PHENOMENOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON POWER AND VULNERABILITY IN CYBERSPACE BY FILIPINO YOUTH
Implications to Church in Dialogue with Digital Culture

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Introduction

This article focuses on selected students' reflections in Philosophy and Gender courses at De La Salle University in the Philippines. These musings are about their engagement of, with, and in cyberspace particularly through virtual games and social networks using a philosophical method known as Phenomenology. Through phenomenology, students critically examined their own experience as they navigated cyberspace and how such experiences impacted on the way they have understood themselves, their gender identities, and even sexual orientation. The activity enabled them to reflect deeply into their own engagement and whether such made them empowered or vulnerable. These engagements by young people are a special import to the Church which is highlighted by Pope Benedict

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XVI in his 47th World Day of Communications Message (2013)[1] where he acknowledges that the "development of digital social networks which are helping to create a new "agora", an open public square in which people share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and forms of community can come into being."

Young people, especially in the Philippines, have wholeheartedly embraced cyberspace, have taken to the internet as well as information and computer mediated technologies or ICTs like ducks to water. Normally sullen and uncommunicative in geographical space, they are hyper gregarious in cyberspace which they considerably and exceptionally employ to creatively express their selves, opinions, feelings and emotions. It is not a coincidence that a status update in Facebook is called a *shout out.* And in the seemingly unlimited vastness of cyberspace, it is exactly as termed, a shout out to announce one's *presence;* to render one as significant and important and not at all an *unknown* or just another face in the crowd. Ironically, this ability to proclaim one's presence into the world through the Internet also renders them vulnerable. I take vulnerability as a direct result of violence inflicted on bodies on a regular and sustained manner. Violence as manifested in geographical space is present in cyberspace inasmuch as the stakeholders, players, perpetrators and victims are humans. For David Roberts in *Human Insecurity: Global Structures of Violence,* violence takes many forms and its definitions range in breadth.[2] It is traditionally understood as the consequences/s of action or actions of an actor or a result of activities of institution or structures. Direct violence normally results in visible victims and survivors. While traditional conceptions of violence emphasized war or armed violence, the manifestation of violence in cyberspace is much more subtle and to some extent sublime. Forms may include cyberbullying, cyber stalking and other acts that emphasize and highlight young people's vulnerability and powerlessness.

The Nature of Cyberspace

It is helpful to regard cyberspace as not ontologically distinct from geographical (physical) space. In *Mapping Cyberspace* (2001) Dodge

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[1] Benedict XV1, "Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization," *Message of His Holiness for the 47th World Communications Day, May 12, 2013.* Retrieved from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20130124_47th-world-communications-day_en.html. Accessed June 21, 2013.

[2] David Roberts, *Human Insecurity: Global Structures of Violence,* London & New York: Zed Books, 2008, 17.

and Kitchin consider *cyberspace* as a metaphor which is used to illustrate a myriad of spaces, of digital interactions created by individual people, communities and corporations to trade information. In this case, cyberspace's contribution to information exchange is tremendous to radically alter our way of life—economically, politically, and culturally. And here lies its true power—*its transformative energy.*[3] It has a tremendous democratic potential—it fosters a sense of participation that only democracy can provide.

Indeed, the "virtual" nature of cyberspace fosters a sense that it is more accessible because it is not constrained by physical boundaries like mountains and oceans as well as immigration counters or border patrols, and non-physical boundaries like language and culture. Most people do not understand how information and media content travel to get to them but certainly there is something gratifying with connecting to someone via information and computer mediated technologies or ICTs. The 1 Billion (and counting) members of **Facebook** can attest to this and the instant comments or queries or status updates by friends and family can either bring about joy or anger or consternation. These are real emotions albeit mediated by ICTs. In virtual games for example, players are not required to physically perform the actions being performed by the players' characters in the game. He/she simply has to press the keyboard and move the mouse. Nonetheless, the term virtual reality implies that inasmuch as it is a mere prototype of reality, it is also experienced as real as when the user is presented with visual, auditory, and even tactile feedback.

But is it really better than real?

Ontologically, what constitutes reality is an on-going debate between the so-called "realists" and the "nonrealists". The realists basically hold that reality is objective, that is, it exists independent of the self or human observer; it is knowable and predictable insofar as it works through and is governed by physical laws. Nonrealists on the other hand hold that what we know as "objective" reality is created or constructed as negotiate complex structures. As such, there is no reality that exists outside these social constructions. Cyberspace is a space that offers limitless possibilities. One of these is the creation

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[3]Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin, *Mapping Cyberspace.* London & New York: Routledge, 2001, 13.

of truly global communities linked solely by common interests or ideologies. William Gibson who coined the word cyberspace in his novel *Neuromancer*[4] defines it as "a consensual hallucination." By the very phrase Gibson here seems to articulate that cyberspace is a simulation of reality but some postmodern thinkers like Jean Baudrillard[5] insists that a basic human experience is already a simulation of reality and to regard a simulation as not "real" is to miss the point on how images, symbols and signs precede what we generally regard as "real." Thus, what reality is, it seems, is characterized more by incommensurability rather than certainty. Cyberspace then is just like any human space constructed by humans themselves and created with the same artifacts (space, city, café, rooms, etc) just like in geographical space and inhabited by the same people we recognize everyday albeit some are in virtual forms. Social networking sites are created because we are social beings and we have been networking for a long, long time largely for our own survival. The Internet then is just one medium with which we express our humanness. With these in mind, cyberspace is no less real than geographical space and not much better.

Crafting Self through Virtual Games

In geographical space, one may be small or insignificant or unimportant. He or she may even be socially inept as most teens are wont to be or may be marginalized by society for being different, e.g. being gay, lesbian or transgender. In cyberspace however you can be whoever you want to be! *Cyberspace constructs selves that are disembodied and unfettered by physical and cultural constraints.* Sherry Turkle's 1995 book, *Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*[6] reveals how participants in MUD (multi-user domains) chat rooms have become more comfortable assuming identities that are different from the ones they have in geographical space. Increasing numbers of males in reality assume female identities in virtual reality and children (those who are below 18 years old) navigate these chat rooms expertly by passing themselves off as adults. Turkle raises concerns about adults having relationships with children unwittingly. Nonetheless, Turkle's work posits that cyberspace has

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[4]William Gibson, *Neuromancer.* New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1984.

[5]Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation.* Originally published in French by Editions Galilee, 1981. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

[6]Shirley Turkle, *Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet,* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

become a place where the self is constructed and the rules of social interaction are built and not received. This is an interesting insight which seems to reinforce people's acceptance or regard of cyberspace as "better than real." From the study conducted by Turkle, Dodge and Kitchin gather that in cyberspace your body is irrelevant and invisible and nobody need know your race, disability, gender, sexuality or marital status unless you choose to reveal it. *Identity is thus conceptualized as constructed through multiple experiences resulting in it becoming fragmented, de-centered and fluid, changing with time and with the situation.*[7]

Crafting self makes virtual gaming more interesting, according to my students who are engaged in it; in particular, games that are considered as *massively multiplayer online role playing games* (M.M.O.R.P.G.s). A male student sumps up the whole process succinctly:

> Kill monsters -> Level Up -> Do Quest -> Realize that quests aren't really worth doing when you could level faster and get much, much, much, much better rewards just repeatedly killing the same set of goddamn monsters 9001 times -> Kill monsters -> Actually Level Up this time -> Rinse and repeat.

The fun is in the ability to be inside a virtual world of role-playing games where one can be anyone he or she chooses to be. The ability to customize characters is one tool that makes the whole gaming experience for the gamers (people who continually play on-line games) more inviting. Imagination is at its peak when presented with 3-dimensional avatars that can range from heroes, heroines, samurais, wizards, monsters and sometimes, culprits. This type of environment that allows self portrayals according to personal preferences had made room for the concept of gender swapping. Virtual gaming knows no rules when it comes to the creation of virtual persona. Gamers are entitled to an ideal "self" that represents them in the gaming world. This gives possibility where a male player can opt for the role of a female character and vice versa.

A female student reflects on why she opted for a male identity in on-line games and social networks:

> I have kept the male identity with my cyberspace friends until they meet me or actually talk to me. One of the reasons I keep my identity male is

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[7]Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin, 2001, *Mapping Cyberspace*, 53.

that the male has the ability to get back, to fight for anything and to raise better opinions than females and it is actually what I have been doing. *When there are times that I am in dire need of explanations, facts, I always think that male is the more superior beings than females.* In forums, it is very rare that these forum entities are female because a *normal* female is currently on shopping, swimming or anything that does not pertain to being in the World Wide Web.

A male gamer on the other hand, decided to pass himself off as a girl and is shocked to realize that:

The implication of this experiment is that men in cyberspace, or at least, specifically, a few men who played the Online RPG, Ragnarok during the early 2000s, determined gender, mistakenly, not based on how real men act in the real world, but how they ideally perceived women to act. During those times, it was simple: I acted cute, defenseless and innocent, and they ate it all up. Of course, I benefited a lot from it, *and it felt good.* It not only worked with men, but I also remember a few specific events when I actually befriended other females (or perceived ones) this way. Of course, this is also in the assumption that those were actual females, but of course, just because I can act the part doesn't mean that I can distinguish between a good faker and a real one, myself. After all, my mind is already rooted in that same paradigm. This leads me to the next point. Aside from the *favors*, the second perk of choosing a female character is the ease of garnering popularity. We had a lot of laughs about how there's a lot of really desperate men in that game (notwithstanding that, at that time, we weren't really any different — but we were dumb kids back then; we actually had the free time to do stupid things like that, and it was on their expense anyway). I could also hazily recount a time when I made a powerful male character kill someone that I didn't like.

One male gamer "fell in love" with another gamer through their constant encounters in games but it turned out unpleasant: "I remember when I was playing Tibia, I met this girl and told her that I think I love her, but she said 'Dude, I'm a guy.' I was quite surprised and I felt a little disgusted too at the same time.

The highly social and intricate group dynamics in M.M.O.R.P.G.s can be a bane to some young people because they taught them how to be cooperative. One gamer points out:

People may find it funny that I take computer gaming so seriously that I try to form strategies and develop some kind of style of play just for a silly video game. I guess it really is just a case of personal preference. What they don't know is that throughout this experience in cyber space, I have made friends, many of which from my clan [UDT] which I have come to know personally. This group in the online video gaming world is

the gaming "clan", the set of players who usually team up together and combine tactics and strategies to win or achieve a specific objective. Either the group views you as part of the lower-tier who still needs development or because of how you play or act in the game, or you're part of the top-class in the group which usually makes the decisions when having organized matches in the game. I am considered in my gaming community as a highly skilled player.

Similarly, a gamer student likens the satisfaction he gets from constructing virtual selves, worlds and universe "to be Godlike." He interprets this expression as "a feeling of being able to mould or shift things into how you desire them to be and to set things in accordance to what you perceive to be perfect." Also that it connotes "to create or construct an environment or a being that a person wishes life could be like, and being able to control the path that you have set upon it. The life one could create in cyberspace has endless possibilities, and to have that feeling of being Godlike in creating such a life in cyberspace is unexplainable." I think that this accurately captures the intense fascination with virtual games because, as another gamer puts it, "there is no accountability; you can do whatever you want to do without fear of punishment or admonition."

The Meaning of Self

A male student's experience in crafting an identity vastly different from his own enabled him to reflect on the meaning of self:
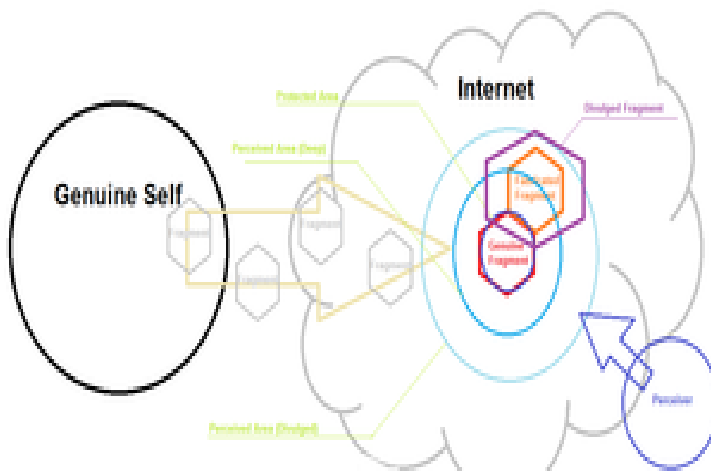
In the model above, a person has a genuine self, which is how the person really is in the real world. The information about the person is sent through cyberspace in the form of "fragments" of information. *Through the process of transfer, these are merely uncategorized fragments, since they are unperceived by anyone.* However, as the information is presented to the internet, through hubs such as social networks or MMORPGs, these fragments are perceived and the validity of which is then classified as *Genuine,* which reflects the true self, and *Fabricated,* which does not reflect the true self. The person can then choose which of these he/she wishes to divulge. Through the internet, the perceiver then has several layers of "x-ray vision" through the information. The outermost layer is the *Divulged Perception Area,* which is mostly made of divulged fragments. The next area is the *Deep Perception Area,* where some genuine information about the self may be uncovered due to good deduction of the divulged facts and uncovering of character inconsistencies. The innermost area contains the genuine fragments of the person, and I call it the *Protected Area,* where such information is intently hidden such that perception can no longer penetrate to it and it would require actual knowledge about the person to uncover.

The student realizes that while the self can definitely be broken down into bits and re-formed into a new entity as it enters cyberspace, usually, one that is quite distant from the true, core self, these fragments are still subject to both the mediating power of the individual (manifested in one's choice of information one wishes to share) and of a particular media entity or platform (manifested in stringent requirements to sign up and divulge personal information) one wishes to join into. I can gather that such realization above is an exercise of self-awareness inasmuch as he is acutely mindful of the hallucinatory nature of cyberspace and thus, what is "real" metaphysically that also includes "genuine" self is one that is bound by physical (geographical) space.

Power/Powerlessness

In his later writings, Foucault clarifies his notion of power and its attendant freedom in a more positive way.

> ... a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions open up.[8]

We have established early on that the true power of cyberspace lies in its ability to provide democratic spaces for people to express themselves. Young people embrace the Internet and ICTs largely for this. While as mature people, we do not operate any under illusion that cyberspace would be some sort of utopia where people can connect meaningfully in all levels, the reality is, many young people do find their engagement with cyberspace meaningful and life-changing. At this point I deem it very important that we highlight how this engagement of, with and in cyberspace can be *empowering* to the youth and that it is also in a way a site of *resistance* against debilitating and death-dealing cultural and ideological standards that render people who are different as an *other.* One of my students describes being empowered as:

> …the process of increasing the capacity to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. In my own understanding, being empowered is being confident with the self; people are comfortable with the totality of their beings and are able to express themselves and influence others without being anxious or worried about what other people might perceive, whether positive or negative.

A lesbian student who found her significant other in lesbian dating website describes her experience as:

> a resistance against the idea that as a homosexual, I cannot possibly find someone to love. I seek to find love and in reality (geographical space) this is something I couldn't openly do. It takes courage to announce yourself as a lesbian in real world. So I diverted my attention to the dating world of cyberspace. In there you can be yourself and tell the whole world that you're a lesbian anonymously. Cyberspace lets me be who I want to be.

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[8]Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1, New York: Vintage Books, 1990, 220.

What these pronouncements reveal is for to acknowledge that every space is discursive; every space offers an opportunity to resist the mechanization of those who render us either as miscreants, subversive or deviants. And this space is metaphorically captured by cyberspace.

| HIGH MATURITY/ CONFIDENCE	High Mat. Low Inv. EMPOWERED -does not rely on cyberspace to feel empowered e.g. naturally empowered people in reality	High Mat. Med Inv. EMPOWERED -uses cyberspace as a tool to maintain empowerment/credibility e.g. renowned bloggers	High Mat. High Inv. EMPOWERED -able to utilize cyberspace to maintain it as source of empowerment e.g. YouTube sensations
MEDIUM MATURITY/ CONFIDENCE	Med Mat. Low Inv. STABLE -a little insecure with self but still confident e.g. normal people who don't frequent cyberspace	Med Mat. Med Inv. STABLE -a little insecure with self but still confident, uses cyberspace as tool to empower themselves e.g. budding bloggers	Med Mat. High Inv. STABLE -a little insecure with self but still confident, sees cyberspace as solution to being empowered e.g. budding YouTube uploaders
LOW MATURITY/ CONFIDENCE	Low Mat. Low Inv. POWERLESS -low self-esteem/confidence, does not see cyberspace as means to helping their situation e.g. insecure people who do not use cyberspace	Low Mat. Med Inv. POWERLESS -low self-esteem/confidence, Sees cyberspace as one of many options to uplift their confidence -cyberspace may result into lower confidence e.g. losers, insecure people wanting to belong and be accepted	Low Mat. High Inv. POWERLESS -low self-esteem/confidence, sees cyberspace as a new lease on life/fresh start/new identity -cyberspace may result into lower confidence e.g. losers, insecure people desperate to belong and be accepted, depressed people
	LOW INVOLVEMENT Or ATTACHMENT	MEDIUM INVOLVEMENT Or ATTACHMENT	HIGH INVOLVEMENT Or ATTACHMENT

A male student apologizes for a "somewhat scatterplot attempt that highlights the relationship of two factors which I perceive is vital in the aspect of empowerment/powerlessness in cyberspace: maturity and involvement." Nevertheless, as a commentator I find it noteworthy because of its thoughtfulness.

In cyberspace power strives and thrives. There is a saying, he continues, that water has the power to sustain and provide life but also has the ability to bring about destruction. Similarly, there are many instances that due to the freedom and lack of constraints of individuals in cyberspace people are able to express themselves more freely and get positively recognized for their self-expressions, much more than they could get in geographical space. Those who revel in their power to bring out about responses from other people yet are too emotionally fragile to handle bullying that could accompany thoughtless responses, can get hurt and depressed. Thus, for this student, only those who are self-aware and have gained enough confidence and maturity can be truly empowered. Being empowered,

according to him, enhances life through one's own action and disposition (maturity), and cyberspace offers a venue for the attainment of that power.

Nonetheless, we are not so naïve as to embrace cyberspace uncritically. In fact, it is a double-edged sword: on one hand it is very empowering; on the other hand, it is also a perfect place for undesirable people to thrive in.

A student illustrates his level of engagement and interaction with cyberspace:
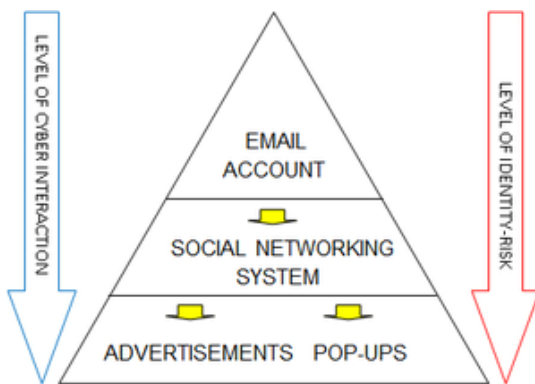
Thought the engagement started out innocently, he realizes that as he engages in it deeper, he is also setting himself up to greater vulnerability in the process.

Cyberbullying Affects Real Lives

Nothing demonstrates this vulnerability more acutely than the phenomenon, cyberbullying. In the Philippines where a large number of the populace owns a cell phone and is actively engaged in social networks, cyberbullying and its accompanying phenomena, cyber stalking, cyber gossiping, and character assassination via spread of false and vicious information against others is considered by experts as a real threat to young people. Real feelings of terror, loneliness, pain, betrayal and misery are noted in victims of cyberbullying. In an informal interview done by a group of students in my Philosophy of the Person class at De La Salle University, a 17 year-old victim shares her story:

They hacked into my account, deleted my photos then replaced them with like gross ones… you know what I'm talking about? And then they placed stuff there… like how I dress and look… that I am gay… though I have nothing against homosexuality, I am straight but do you get it? They were just giving false information about me. And that hurt me really because I thought that they were people I can trust.

What makes cyberbullying especially pernicious is that some perpetrators do not identify themselves when they post hurtful messages and insults thus making it harder for the victims to cope because, as a female student puts it, "she would feel more helpless and isolated for not knowing who her 'enemy' is."

Cyberspace Excludes; Reinforces Stereotypes

Most young people think of cyberspace as a largely democratic space which allows them countless ways to construct identities, engage in activities, and even carve out spaces for their interests that may be disallowed in geographic space. How they comport themselves — in cyberspace speak of and manifest their general acceptance of it as democratic and safe. And it is not so really. Fact is, cyberspace was created, maintained and sustained by capitalist ideals, more specifically, neoliberal economic ideals. Neo-liberalism is an economic model that emphasizes fair competition, free trades, liberalization and privatization. The view that cyberspace is largely an egalitarian, democratic, perhaps better than geographical space is challenged by the fact that it is still inaccessible to a great number of people on the planet especially those who are very poor or living in poor countries which lack the necessary infrastructures to access it, despite the United Nations' estimate that around 2 billion people on the planet are using the Internet for varying reasons. The Philippines itself has joined the Internet as early as 1994, yet more than eighteen years later, digital divide persists even if some degree of economic boom has been noted by economists worldwide. In a report presented by Yahoo and market research company, Nielsen in 2011 on a study they conducted on the state of Internet use in the country, digital growth only occurred in highly urban centres in the country, namely Metro Manila, Cebu and Davao.[9] Poverty and lack of infrastructures to access cyberspace continue to prevent a significant number of Filipino youth from joining and participating in global information highways. The oft-used image of a shrinking world because of

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[9]Data can be seen at http://tonyocruz.com/?p=3194. Accessed May 9, 2013.

Internet acquires an ominous dimension when we factor in digital divide among those who have the means to participate and those who cannot.

Dodge and Kitchin note that while contemporary maps of cyberspace show lines and circles continually intersecting and overlapping thereby giving a picture of a truly unified globe, what lies beneath those interconnecting lines and circles are invisible "geographies of power" and "geographies of exclusion."[10]

> Space is one of the principal mediums through which power is administered and controlled. Spatial organization, the demarcation of territories, spatial surveillance and policing, and the expression of cultural ideologies based around factors such as gender, race, disability, all produce complex spatial geometries of power. Some commentators regard cyberspace as utopian space of individual power while others see it as control space where Big Brother asserts its presence and control. For others still cyberspace reinforces and deepens current geometries, providing a medium through which hegemony is further reproduced.

The idea of cyberspace as reinforcing status quo is hardly surprising. This is especially evident in gender dynamics in cyberspace. When we come to examine the phenomenon of gamers constructing genders different from their own, its gender bending/destabilizing/transgressing premise is not entirely good news for us. Students' reflections on this perpetuate male and female stereotypes but they capture what these young people feel — they are empowered — when they can easily craft a new identity which is something that is extremely difficult to do in real life. However, even in their fantasies, they bear witness to the mechanization of the normalization process by which gender and sexuality are defined. In other words, their understanding of power, demonstrated in their ability to construct gender identities vastly different from theirs, is not really of the kind which emancipates.

For French Philosopher Michel Foucault, power is always confronted by resistance and resistance is a manifestation of power. Moreover, one characteristic of power is that it is shared by making the disciplinary technologies as pleasurable as possible. With this strategy, cooperation to institutions is deemed acceptable if not desirable as it brings about pleasure. There is no coercion here.

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[10] Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin, *Mapping Cyberspace*, 37.

Powerlessness on the other hand is mindless cooperation or sets in when the people are put in a situation where choice is impossible; where resistance is futile and only cooperation stands between life and death. Note that this state of being is not pleasurable. The other way power is shared is through negotiation. If young people could negotiate through subversion, noncooperation, defiance, dissent and resistance, then they have power, albeit in micro-ways. So to continue to cling to the idea that young people are forever victims of unscrupulous perpetrators who prey on them is to underestimate the youth and underestimate their ways to resist/subvert in ways that they can, either by strategic cooperation or negotiation. I say this quite strongly to hammer a point that adults sometimes regard young people as totally clueless about the ways and cares of the world. And this is where we lose them.

A female student reflects on her horrifying brush with an on-line pedophile:

> I began with ignorance and ended with awareness. Yes, I became more aware; awareness of a different sort; Awareness that is more practical and more experienced, something truer and closer to the dark side that does comprise the real world. Awareness that there are dangers that lurk beneath even the most innocent of things, awareness that love cannot be found in an electronic box, at least not this way. Awareness which makes you know that there are people who will play on your needs and your desires, your innocence and your youth. First you learn about the basics of something: how it works, what it does, how to use it. But experience will show you that there are many things that underlie the basics; things are never as they seem, not even in the real world. You learn the hard way sometimes, but hey, at least you learn, and learning this way helps you to never forget. The Internet gives us freedom, yes. But it also gives us choice in the most encompassing sense. It will be our choice to click this or to ignore that; to listen to consciences and guilt or to play deaf to regret. It is the ultimate test of our ability to discern what is right or wrong, and better yet, to change what is wrong and do something about it when your spidey senses tingle.

As an educator who spends considerable time with young people, I cannot hope for a better realization which is perfectly articulated above. Phenomenologically, reality is much, much complex than we think and that to naively think of an alternative reality which does not hold us accountable for our actions is to miss the point that there is nothing too fantastical that will help us escape our responsibilities, especially the responsibility to make choices on the life we want to

lead. Young people are vulnerable, yes, but only through recognizing those points of vulnerability and expertly avoiding them can they be fully empowered, the kind of power which emancipates. When's the perfect time to practice?

Conclusion: Deepening the Dialogue between Church and Digital Culture

In the same 2013 Message mentioned at the beginning of the article, Pope Benedict XVI underscores that "the digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but is part of the daily experience of many people, especially the young. Social networks are the result of human interaction, but for their part they also reshape the dynamics of communication which builds relationships: a considered understanding of this environment is therefore the prerequisite for a significant presence there." The Pontiff shows remarkable grasp of the deep and wide engagement of young people with cyberspace, particularly young Filipinos. This particular passage acknowledges the empowering potential of social networks insofar as it provides crucial human interactions that young people crave; viewed in this way, the Church ought to embrace cyberspace, predominantly social networks, where young people reside and interact. Evangelization takes roots and flourishes in these spaces which in turn provide the Church with the necessary tools to reach out to young people in ways that are comfortable for them because they acknowledge their presence, their words and feelings, and their entire selves.