meeker, Chandra Mukerji, Robert Horwitz, Matt Ratto, Paula Chakrabarty, Teresa Caldeira, James Holston, Jean-Paul Dumont, Michael Silverstein, Mary Steedly, Dan Rosenberg, Clifford Kuhn, Susan Rogers, Bruce Morrill, Carol Dahl, and members of the editorial committee of *Public Culture*.

Public Culture 15(3): 399–425
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middle-class demands. At its most utopian, the fetish of communication suggested the possibility of dissolving, however provisionally, existing class divisions. From this perspective, communication held the messianic promise of refashioning the heterogeneous crowd into a people addressing and addressed by the promise of justice. But as we will see, these telecommunicative fantasies were predicated on the putative “voicelessness” of the masses. For once heard, the masses called attention to the fragility of bourgeois claims to shape the transmission of messages about the proper practice of politics in the nation-state. In this context, media politics (understood in both senses of the phrase: the politics of media systems, but also the inescapable mediation of the political) reveal the unstable workings of Filipino middle-class sentiments. Unsettled in their relationship to social hierarchy, these sentiments at times redrew class divisions, anticipated their abolition, or called for their reinstatement and consolidation.¹

Calling

Telephones were introduced in the Philippines as early as 1885, during the last decade and a half of Spanish colonial rule.² Like telegraphy before it, telephony provoked fantasies of direct communication among the colonial bourgeoisie. They imagined that these new technologies would afford them access to colonial leaders, enabling them to hear and be heard directly by the state. We can see this telecommunicative ideal, for example, in a satirical piece written by Filipino national hero Jose Rizal in 1889. Entitled *Por Telefono*, it situates the narrator as an eavesdropper. He listens intently to the sounds and voices that travel between the Spanish friars in Manila—regarded as the real power in the colony—and their superiors in Madrid.³ The nationalist writer wiretaps his way, as it were, into

1. The link between telecommunication technologies and the politics of belief that I pursue here is indebted to the work of Jacques Derrida, especially in such writings as “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” trans. Samuel Weber, in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002); “Signature Event Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997).

2. See the bundle entitled “Telefonos, 1885–1891” at the Philippine National Archives, Manila, for sketches of a plan to install a telephone system in the city as early as November 1885. By December 1885 an office of Telephone Communication had been established, and the first telephone station at Santa Lucia, Manila, was operational.

3. Jose Rizal, “Por Telefono” (Barcelona, 1889); reprinted in *Miscellaneous Writings* (Manila: R. Martinez and Sons, 1959) and in various other anthologies of Rizal’s writings. For a more extended discussion of telegraphy and the formation of a wish for a lingua franca among the first generation of

the walls of the clerical residences, exposing their hypocrisy and excesses. In this sense, the telephone shares the capacity of that other telecommunicative technology, print, to reveal what was once hidden, to repeat what was meant to be secret, and to pass on messages intended for a particular circle.⁴ It is this history of tapping into and forwarding messages—often in the form of ironic commentaries, jokes, and rumors—that figured recently in the civilian-led coup known as “People Power II.” From 16 to 20 January 2001, more than one million people assembled at one of Metro Manila’s major highways, Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (commonly called EDSA), site of the original People Power revolt in 1986. A large cross section of Philippine society gathered there to demand the resignation of President Joseph “Erap” Estrada, after his impeachment trial was suddenly aborted by the eleven senators widely believed to be under his influence. The senators had refused to include key evidence that purportedly showed Estrada had amassed a fortune from illegal numbers games while in office. The impeachment proceedings were avidly followed on national TV and the radio. Most viewers and listeners were keenly aware of the evidence of corruption on the part of Estrada and his family; once the pro-Estrada senators put an abrupt end to the hearing, hundreds of thousands of viewers and listeners were moved to protest in the streets.⁵ Television and radio had kept them in their homes and offices to follow the court proceedings, but at a critical moment, these media also drew them away from their seats. Relinquishing their position as spectators, they now became part of a crowd that had formed around a common wish: the resignation of the president.

Aside from TV and radio, another communications medium was given credit for spurring the coup: the cell phone. Nearly all the accounts of People Power II available to us come from middle-class writers or by way of a middle-class-controlled media with strong nationalist sentiments. And nearly all point to the crucial importance of the cell phone in the rapid mobilization of demonstrators.

nationalists, see Vicente L. Rafael, “Translation and Revenge: Castilian and the Origins of Nationalism in the Philippines,” in *The Places of History: Regionalism Revisited in Latin America*, ed. Doris Sommer (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

4. For an elaboration of other modalities of these telecommunicative fantasies and their role in shaping nationalist consciousness, see Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Philippine History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), especially chapters 4 and 8 on rumor and gossip as populist modes of communication in Philippine history.

5. For a useful collection of documents and newspaper articles relating to the corruption case against Estrada, see Sheila Coronel, ed., *Investigating Estrada: Millions, Mansions and Mistresses* (Metro Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2000).

“The phone is our weapon now,” we hear from an unemployed construction worker quoted in a newspaper article. A college student in Manila testified that “the power of our cell phones and computers were among the things which lit the fuse which set off the second uprising, or People Power Revolution II.” And a newspaper columnist advised “would-be foot-soldiers in any future revolution” that “as long as you[r cell phone] is not low on battery, you are in the groove, in a fighting *mood*.”⁶ A technological thing was thus idealized as an agent of change, invested with the power to bring forth new forms of sociality.

Introduced in the latter half of the 1990s, cell phones in the Philippines had become remarkably popular by 1999.⁷ There are a number of reasons for their ubiquity. First, there is the perennial difficulty and expense of acquiring land line phones in the Philippines, and the service provided by the Philippine Long Distance Company (PLDT) and the more recent, smaller Bayan Tel is erratic. Cell phones offered the promise of satisfying this need for connectivity. In addition, cell phones cost far less than personal computers, which are owned by less than 1 percent of the population (though a larger proportion has access through Internet cafes). By contrast, there are over 10 million cell phone users in a population of about 77 million. The vast majority of users buy prepaid phone cards that, combined with the relatively low cost of phones (as little as \$50 in the open market and half this amount in secondary markets), make wireless communication more accessible and affordable than regular telephones or computers.

More importantly, cell phones allow users to reach beyond traffic-clogged streets and serve as an alternative to slow, unreliable, and expensive postal service. Like many Third World countries recently opened to more liberal trade policies, the Philippines shares the paradox of being awash with the latest communication technologies, like the cell phone, while being mired in deteriorating infrastructures: roads, postal services, railroads, power generators, and land lines. With the cell phone, one seems able to pass beyond these obstacles. And inasmuch as these broken, state-run infrastructures represent government ineptitude,

6. The quotations above come, respectively, from Uli Schmetzer, “Cell Phones Spurred Filipinos’ Coup,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 January 2001; Ederic Penaflor Eder, “Tinig ng Generation Txt” [Voice of Generation Txt], *Pinoy Times*, 8 February 2001; and Malou Mangahas, “Text Messaging Comes of Age in the Philippines,” *Reuters Technology News*, 28 January 2001.

7. Much of the information that follows was gathered from Wayne Arnold, “Manila’s Talk of the Town Isn’t Talk at All,” *New York Times*, 5 July 2000, C1; “Text Generation,” special issue of *I: The Investigative Reporting Magazine* 8, no. 2 (April–June 2002), especially 14–21, 28–32; and Elvira Mata, *The Ultimate Text Book* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2000), which is especially good for examples of the more common text messages that circulate among Filipino users.

passing beyond them gives one the sense of overcoming a state long beset by corruption.⁸ It is not surprising, then, that cell phones could prove literally handy in spreading rumors, jokes, and information that steadily eroded whatever legitimacy President Estrada and his congressional supporters still had during the impeachment hearings. Bypassing the broadcasting media, cell phone users themselves became broadcasters, receiving and transmitting both news and gossip, and often confounding the two. Indeed, one could imagine each user becoming his or her own broadcasting station: a node in a wider network of communication that the state could not possibly monitor, much less control.⁹ Hence, once the call was made for people to mass at Edsa, cell phone users readily forwarded messages they received as they followed the messages' instructions.

Cell phones, then, were not only invested with the power to overcome the crowded conditions and congested surroundings brought about by the state's inability to order everyday life, they were also seen to bring about a new kind of crowd that was thoroughly conscious of itself as a movement headed toward a common goal. While telecommunication allows one to escape the crowd, it also opens up the possibility of finding oneself moving in concert with it, filled with its desire and consumed by its energy. In the first case, cell phone users define themselves against a mass of anonymous others. In the second, they become those others, accepting anonymity as a condition of possibility for sociality. To understand how the first is transformed into the second, it is worth noting how, specifically, the vast majority of cell phone messages are transmitted in the Philippines: as text messages.

Texting

Text messages are e-mails sent over mobile phones that can also be transferred to the Internet. Recently, the verb *texting* has emerged to designate the act of sending such messages, indicating its popularity in such places as England, Japan, and

8. For a succinct historical analysis of the Philippine state, see Benedict Anderson's "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines" in his book *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998). See also John Sidel, *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Paul D. Hutchcroft, *Booty Capitalism: The Politics of Banking in the Philippines* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).

9. Technologies for monitoring cell phone use do exist, and there is some indication that the Philippine government is beginning to acquire them. It is doubtful, however, that cell phone surveillance technology was available to the Estrada administration. It is also not clear whether the current regime of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has begun or intends to monitor cell phone transmissions.

Finland (where text messaging was first available). In the Philippines, texting has been the preferred mode of cell phone use since 1999, when the two major networks, Globe and Smart, introduced free and, later on, low-cost text messaging as part of their regular service. Unlike voice messages, text messages take up less bandwidth and require far less time to convert into digitized packets available for transmission. It thus makes economic sense for service providers to encourage the use of text messaging in order to reserve greater bandwidth space for more expensive—and profitable—voice messages. Calling cards and virtually free texting, as opposed to expensive long-term contracts, give cell phone service providers a way to attract a broad spectrum of users from different income levels. Thus, from an economic standpoint, texting offers a rare point of convergence between the interests of users and providers.¹⁰ But it is obviously more than low costs that makes cell phones popular in the Philippines. In an essay sent over the Internet by “An Anonymous Filipino,” the use of cell phones in Manila is described as a form of “mania.” Using Taglish (the urban lingua franca that combines Tagalog, English, and Spanish), this writer, a Filipino *balikbayan* (one who resides or works abroad and periodically visits the motherland), remarks:

HI! WNA B MY TXT PAL? They're everywhere! In the malls, the office, school, the MRT [Manila Railroad Transit], what-have-you, the cellphone mania's on the loose! Why, even Manang Fishball [Mrs. Fishball, a reference to older working-class women who sell fishballs by the side of the road] is texting! I even asked my sisters how important they think they are that they should have cells? Even my nephew in highschool has a cell phone. My mom in fact told me that even in his sleep, my brother's got his cell, and even when they have a PLDT [land line] phone in the house, they still use the cell phone.¹¹

10. See Arnold, “Manila’s Talk of the Town”; Mangahas, “Text Messaging Comes of Age”; and Schmetzer, “Cell Phones Spurred Filipinos’ Coup.” See also Leah Salterio, “Text Power in Edsa 2001,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (hereafter indicated *PDI*), 22 January 2001, 25; Conrado de Quiros, “Undiscovered Country,” *PDI*, 7 February 2001, 8; and Michael L. Tan, “Taming the Cell Phone,” *PDI*, 6 February 2001. However, the economic advantages of texting are limited. For example, any transmission across cell networks is expensive, so that calling or texting from a Globe phone to a Smart phone is rarely done. Indeed, the Department of Transportation and Communication (DOTC) had to intervene in late 1999 to get the two companies to improve interconnectivity and service as well as lower their costs.

11. This article was circulated on the listservs of various nongovernmental organizations in the Philippines and bore the title “Pinoy Lifestyle.” I have no knowledge of the original source of this piece, so it exists in some ways like a forwarded text message. Thanks to Tina Cuyugan for forwarding this essay to me. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *mania* is a kind of madness characterized “by great excitement, extravagant delusions and hallucinations, and, in its acute stage, by great violence.” The insistence on having cell phones nearby, the fact that they always seem to be on hand, indicates an attachment to them that surpasses the rational and the utilitarian, as the remarks above indicate. The cell phone gives its owner a sense of being someone even if he or she is only a street vendor or a high school student—someone who can reach and be reached and is thus always in touch. The “manic” relationship to the cell phone is just this ready willingness to identify with it, or more precisely with what the machine is thought capable of doing. One not only has access to it; by virtue of its omnipresence and proximity, one becomes like it. That is to say, one becomes an apparatus for sending and receiving messages at all times. An American journalist writing in the *New York Times* observes as much in an article on Manila society:

“Texting?” Yes, texting—as in exchanging short typed messages over a cell phone. All over the Philippines, a verb has been born, and Filipinos use it whether they are speaking English or Tagalog. The difference [between sending e-mail by computers and texting] is that while chat-room denizens sit in contemplative isolation, glued to computer screens, in the Philippines, “texters” are right out in the throng. Malls are infested with shoppers who appear to be navigating by cellular compass. Groups of diners sit ignoring one another, staring down at their phones as if fumbling with rosaries. Commuters, jaywalkers, even mourners—everyone in the Philippines seems to be texting over the phone. . . . Faye Siytangco, a 23-year-old airline sales representative, was not surprised when at the wake for a friend’s father she saw people bowing their heads and gazing toward folded hands. But when their hands started beeping and their thumbs began to move, she realized to her astonishment that they were not in fact praying. “People were actually sitting there and texting,” Siytangco said. “Filipinos don’t see it as rude anymore.”¹²

Unlike computer users, cell phone owners are mobile, immersed in the crowd, yet able to communicate beyond it. Texting provides them with a way out of their surroundings. Thanks to the cell phone, they need not be present to others around them. Even when they are part of a socially defined group—say, commuters or mourners—cell phone users are always somewhere else, receiving and transmitting messages from beyond their physical location. It is in this sense that they become other than their socially delineated identity: not only cell phone users but

12. Arnold, “Manila’s Talk of the Town.”

cell phone “maniacs.” Because it rarely leaves their side, the phone becomes part of the hand, the digits an extension of the fingers. In certain cases, the hand takes the place of the mouth, the fingers that of the tongue. One Filipino-American contributor to Plaridel, an on-line discussion group dealing with Philippine politics, referred to a Filipino relative’s cell phone as “almost a new limb.”¹³ It is not surprising then that the consciousness of users assumes the mobility and receptivity of their gadgets. We can see how this assumption of the qualities of the cell phone comes across in the practice of sending and receiving messages:

The craze for sending text messages by phone started [in 1999] when Globe introduced prepaid cards that enabled students, soldiers [and others] too poor for a long-term subscription to start using cellular phones. . . . People quickly figured out how to express themselves on the phone’s alphanumeric keypad. . . . “Generation Txt,” as the media dubbed it, was born. Sending text messages does not require making a call. People merely type in a message and the recipient’s phone number, hit the phone’s send key and off it goes to the operator’s message center, which forwards it to the recipient. . . . Sending text messages by phone is an irritating skill to master, largely because 26 letters plus punctuation have to be created with only 10 buttons. Typing the letter C, for example, requires pressing the No. 2 button three times; an E is the No. 3 button pressed twice; and so on. After the message is composed it can be sent immediately to the phone number of the recipient, who can respond immediately by the same process. People using phones for text messages have developed a shorthand. “Where are you?” becomes “WRU.” And “See you tonight” becomes “CU 2NYT.” People have different styles of keying in their messages. Some use their index fingers, some one thumb, others both. . . . [Others] tap away with one hand without even looking at [their] phone.¹⁴

As with e-mail, conventions of grammar, spelling, and punctuation are frequently evaded and rearticulated in texting. The constraints of an alphanumeric keypad require users to type numbers to get letters. As a result, counting and writing become closely associated. Digital communication requires the use of digits, both one’s own and those on the phone keypad, as one taps away. But this tapping unfolds not to the rhythm of one’s speech or in tempo with one’s thoughts, but in

13. Message posted by mrsarreal@aol.com, in Plaridel (plaridel_papers@egroups.com), 25 January 2001.

14. Arnold, “Manila’s Talk of the Town”; see also Richard Lloyd Parr’s untitled article on People Power II and cell phone use in the *Independent* (London), 23 January 2001.

coordination with the numbers by which one reaches letters: three taps on 2 to get a *C*, for example, or two taps on 3 to get an *E*. Texting seems to reduce all speech to writing and all writing to a kind of mechanical percussion, a drumming that responds to external constraints rather than an internal source. In addition, there are no prescribed styles for texting: one or two fingers or a thumb will do, and skilled typists can text without looking at the screen. Nor are standardized body postures required while texting: one can sit, walk, or drive while sending messages. If handwriting in the conventional sense requires classroom instruction in penmanship and posture under the supervision of teachers, texting frees the body, or so it seems, from these old constraints.

Mimicking the mobility of their phones, texters move about, bound to nothing but the technological forms and limits of the medium. The messages they send and receive condense whatever language—English or Tagalog and, more frequently, Taglish—they are using, and so are proper to none. This hybrid language follows the demands of the medium itself rather than the idiosyncrasies of its users. The phone companies' recent introduction of limits on free text messaging, and their assessment of a fee per character of text, has led to the further shortening of words and messages. Instant messaging, along with the mechanical storage and recall of prior messages, requires only highly abbreviated narrative constructions with little semantic deferral or delay. Using the cell phone, one begins to incorporate its logic and techniques to the point of identifying with an apparently novel social category: *Generation Txt*.

An obvious pun on *Generation X*, *Generation Txt* was first used as an advertising gimmick by cell phone providers to attract young users to their products. Defined by its attachment to and ease with the cell phone, *Generation Txt* has troubled older generations uneasy about the rise of texting. An anthropologist from the University of the Philippines addresses the dangers of texting in terms that are familiar from other countries where the practice has become popular, especially among youth. He cites the cell phone's propensity to stifle literacy by "[wreaking] havoc" on spelling and grammar, and its erosion, "in tandem with mindless computer games and Internet chat rooms, [of] young people's ability to communicate in the real world in real time."¹⁵ Rather than promote communication, texting obstructs it; indeed, cell phones cultivate a kind of stupidity. For the anthropologist, this is evident in young people's gullibility for the marketing ploys of cell phone providers: they end up spending more money sending messages of little or no consequence. He further charges cell phones with leading to

15. Tan, "Taming the Cell Phone."

“anti-social” behavior: children “retreat to their own cocoons,” while the parents who give them the cell phones evade responsibility for “interacting” with them in any meaningful way.¹⁶ Other writers report students’ use of texting to cheat on exams, or the role of cell phones in spreading slanderous rumors and gossip that may ruin someone’s reputation.¹⁷ As one Filipino on-line writer put it, cell phones are like “loaded weapons,” and their use must be tempered with caution. Another contributor writes: “If the text [I received] felt like a rumor masquerading as news, I didn’t forward it.” An office worker from Manila adds: “Sometimes whenever you receive serious msgs, sometimes you have to think twice if it is true or if perhaps someone is fooling you since there is so much joking [that goes on] in txt.”¹⁸

Part of the anxiety surrounding texting arises from its perceived tendency to disrupt protocols of recognition and accountability. Parents are disconnected from their children, who in turn defy parental authority. Cheating is symptomatic of the inability of teachers to monitor students’ cell phone use. And the spread of rumors and gossip, along with irreverent jokes, means that the senders of messages readily give in to the compulsion to forward messages without, as the writers above advise, weighing their consequences or veracity. Indeed, it is the power to forward messages almost instantaneously that transforms the cell phone into a “weapon.” The urge to retransmit messages is difficult to resist and, under certain conditions, irrepressible, as we learn from the events leading up to People Power II. Actor and writer Bart Guingona, who organized a demonstration at Edsa on 18 January, describes his initial doubts about the effectiveness of cell phones in a posting to the Plaridel listserv: “I was certain [texting] would not be taken seriously unless it was backed up by some kind of authority figure to give it some sort of legitimacy. A priest who was with us suggested that [the church-owned broadcasting station] Radio Veritas should get involved in disseminating the particulars. . . . We [then] formulated a test message . . . and sent it out that night and I turned off my phone. . . . By the time I turned it on in the morning, the message had come back to me three times. . . . I am now a firm believer in the power of the text!”¹⁹

16. Tan, “Taming the Cell Phone”; De Quiros, “Undiscovered Country.”

17. Arnold, “Manila’s Talk of the Town.”

18. These messages were forwarded by rnrnsarreal@aol.com to the Plaridel discussion group (plaridel_papers@yahoo.com), 25 January 2001.

19. Bart Guingona, Plaridel (plaridel_papers@yahoo.com), 26 January 2001. Texting is widely credited with bringing about the rapid convergence of crowds at the Edsa Shrine within approximately seventy-five minutes of the abrupt halt of the Estrada impeachment trial on the evening

The writer was initially hesitant to use texting, reasoning that messages sent this way would be perceived as groundless rumors. Anonymously circulated from phone to phone, the text seemed unanchored to any particular author who could be held accountable for its content. Only when the church-owned radio station offered to broadcast the same information did he agree to send a text message. Upon waking up the next day, he saw the effect of this transmission. Not only did his message reach distant others; it returned to him threefold. He is converted from a doubter to a believer in the “power of the text.” Such power has to do with the capacity to elicit numerous replies.

There are two things worth noting, however, in this notion of the power of texting: first, that it requires, at least in the eyes of this writer and those he sends messages to, another power to legitimate the text’s meaning; and second, that such a power is felt precisely in the multiple transmissions of the same text. The power of texting has less to do with the capacity to elicit interpretation and stir public debate than it does with compelling others to keep messages in circulation. Receiving a message, one responds by repeating it. The message is forwarded to others who are expected to do the same. In this way, the message returns, mechanically augmented but semantically unaltered. They crowd one’s phone mailbox just as those who believed in the truth of the call they received crowded the streets of Metro Manila. On this account, the formation of crowds answers the repeated call of texts deemed to have legitimacy by virtue of being grounded in an authority outside the text messages themselves: the electronic voice of the Catholic Church. The voice of the church in effect domesticates the dangers associated with texting. Users forward texts and likewise feel forwarded by the expectations these texts give rise to. Finding themselves called by the message and its constant repetition, they become “believers,” part of Generation Txt.

Generation Txt thus does not so much designate a new social identity as a desire for seeing in messages a meaning guaranteed by an unimpeachable source residing outside the text. In this sense, there is nothing very new or different about

of 16 January. Even prior to Cardinal Sin and former president Cory Aquino’s appeal for people to converge at this hallowed site, it has been estimated that over 20,000 people had already arrived there, perhaps drawn by text messages they received. As Danny A. Gozo, an employee at Ayala Corporation, points out in his posting on Plaridel (plaridel_papers@yahoo.com), 23 January 2001, during the four days of People Power II, Globe Telecom reported an average of 42 million outgoing messages and roughly an equal number of incoming ones as well, while Smart Telecom reported over 70 million outgoing and incoming messages texted through their system *per day*. He observes enthusiastically that “the interconnectedness of people, both within the country and outside is a phenomenon unheard of before. It is changing the way that we live!”

the technological fantasy. Most of those who gathered at Edsa and marched toward Mendiola—the road leading to the presidential palace—were united by anger at the corrupt regime of President Estrada and by their wish to replace him with a more honest leader. This said, the protesters challenged neither the nature of the state nor its class divisions. Indeed, everything I have read by supporters of People Power II emphasizes the constitutional legality of these protests and their institutional legitimacy vis-à-vis the Supreme Court and the Catholic Church (as opposed to the army or left-wing groups). In the end, Estrada’s replacement came from within his own circle of power: Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was his vice-president and the daughter of a previous Philippine president. It would appear then that Generation Txt comes out of what its “believers” claim to be a “technological revolution” that sets the question of social revolution aside.

Texting is thus “revolutionary” in a reformist sense. Its “politics” seeks to consolidate and render authority transparent, whether this is the authority of the state or of text messages. In an exemplary manifesto titled “Voice of Generation Txt” [Tinig ng Generation Txt], which appeared in what was, until recently, one of Manila’s more widely read tabloids, the *Pinoy Times*, Ederic Penaflor Eder, a twenty-something University of the Philippines graduate, credits the “power” (*lakas*) of “our cellphones and computers” for contributing to the “explosion” of People Power II. Texting, he declares, became the medium through which “we” responded quickly to the “betrayal” (*kataksilan*) of the pro-Estrada senators who had sought to block the impeachment hearings. Elaborating on the “we” designating Generation Txt, Eder writes in Taglish:

We are Generation Txt. Free, fun-loving, restless, insistent, hard-working, strong and patriotic.

We warmly receive and embrace with enthusiasm the revolution in new technology. Isn’t it said that the Philippines rules Cyberspace and that the Philippines is the text messaging capital of the world? Our response was rapid to the betrayal of the eleven running dogs (*tuta*) of Jose Velarde (a.k.a. Joseph Estrada). The information and calls that reached us by way of text and e-mail were what brought together the organized as well as unorganized protests. From our homes, schools, dormitories, factories, churches, we poured into the streets there to continue the trial—the impeachment trial that had lost its meaning. . . .

Our wish is for an honest government, and a step towards this is the resignation of Estrada. We are patriotic and strong and with principles, since our coming together is not merely because we want to hang out with our friends, but rather to attain a truly free and clean society brought by our love for the Philippine nation. . . .

There were those from our generation that have long since before the second uprising chosen to struggle and fight in the hills and take up arms, trekking on the harsh road towards real change. Most of us, before and after the second uprising, can be found in schools, offices, or factories, going about our everyday lives. Dreaming, working hard for a future. Texting, internetting, entertaining ourselves in the present.

But when the times call, we are ready to respond. Again and again, we will use our youth and our gadgets (*gadyet*) to insure the freedom of our Motherland. . . . After the second uprising, we promise to militantly watch over the administration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo while we happily push Asiong Salonga (a.k.a. Joseph Estrada) into the doors of prison.

We are Generation Txt.²⁰

This statement of identity curiously enough does not specify the “we” except as those who “warmly accept and embrace” the “revolution” in new technology. The “we” is established through an identification with technological novelty and the status of the Philippines as the “text messaging” capital of the world. This is perhaps why the message reads as if it were meant to be received, then forwarded: it begins and ends with exactly the same lines: *Kami ang Generation Txt* (We are Generation Txt). Instead of ideals or a critique of social relations, Generation Txt is characterized here by attitudes and affects: it is *malaya* (free), *masayahin* (fun-loving), *malikot* (restless), *makulit* (insistent), *masipag* (hard-working), and so forth. Its members pride themselves on having principles and courage, and, unlike the rudderless and Westernized Generation X, they have direction. They stand for “transparent” government and a “free” and “clean” society. In this sense, they do not see themselves as different from their elders: they are patriots (*makabayan*) dedicated to using their “gadgets” for the sake of the motherland (*Inang Bayan*). Such commitment comes in the form of a “militant” readiness to watch over the workings of the new government in order to ensure “justice” (*katarungan*). Unlike those who have chosen to take up arms and go to the mountains, Generation Txt can be found in schools, offices, and factories, ready to respond to the call of the times. They watch, they wait, and they are always ready to receive and forward messages.

Generation Txt is concerned not with challenging the structures of authority but with making sure they function to serve the country’s needs. This reformist impetus is spelled out in terms of their demand for accountability and their inten-

20. Eder, “Tining ng Generation Txt.” The translation of this text is mine.

tion of holding leaders under scrutiny. Through their gadgets, they keep watch over their leaders, rather than taking their place or putting forth other notions of leadership. Thus does Generation Txt conceptualize its historical agency: as speedy (*mabilis*) transmitters of calls (*panawagan*) that come from elsewhere and have the effect of calling out to those in their “homes, schools, dormitories, factories, churches” to flood the streets in protest. Rather than originate such calls, they are able to trace them to their destination, which, in this case, is the nation of middle-class citizens that seeks to renew and supervise its government. Like the first generation of bourgeois nationalists in the nineteenth century mentioned earlier, Generation Txt discovers yet again the fetish of technology as the capacity to seek access to, and recognition from, authority.²¹

Crowding

In the Generation Txt fantasy, texting calls into being a new form of social movement—one that is able to bear, in both senses of the term, the hegemony of middle-class intentions. As we have seen, texting is sometimes used to escape the crowd. But as a political technology, it is credited with converting the crowd into the concerted movement of an aggrieved people. In short, the middle class invests the crowd with the power of the cell phone: the power to transmit their wish for a moral community. Indeed, the act of transmission would itself amount to the realization of such a community. This fantasy projects a continuity between the crowd and the middle-class texters. Nevertheless, during People Power II, the middle-class interest in ordering the crowd sometimes gave way to its opposite. At times, it was possible to see the materialization of another kind of desire, a desire for the dissolution of class hierarchy altogether. How so?

The streets of contemporary Manila provide some insight into the contradictory nature of middle-class ideas about crowds. The city has a population of over 10 million, a large number of whom are rural migrants in search of jobs, education, or other opportunities unavailable in the provinces. Congested conditions—packed commuter trains, traffic-clogged roads, crowded sidewalks, teeming shopping malls—characterize everyday life in the city, slowing travel from one place to another at nearly all hours of the day. These conditions affect all social classes. And because there is no way of definitively escaping them, they constitute the most common and widely shared experience of city life.

21. I owe this term to James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Just as Manila's roads are clogged with vehicles, its sidewalks seem unable to contain the unending tide of pedestrians who spill out onto the highways, weaving in and out of vehicular traffic. Indeed, among the most anomalous sights on city sidewalks are signs for wheelchair access. Given the uneven surface and packed conditions of the sidewalks, these signs are no more than the traces of a possibility never realized, a future overlooked and forgotten. It is as if at one point, someone had thought of organizing urban space along the lines of a liberal notion of accommodation. Instead, that thought quickly gave way to what everywhere seems like an inexorable surrender of space to the people who use it—and use it up.

Urban space in Manila seems haphazardly planned, as if no central design had been put in place and no rationalizing authority were at work in organizing and coordinating the movement of people and things.²² Instead, this movement occurs seemingly on its own accord. Pedestrians habitually jaywalk and jump over street barriers. Cars and buses belch smoke, crisscrossing dividing medians—if these exist at all— inching along to their destinations. Drivers and passengers find it difficult to see more than a few feet beyond their vehicles. The windshields and windows of jeepneys, tricycles, and cabs are often cluttered by decals, curtains, detachable sunshades, and other ornaments that make it difficult to get a view of the road, in effect obstructing vision and further heightening the sense of congestion. Indeed, given Manila's topographical flatness, it is impossible to get a panoramic view of the city except from commuter trains and the tops of tall buildings. In the West, the “view” is understood as the site for evacuating a sense of internal unease and a resource for relieving oneself of pressure, both social and psychic.²³ This panoramic notion of the view is not possible in Manila's streets. Caught in traffic, one sees only more stalled traffic, so that the inside and the outside of vehicles seem to mirror each other.

The overwhelming presence of garbage only adds to the sense of congestion.

22. My remarks on Manila's streets were gleaned from the notes and observations I made in the 1990s. On Manila's urban forms, see the excellent essay by Neferti X. Tadiar, “Manila's New Metropolitan Form,” in *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*, ed. Vicente L. Rafael (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995). For a lucid portrait of Manila's fantastic street life, see James Hamilton-Paterson's novel *The Ghosts of Manila* (New York: Vintage, 1995). Contemporary Philippine films, which often traverse the divide between rich and poor and explore their spaces of habitation, are excellent primary source materials for the study of Manila's urban forms. For a recent collection of essays on Philippine cinema, see Roland Tolentino, ed., *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000).

23. See chapter 4 of Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

Garbage disposal has long been a problem in Manila, owing to a shortage of adequate landfills, among other reasons. As a result, trash seems to be everywhere, dumped indiscriminately on street corners or around telephone poles, some of which bear signs that impotently forbid littering and public urination. What appear are thus scenes of near ruin and rubble. While certainly not exclusive to Manila, these scenes bespeak a city in some sense abandoned to the pressures of a swelling population. Instead of regulating contact and channeling the efficient movement of people and things, the city's design—such as it is—seems to be under constant construction from the ground up and from so many different directions. The thought of regulation occurs, but the fact that construction never seems to end—stalled by crowded conditions, periodic typhoons, floods, and the accumulation of garbage—makes it seem as if these sites were ruins. The sense is that there is no single, overarching authority. Walking or riding around Manila, then, one is impressed by the power of crowds. Their hold on urban space appears to elude any attempt at centralizing control. This is perhaps why the largest private spaces open to the public in Manila, shopping malls, play what to an outsider might seem to be extremely loud background music. A shopping mall manager once told me that turning the volume up was a way of reminding mall-goers they were not in the streets, that someone was in charge and watching their actions.²⁴

The anonymity proper to crowds makes it difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate individuals by precise social categories. Clothing sometimes indicates the social origins of people, but with the exception of beggars, it is difficult to identify class on the basis of looks alone. The sense one gets from moving in and through crowds is of a relentless and indeterminable mixing of social groups. This pervasive sense of social mixing contrasts sharply with the class-based and linguistic hierarchies that govern political structures and social relations in middle-class homes, schools, churches, and other urban spaces.²⁵ One becomes part of the crowd only by having one's social identity obscured. Estranged, one becomes like everyone else. Social hierarchy certainly does not disappear on the streets. But like the police who are barely visible, appearing mostly to collect payoffs (*tong* or *lagay*) from jeepney drivers and sidewalk vendors, hierarchy feels more arbitrary, its hold loosened by the anonymous sway of the crowd.

The power of the crowd thus comes across in its capacity to overwhelm the physical constraints of urban planning and to blur social distinctions by provok-

24. I owe this information to David Rafael, former manager of the Glorietta shopping mall in the Ayala Center, Makati.

25. For a discussion of the historical link between linguistic and social hierarchies, see Vicente L. Rafael, "Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca," in *White Love and Other Events*.

ing a sense of estrangement. Its authority rests on an ability to promote restlessness and movement, thereby undermining pressure from state technocrats, church authorities, and corporate interests to regulate and contain such movements. In this sense, the crowd is a sort of *medium*, if by that word one means a way of gathering and transforming elements, objects, people, and things. As such, the crowd is also a site for the articulation of fantasies and the circulation of messages. It is in this sense that we might think of the crowd as not merely an effect of technological devices, but as a kind of technology itself. It calls incessantly and we find ourselves compelled to respond to it. As a technology, the crowd represents more than a potential instrument of production or an exploitable surplus for the formation of social order. It also delineates the form and content of a technic of engaging the world. The insistent and recurring proximity of anonymous others creates a current of expectation, of something that might arrive, of events that might happen. As a site of potential happenings, it is a kind of place for the generation of the unknown and the unexpected. Centralized urban planning and technologies of policing seek to routinize the sense of contingency generated by crowding. But in cities where planning chronically fails, the routine sometimes gives way to the epochal. At such moments, the crowd takes on a kind of telecommunicative power, sending messages into the distance while bringing distances up close. Enmeshed in a crowd, one feels the potential for reaching across social, spatial, and temporal divides.²⁶

As we saw, middle-class discourses about the cell phone tend to oppose texting to the crowd as a means for overcoming the latter. But in more politically charged moments such as People Power II, cell phones were credited, along with radio, television, and the Internet, for summoning the crowd and channeling its desire, turning it into a resource for the reformation of social order. Other accounts, however, suggested the crowd's potential for bringing about something else: the transmission of messages, which at times converged with, but at other times diverged from, those emanating from cell phones. For at times, the crowd made possible a different kind of experience for the middle class. This had to do less with representing the masses as becoming one with them. In so doing, the crowd became a

26. Here, I draw from Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question concerning Technology," in his book *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). See also the illuminating commentary by Samuel Weber, "Upsetting the Setup: Remarks on Heidegger's 'Questing after Technics,'" in *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996). My remarks on the crowd are indebted to Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1997).

medium for the recurrence of another fantasy that emanates from the utopian side of bourgeois nationalist wishfulness: the abolition of social hierarchy.²⁷ We can see a recurrence of this fantasy in one of the more lucid accounts of the crowd's power in a posting by "Flor C." on the Internet discussion group Plaridel.²⁸ The text, written in Taglish, is worth following at some length for what it tells us about this other kind of political experience.

"I just want to share my own way of rallying at the Edsa Shrine," Flor C. begins. She invites others do the same, adding, "I am also eager (*sabik*) to see the personal stories of the 'veterans' of Mendiola." The urge to relate her experience at the protests comes with a desire to hear others tell their own stories. What she transmits is a text specific to her life, not one that comes from somewhere else and merely passes through her. Yet, by identifying herself only as "Flor C.," she makes it difficult for us to locate her narrative beyond its signature. Nor can we determine who authorizes its telling. In this way, she remains anonymous to her readers, the vast majority of whom likewise remain unknown to her.²⁹ What is the relationship between anonymity and an eagerness to share experiences, one's own as well as those of others?

Flor C. refers to the "buddy system" used by protest marchers in the 1970s and 1980s to guard against infiltration by fifth columnists and military and police harassment. But, writes Flor C., because "my feet were too itchy so that I could not stay in the place that we agreed to meet," she ends up without a "buddy" at Edsa. Instead, she finds herself swimming in an "undulating river (*ilog na dumadaloy*) without letup from Edsa and Ortigas Avenue that formed the sea at the Shrine." She can't keep still. She feels compelled to keep moving, allowing herself to be carried away from those who recognize her. At Edsa, she knows no one and no one knows her. Yet the absence of recognition causes neither dismay nor a longing for some sort of identity. Instead, she relishes the loss of place brought about by her absorption into the movement of the crowd. She finds herself in a community outside of any community. It fills her with excitement (*sabik*).

27. For a discussion of the history of this nationalist fantasy, see the Introduction to Rafael, *White Love and Other Events*. For a comparative approach to the radical potential of nationalist ideas, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

28. Flor C., Plaridel listserv (plaridel_papers@yahoo.com), 24 January 2001.

29. "Flor C.," I have subsequently learned, is Flor Caagusan, formerly editor of the editorial page of the *Manila Times* and at one point the managing editor of the *Diliman Review*. I owe this information to the journalist Pete Lacaba. While she would be known to a small number of journalists who are part of the Plaridel discussion group, she would presumably be unknown to the majority of the group's participants.

But rather than reach for a cell phone, she does something else: she takes out her camera.

And so I was eager to witness (*kaya nga sabik akong masaksihan*) everything that was happening and took photographs. Walking, aiming the camera here and there, inserted into the thick waves of people who also kept moving and changing places, walked all day until midnight the interiors of the Galleria [shopping mall], around the stage and the whole length of the Edsa-Ortigas flyover. Sometimes stopping to listen for a while to the program on stage, shouting “Erap resign!” and taking close-ups of the angry, cussing placards, T-shirts, and posters and other scenes; “Good Samaritans” giving away mineral water and candy bars, a poor family where the mother and child were lying on a mat while the father watched over, a group of rich folks on their Harley Davidsons, Honda 500s, and Sym scooters that sparkled. . . . And many other different scenes that were vibrant in their similarities but also in their differences.

Immersed in the crowd, Flor C. begins to take photographs. Here, the camera replaces the cell phone as the medium for registering experience. In the passage above, she initially refers to herself as *ako*, the first-person singular pronoun in Tagalog. But once she starts to take photographs, the “I” disappears. The sentences that follow do not contain any pronouns at all. It is as if her walking, moving, listening, and looking are performed impersonally. While we can certainly imagine a person carrying out these activities, Flor C.’s narrative suggests some other agency at work: an “it” rather than an “I.” That “it” of course is the camera Flor C. takes out and begins to aim (*tinutok*). Led by her desire to join the crowd, she begins to act and see like her camera. She stops, then moves on, taking close-ups of “scenes” (*eksenas*) made up of the juxtaposition of various social classes. She is drawn to the appearance of sharp “contrasts” (*pagkaiba*) that are thrown together, existing side by side as if in a montage. The juxtaposition of contrasts, the proximity of social distances, the desire to close in on all sorts of expressions and signs, to draw them into a common, though always shifting, visual field: these are what interest Flor C.’s camera. These are also precisely the features of the crowd. It is the crowd that drives Flor C. to take out her camera; and in registering the mixing of differences the camera reiterates its workings. Identifying with a camera that brings distances up close and holds differences in sharp juxtaposition, Flor C. begins to take on the telecommunicative power of the crowd. Yet, unlike the cell phone, whose political usefulness requires the legitimation of messages by an outside authority, the crowd in Flor C.’s account seems to derive its power from itself. At least in this instance, the crowd does not look beyond itself,

precisely because it erodes any boundary between inside and outside. We can further see this blurring of boundaries in Flor C.'s account of entering the Galleria shopping mall next to the center stage of the Edsa protest:

Many times I entered the Galleria to line up for the restroom and at the juice store. During one of my trips there, I was shocked and thrilled (*kinilabutan ako*) when I heard "Erap resign!" resonating from the food center, cresting up the escalator, aisles and stores. The mall became black from the "advance" of middle-class rallyists wearing the uniform symbolic of the death of justice. But the whole place was happy (*masaya*). Even the security guards at the entrance simply smiled since they could not individually inspect the bags that came before them.

She is thrilled and shocked (*kinilabutan ako*) by a sonic wave making its way up the shopping mall. Middle-class "rallyists" dressed in black surged through the aisles, protesting rather than shopping. Like all modern retail spaces, the shopping mall has been designed to manufacture novelty and surprise only to contain them within the limits of surveillance and commodity consumption. But during People Power II, it is converted into a site for something unexpected and unforeseen. Ordinarily, the mall is meant to keep the streets at bay. Now it suddenly merges with them, creating a kind of uncanny enjoyment that even the security guards cannot resist. Formerly anonymous shoppers, middle-class protestors now come across en masse. As shoppers, they consumed the products of others' labor and constituted their identity in relation to the spectacle of commodities. But as demonstrators, they now shed what made them distinct: their identity as consuming individuals. They are instead consumed and transformed by the crowd. While they may still be recognizably middle class, they simultaneously appear otherwise, advancing in black shirts and chanting slogans. To Flor C., their unfamiliar familiarity produces powerful effects. In the mall, Flor C. finds herself to be somewhere else. As in the streets, the intensification of her sense of displacement becomes the basis for a sensation of fleeting, pleasurable connection with the crowd.

However, this sense of connection can be a source of not only pleasure but, at certain times, anxiety and fear. What is remarkable about Flor C.'s narrative is the way it takes on rather than evades this fear. The result, as we see in the concluding section of her story, is not a mastery or overcoming of the crowd's disorienting pull, but a realization of what she conceives to be the saving power of the crowd. Back on the streets, she wanders onto a flyover, or on-ramp, at the Edsa highway.

When I first went to the flyover, I was caught in the thick waves of people far from the center of the rally. I could barely breathe from the weight of the bodies pressing on my back and sides. I started to regret going to this place that was [so packed] that not even a needle could have gone through the spaces between the bodies. After what seemed like an eternity of extremely small movements, slowly, slowly, there appeared a clearing before me (*lumuwag bigla sa harap ko*). I was grateful not because I survived but because I experienced the discipline and respect of one for the other of the people—there was no pushing, no insulting, everyone even helped each other, and a collective patience and giving way ruled (*kolektibong pasensiya at pagbibigayan ang umiral*).

The night deepened. Hungry again. Legs and feet hurting. I bought squid balls and sat on the edge of the sidewalk. . . . While resting on the sidewalk, I felt such immense pleasure, safe from danger, free, happy in the middle of thousands and thousands of anonymous buddies.

Finding herself amid a particularly dense gathering of bodies, Flor C. momentarily fears for her life. She can barely breathe, overwhelmed by the weight of bodies pressed up against her. Rather than a medium for movement, the crowd is, in this instance, a kind of trap, fixing her in place. Yet ever so slowly, the crowd moves as if on its own accord. No one says anything, no directives are issued, no leader appears to reposition bodies. Instead a kind of “collective patience and giving way ruled” (*kolektibong pasensiya at pagbibigayan ang umiral*). The crowd gives and takes, taking while giving, giving while taking, and so suffers the presence of all those that compose it. It is for this reason “patient,” which is to say, forbearing and forgiving, while forgetting the identities of those it holds and is held by. Forbearance, forgiveness, and forgetting are always slow, so slow in coming. They thus share in, if not constitute, the rhythm of the work of mourning that in turn always entails the sharing of work.

After what seemed like an eternity of waiting and very little movement, Flor C. suddenly arrives at a clearing. “*Lumuwag bigla sa harap ko*” (it suddenly cleared in front of me), she says, which can also be glossed as “the clearing came before me.” Who or what came before whom or what remains tantalizingly uncertain in the text. Earlier, she regretted being trapped in the crowd. But now, thrown into a sudden clearing by a force simultaneously intimate and radically exterior to her, Flor C. is grateful. She survives, but for her this is not the most important thing. Rather, what matters is that she was given the chance to experience the “discipline and respect” of a crowd in which no one was pushing or insulting, and everyone seemed to help one another, a condition that in Tagalog

is referred to as *damayan*, or cooperation, the very same word used to connote the work of mourning.³⁰ It is a peculiar sort of discipline that Flor C. undergoes, one that does not interpellate subjects through hierarchies of recognition.³¹ Instead, it is a discipline borne of mutual restraint and deference that, inasmuch as it does not consolidate identity, lessens the hold of social distinctions.

Crowding gives rise to a sense of forbearance and a general economy of deference. At the same time, it does not precipitate social identities. Rather, it gives way to a kind of saving that Flor C. refers to as the experience of “freedom” (*kalayaan*). Far from being a mob, the crowd here is an embodiment of freedom and incalculable pleasure. It is where a different sense of collectivity resides, one that does away momentarily with hierarchy and the need for recognition. Constraint gives way to an unexpected clearing, to a giving way that opens the way for the other to be free, the other that now includes the self caught in the crowd. And because it is unexpected, this freeing cannot last—just as it cannot be the last, in the sense of final, experience of freedom. Here, emancipation, however transitory—and perhaps because it is felt to be so—does not depend on submission to a higher authority that guarantees the truth of messages. Rather, it relies on the dense gathering of bodies held in patient anticipation of a clearing and release.

Accounts of People Power II indicate that over a million people gathered in the course of four days at Edsa. These protestors were not all from the middle class. As Flor C.’s earlier remarks show, many who opposed Estrada drew from the ranks of the working class and the urban and rural poor. This heterogeneous crowd was not entirely constituted by texting, for obviously not everyone owned cell phones. It emerged primarily, we might imagine, in response to a call for and the call of justice. Put another way, the crowd at Edsa was held together by the promise of justice’s arrival. Here, justice is imagined not simply as a redistributive force acting to avenge past wrongs, its violence producing yet more injustice. The nonviolent nature of People Power II instead suggests that the crowd formed

30. For an elaboration of the notion of *damayan*, see Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979). See also the important work of Fenella Cannell on Bikol Province, south of Manila, *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

31. Flor C.’s account also recalls the experience of crowding in certain religious gatherings, notably the all-male procession of the image of Black Nazarene that marks the high point of the fiesta of Quiapo, a district of Manila on the ninth of January. For a description of the 1995 procession that conveys some sense of the dangers and pleasures experienced by onlookers and practitioners alike in the experience of crowding, see Jaime C. Laya, “The Black Nazarene of Quiapo,” in *Letras y Figuras: Business in Culture, Culture in Business* (Manila: Anvil, 2001), 86–90.

not to exact revenge but to await justice. In so doing, it dwelt in the expectation of a promise that was always yet to be realized. Like freedom and no doubt inseparable from it, justice is always poised to arrive from the future. And it is the unceasing uncertainty of its arrival that constitutes the present waiting of the political crowd. It is a gathering that greets those whose arrival is never fully completed and which forbears a coming always deferred. Yet it is precisely because justice comes by not fully coming, and coming in ways unexpected, that it comes across as that which is free from any particular sociotechnical determination. This promise of justice is what Flor C.'s experience of the crowd conveys. The promissory nature of justice means that it is an event whose eventfulness occurs in advance of and beyond any given political and social order. Evading reification and exceeding institutional consolidation, such an event entails a telecommunication of sorts, what Jacques Derrida might call "the messianic without a messiah." It would be "the opening up to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice. . . . It follows no determinable revelation. . . . This messianicity stripped of everything, this faith without dogma. . . ."32 In the midst of messianic transmissions, Flor C., along with others around her, imagines the dissolution of class differences and feels, at least momentarily, that it is possible to overcome social inequities. She sees in crowding a power that levels the power of the social as such. Past midnight, Flor C. finds herself no longer simply herself. Her body hurting, bearing the traces of the crowd's saving power, she sits on the sidewalk, eating squid balls, happy and safe, free in the midst of countless and anonymous "buddies."

32. Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Acts of Religion*, 56–57. The relationship among politics, promise, and technology intimated by Derrida is, of course, a key preoccupation of this essay. Promises arguably lie at the basis of the political and the social. The possibility of making and breaking pledges, of bearing or renouncing obligations, of exchanging vows and taking oaths forges a sense of futurity and chance, allowing for an opening to otherness. It is this possibility of promising that, Derrida has argued, engenders the sense of something to come, of events yet to arrive. But promises can be made and broken only if they can be witnessed and sanctioned, confirmed and reaffirmed. They must, in other words, be repeatable and citable, capable of being performed again and again. Repetition underlies the making of promises and, thus, the practices of politics. We can gloss this iterative necessity as the workings of the technical and the mechanical that inhere in every act of promising. Technology as the elaboration of the technical, including the technics of speech and writing, is then not merely an instrument for engaging in politics. It is that without which the political and the futures it claims to bring forth would simply never emerge, along with the very notion of emergence itself.

Utopias, of course, do not last, even if their occasional and unexpected happenings are never the last.

Some three months after People Power II, the newly installed government of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo made good on its promise to arrest Estrada on charges of graft and corruption. On 25 April 2001, he was taken from his residence, fingerprinted and photographed, his mug shot displayed for all to see in the media. The sight of Estrada treated as a common criminal infuriated his numerous supporters, many from the ranks of the urban poor who had helped him win the largest majority ever in a presidential election. Spurred on by the middle-class leaders of Estrada's party, *Pwersa ng Masa* (Force of the Masses), and swelled by the ranks of the pro-Estrada Protestant sect *Iglesia ni Cristo* and the populist Catholic group *El Shaddai*, a crowd of perhaps one hundred thousand formed at Edsa and demanded Estrada's release and reinstatement. Unlike those who had gathered there during People Power II, the crowd in what came to be billed as the "Poor People Power" was trucked in by Estrada's political operatives from the slums and nearby provinces and provided with money, food, and, on at least certain occasions, alcohol. In place of cell phones, many reportedly were armed with slingshots, homemade guns, knives, and steel pipes. English-language news reports described this crowd as unruly and uncivilized and castigated protestors for strewing garbage on the Edsa Shrine, harassing reporters, and publicly urinating near the giant statue of the Virgin Mary of Edsa.³³

Other accounts qualified these depictions by pointing out that many in the crowd were not merely hired thugs or demented loyalists but poor people who had legitimate complaints. They had been largely ignored by the elite politicians, the Catholic Church hierarchy, the middle-class-dominated left-wing groups, and the NGOs. Even though Estrada manipulated them, the protestors saw their ex-president as a patron who had given them hope by way of occasional hand-

33. See, for example, the news reports and opinion columns of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* from 26 April to 5 May 2001 for coverage of the "Poor People Power," or, as others have referred to it, "People Power III." In particular, see the following: Alcuin Papa, Dave Veridiano, and Michael Lim Ubac, "Estrada Loyalists Overwhelm Cops on Way to Malacanang," *PDI*, 2 May 2001, 1; Amando Doronila, "The State Defends Itself," *PDI*, 2 May 2001, 1; Amando Doronila "Now the Fight over Semantics," *PDI*, 4 May 2001, 9; "Exchanges on Edsa 3," *PDI*, 3 May 2001; Blanche S. Rivera and Christian Esguerra, "Edsa Reclaimed by Edsa II Forces," *PDI*, 2 May 2001, 1; Blanche Gallardo, "Tears of Joy for Tears of Sadness," *PDI*, 6 May 2001. See also Jarius Bondoc, "Gotcha," *Philippine Star*, 1 May 2001; Howie G. Severino, "The Hand That Rocks the Masa," *Filipinas Magazine*, June 2001, 70–72; and Pete Lacaba, "Edsa Pwersa," *Pinoy Times*, 29 April 2001.

outs and who addressed them in their vernacular. The middle-class media treated Estrada's supporters as simpletons deficient in moral and political consciousness, but worthy of compassion. The vast majority of middle-class opinion thus shared the view that the pro-Estrada crowd differed profoundly from the one that gathered in January during People Power II. While the latter was technologically savvy and politically sophisticated, the former was retrograde and reactionary. Generation Txt spoke of democratization, accountability, and civil society; the "tsinelas crowd," so called because of the cheap rubber slippers many protestors wore, was fixated on its "idol," Estrada. In their mystified state, they seemed to the middle class barely articulate and incapable of formulating anything other than a desire for revenge on those they deemed responsible for victimizing Estrada. If the crowds of People Power II responded to the circulation of messages sanctioned by a higher authority and the prospect of justice as the promise of freedom, the *masa* (masses) of People Power III were merely playing out a tragically mistaken identification with Estrada. They sought, or so it was assumed, the crude sort of payback typical of many of the ex-president's movie plots.³⁴

Middle-class accounts of this other crowd regularly made mention of the "voicelessness" of the urban poor. At the same time, these accounts showed a relative lack of concern with actually hearing—much less recording—any distinctive voices. By emphasizing this voicelessness, the middle class in effect redoubled the masses' seeming inarticulateness; as if the masses, without anything intelligible to say, could only act irrationally and at times violently. "Voiceless," the masses, it was feared, might riot in the streets. Indeed, in the early morning of 1 May, they marched from the Edsa Shrine to the presidential palace, in the process destroying millions of pesos worth of property and suffering several deaths and scores of injuries. They finally were dispersed by the police and palace guards. But it is important to note that the protestors were not, in fact, voiceless. While marching to the palace, the masses chanted slogans. Newspaper reports quoted these slogans and in so doing give us a rare chance to actually hear the crowd: "*Nandito na kami, malapit na ang tagumpay!*" (We're here, our victory is close at hand!) and "*Patalsikin si Gloria! Ibalik si Erap! Nandyang na kami! Maghanda na kayo!*" (Get rid of Gloria! Return Erap! We are coming! Get ready!).³⁵

34. See, for example, Conrado de Quiros, "Lessons," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 4 May 2001; Walden Bello, "The May 1st Riot: Birth of Peronism RP Style?" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 May 2001; La Liga Policy Institute (Quezon City), "Poor People Power: Preludes and Prospects," as it appears in *filipino-studies@yahoo.com*, 6 May 2001; and Ferdinand Llanes "Edsa at Mendiola ng Masa," *filipino-studies@yahoo.com*, 3 May 2001.

35. Papa, Veridiano, and Ubac, "Estrada Loyalists Overwhelm Cops."

Here, the crowd is fueled by the desire to give back to Gloria what it thinks she's given it. In return for her unseating of Estrada, it wants to unseat her. She took his place, and now it wants him to take hers. Through its slogans, the crowd expresses this giving back of a prior taking away. It says: "We are here, our victory is close at hand!"; "We are coming, you'd better be ready!" The crowd thereby takes itself for an apocalyptic power. The "we" referred to here has already arrived, even as it continues to come. Certain of their arrival, the protesters ask those who hear to be ready. Having arrived, they will settle their debts, collect what is owed to them and thereby put an end to their—the crowd's and its audience's—waiting. While the crowd in *People Power II* clung to a sense of the messianic without a messiah, this other crowd comes as a messianic specter delivered by resentments whose satisfaction can no longer be deferred. It is perhaps for this reason that middle-class observers repeatedly referred to it (in English) as a "mob," "rabble," or "horde." These words imply more than savage or disordered speech and appearance. As the use of the word *horde* indicates, the masses were also seen to be irreducibly alien: foreign invaders encroaching upon a place they had no right to occupy.³⁶

Eschewing a stance of forbearance, this crowd demanded recognition without delay. "Here we are!" it shouted. "Be prepared!" For many among the middle class, to hear this crowd was to realize that they were not quite ready to hear them; indeed, that they would always have been unprepared to do so. The masses suddenly became visible in a country where the poor are often viewed by the middle class as literally unsightly, spoken about and spoken down to because they are deemed incapable of speaking up for themselves. They are acknowledged only in order to be dismissed. Marching to the palace, however, and chanting their slogans, they assumed an apocalyptic agency. They threatened to bring about a day of reckoning that was simultaneously desired and dreaded by those who saw them. In their uncanny visibility, the masses did not so much gain a "voice" that corresponded to a new social identity. Instead, they communicated an excess of communication that could neither be summed up nor fully accounted for by those who heard them. Unprepared to hear the crowd's demand that they be prepared, the middle class could only regard it as monstrous. Hence the bourgeois calls for the conversion of the masses and their domestication by means of "pity," "compassion," and some combination of social programs and educational

36. *Horde* comes from the Turkish *ordilordu*, meaning "camp," and originally referred to "troops of Tartar or other nomads dwelling in tents or wagons and moving from place to place for pasturage or for war and plunder," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

reform. But these calls also demanded that those who made up the crowd, one that was now totally other, be put back in their place, removed like so much garbage from the Edsa Shrine and the perimeter of the presidential palace.³⁷ By late morning of Labor Day, the military, spooked by the specter of Poor People Power, had dispersed the marchers. The crowd's violent outburst, like their abandoned rubber slippers, was relegated to the memory of injustices left unanswered, fueling the promise of revenge and feeding the anticipation of yet more uprisings in the future.

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37. See Riverra and Esguerra, "Edsa Reclaimed by Edsa II Forces," which reports, among other things, how those involved in People Power II "brought their own towels, sponges, and scrubs," to clean the garbage that had been left behind by the pro-Estrada crowd, hosing down "the filth from the ground" and "disinfecting" the shrine with chlorine. Estrada's supporters had "heaped mounds of garbage, sang and danced lustfully over the Edsa shrine marker, rammed a truck into the landscape and directed huge loudspeakers to the shrine door," according to the shrine rector, Monsignor Soc Villegas.