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I Introduction

Recently the Philippines was put on the spot when the lethal love bug virus that wrecked havoc to computers and caused millions of dollars of damages world wide was traced to have been created by someone from this country. The suspect was a drop-out from an oblivious computer school. The country today is thriving with these hackers and underground programmers who get high in hacking computer networks and unleashing destructive viruses. They are often branded as cyber delinquents.

A local sociologist and news paper columnist Randy David observed something about these cyber delinquents:

"They are self-styled artist and warriors who, more often than not, do not even have enough money to buy their own computers. Yet, in a virtual world they have learned to inhabit, they imagine themselves as equal to everyone they encounter in cyberspace. All the emblems of inferiority which in the past may have suppressed their genius have become irrelevant—how you look, how you speak English, which school you attended, who your parents are, etc. To them what matters is what you can do to the machine. No other development in human affairs can be more democratic than this or more conducive to personal emancipation."

Since Alvin Toffler came out with his book Future Shock in the seventies a gradual realization of a shifting basis of wealth and power from land to information emerged. This was further elucidated by Toffler in his work the Third Wave. The era of information technology has created a new polarization of wealth and power in society wherein the traditional domains of wealth and power were overtaken by emerging technicians. This seems to be a reminiscence of the early stage of the scientific and industrial revolutions when scientists, merchants and craftsmen emerged as the new nobility thereby grabbing away from the traditional aristocrats the homage they traditionally enjoyed.

Information is defined as knowledge acquired from another; facts *etc* communicated or learnt. Our understanding of "information" could be very varied and comprehensive. As such, in this paper, I will limit my understanding of information in the realm of symbols and cultural meanings. I will try to briefly illustrate the roles of symbols in society (particularly its role in molding culture) and explain why it is a potent tool in affecting change. In arriving at this point I will try to briefly discuss the work of Ulf Hannerz'

Cultural Complexity where he shows the complexity of our present culture and the new form of power that takes place in the contemporary complex culture.

II Contemporary Complex Culture

Human beings construct systems of meanings in the world. These systems of meanings are externalized and thus observable. As time progresses the environment changes and the externalization of these systems of meanings changes with the environment. The externalization though, varies from the individual and the collective. Some meanings are shared collectively while others are not.

The massive progress in transportation and communication have made the world smaller, thus cultural drift and assimilation have been more dynamic to the extent that it has been difficult to determine an unadulterated culture. We are now living in a society of "complex culture".

Culture(s) in society have assumed diverse functions, for instance, instrumental function, i.e., as an ideological apparatus in legitimizing a particular interest. Hannerz wants to confront the traditional idea of culture as a "*collective socially organized meaning...as something shared...and homogeneously distributed in society,*" with the sources of the diversity of culture and its consequences.

The progress in telecommunication and transportation facilitated and accelerated cultural flow. As well as it made cultural flow manageable in space and time. It also nuances the concept of space. Traditionally, Weber for instance, conceived "space" as associated with local territory easily accessible. A community is a group of people conceived in this concept of space--a local territory. However, with media the "imagined community", as conceived by Benedict Anderson, widens and put us into contact with other people whom we met or not met but influence us or we influencing them. These are the people who are even beyond our local territory.

The "information explosion" witnessed in our decade seemed to have made the management of knowledge difficult. As mentioned earlier, ideas and thoughts in the minds are externalized, in the age of information explosion, the management of these information have been difficult in a sense that according to Hannerz: "*people cannot confidently manage the relationships between the entire inventory and their reasonable personal share in it.*"

Also, there are several problems contemporary society has brought, for instance, the unevenness of distribution of knowledge widens the gap between civilizations.

In a contemporary postmodern world "images" have replaced metaphysics. Meanings have been exorcised with all meta-narratives, that it sought refuge in images. And since there is no metaphysical element in which meanings can be grounded, a plurality of perspectives arose.

These images are most often creation of the corporate worlds. Hence if they can create it, they can also manipulate how people think. We can see today an excessive trend of commodization that individual identity has been lost in the "crowd."

Contemporary complex society has its own system of non-sharing. Relationships in contemporary complex culture are shallow. "Meanings" vary from one society to another, sometimes shared, sometimes not. Hence creating a problem in communication. The problems in communication make the sharing of knowledge difficult. John Fischer define culture as "persistent, socially transmitted and shared information." Given the difficulty of sharing information as mentioned above, culture appears to be in crisis. There is a need to look at the process of sharing and degrees of non-sharing of knowledge/information in society.

Culture is transferred or assimilated through the frameworks of society namely; ordinary mingling of people, the state, market and movements (e.g. social movements). The ordinary mingling of people is the most natural framework for cultural transfer and assimilation. Market commodities carry some meanings themselves. The market also defines meanings for human needs, thus a powerful framework for the creation of culture. The state manages meanings in various ways and most often through physical force. The management of meaning of the state is to identify a common identity among people living in a certain territory. Social Movements create and transform meanings other than the usual accepted meanings. It opens (or closes) other horizons of meanings, that is, introducing people to a higher consciousness of meanings.

The division of labor in contemporary complex society has created a highly specialized form of labor. This division of labor created a specialized world among peoples. Each kind of labor develops a language and culture of its own. In this divided setup of society, communication among disciplines may be possible. Given the complexity of contemporary society, Hannerz added however that in complex culture not all relationships are asymmetrical as well as in small-scale society relationships are symmetrical. This may be a hope for sharing of meanings.

The role of individuals in society is important. Individuals are not entirely passive cogs in society. They are an "intentionality" themselves capable of constructing meanings. They have a portion in culture and Hannerz calls this "perspectives" for the reason that: "*people manage meanings from where they are.*" It is the perspective that enables the organization of the attention and the interpretation of the individual towards the "externally carried meanings."

Each individual plays a role or roles in society, from these roles the individual generates his/her perspective. An individual in his/her daily life plays several roles. For instance, a woman may wake up in the morning as a wife to her husband and mother to her children. Later on she goes to the office as an employee, and so on and so forth. Some roles may be more important than the other. The individual has with him/her a collection of perspectives in which he/she applies when the situation calls for it. This collection of perspectives becomes a personal paradigm in which an individual weaves his/her horizon

of meanings. Sometimes there are unique situations never encountered before and requires a new perspective. This is where the creativity of the human person comes in creating a perspective applicable to the situation. A person and re-appropriate his/her paradigm to a given unique situation, in the process assimilating or rejecting such situation into his/her world of meanings.

Perspectives interact thus producing a pattern of habits otherwise known as culture. In a complex society there exists clusters of symmetry: culture and subcultures. There exists a smaller unit of people sharing a common cultural pattern known as subculture. This cultural pattern may be due to the fact that they have the same profession, economic status, etc. and a person may have several sub-cultures. This subculture interacts together in a bigger society. In the interaction a subculture may assimilate or reject other subcultures. Social movements or individuals with insights usually open the possibility of adopting or rejecting other subcultures. Not everyone may be involved in the process of critical re-appropriation of sub-cultures, however by sharing the appropriation made by social movements or insightful individuals, they reinforce these re-appropriations and contribute to its maintenance.

Some subcultures are more dominant than others. Some dominant subcultures may have gained their dominance through historical, economic reasons, etc. There is a tendency for a dominant subcultural group to impose its culture on others. In fact even within a subcultural group there is a tendency to impose a monolithic culture to everyone. Individuals who do not entirely share these meanings are considered as deviants.

To realize the familiarity or connectedness of meanings, "cultural apparatus " are created. Cultural apparatus is that which "composed of all organizations and milieus in which artistic, intellectual and scientific work goes on, and of the means in which such work is made available to circles, publics, and masses." This cultural apparatus connects the shared meanings of people through arts, symbols, rituals, etc. Education for instance plays a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of these apparatus.

Media (e.g., print and audio-visuals) plays a very large role in disseminating information in complex society. However, in such society there exists an asymmetry in media. Media for instance is in the hands of dominant groups in society who can manipulate information for their own strategic interest.. Most often the flow is one way, that is, consumers passively receive information conveyed by the media. Though in print media, one can take a critical stand by having the occasion to re-read obscure passages. But, in audio-visuals (radio, television, movies) one is simply left bombarded by information without the chance of interacting or managing the information. According to Hannerz it is important to manage the "symbol system" that is conveyed to us.

Cultural apparatus as they mediate through subcultures may bring them closer or apart. Commercial culture for instance, manipulates cultural apparatus to present a spectacular homogenized culture to consumers. This may bring about "mass culture." Some subcultures may reject the foreign cultural apparatus, whereas others may assimilate them

(and contextualized them to the local culture). There is a dialectical tension between this process of rejection and assimilation.

Cultural meanings have practical manifestations. Sharing a knowledge or sets of meanings that one has to other people will not diminish one's own treasury of meanings. In fact, it will even enhance the value of his/her meanings if other people accept it. But for some people the relationship of sharing meanings has consequences in terms of material goods and services they can get from other people.

There are some people (maybe because of their cultural or economic status) who have access to larger collection of meanings. While others do not have the same access--hence culturally impoverished. In this cultural appropriation, the market plays a role in managing the flow of culture.

Ideology too carries a crucial role in the distribution of culture. Hannerz understands ideology as: "*An expansive cultural flow fundamentally originating in one perspective (usually the collective perspective of the group) states basic understanding or ground rules for action, interaction, and exchange which, when accepted by others, results in asymmetrical distribution of power and/or material resources.*"

It is perpetrated by the state or the market to gain hegemony. It is accepted by those who are in favor of it as well as those who gain something from it. It shapes the people's minds to the extent that people are possessed by it. It may be communicated freely or with some elements of coercion for people to accept. In such case people accept it publicly, but reject it privately. Other people may present an alternative ideology. This alternative ideology may be rejected by the "faithful" (of a certain ideology) and accepted by those who do not accept the prevailing ideology. Nevertheless, the process of crisscrossing of ideologies prevails.

Meanings are forced or withdrawn upon people or kept as a secret. There are meanings that are deemed to be destructive to a culture hence they are censored, they are kept from being distributed. For instance, pornography is deemed to be destructive hence the state regulates its distribution. Information may also be censored by a particular group in order to gain strategic interests over other groups. However, according to Hannerz, it is very difficult to suppress information, they are disposed to surface sooner and later.

Furthermore, Some cultural flow may be more attractive than others, that those who do not belong to the group and pretend to possess such traits are frowned upon. This attractive cultural flow may lose its attractiveness and be replaced by something new, perhaps a more attractive one. The market is fast to capture this attractive cultural flow and commoditize it. People buy the material good, symbols, etc., deemed as attractive by the cultural flow.

In a society there is a "mode in the management of meaning which *people* engage in much of the time." Hannerz calls this as "common sense". People go on with their daily activities with an unreflective meaning at hand and this is where meaning is sustained.

However, once and a while they encounter a new situation. Where this "common sense" no longer applies. These new situations are brought about by: the vagueness of meanings; changes in external circumstances; and no "common corner" in which people may interact. Hence, people react to such situations. Some reactions may be creative, some may be destructive.

Some people, instead of responding to the new situation and re-appropriating a creative response shut their world from such a situation. There is a drive for a secured perspective. Contacts with other perspectives may destroy the existing valued perspective throwing people in the dark. These confrontations of perspectives may result in orthodoxy (a belief held to be correct and infallible and not open to change) or heterodoxy (a pluralistic notion of meanings, i.e., there is no monolithic infallible belief but everything is relative). This process continues in an evolving society and the intensity in which this process takes place vary from one society to another.

The process of cultural flux evolves spontaneously on the one hand. On the other hand it may be a result of deliberate "cultural engineering". The intellectuals or intellegentia play a crucial role in the expansion and connection of meanings. When the common sense held by people no longer suffice they turn to those who have a more critical, sensitive and insightful assessment of the environment, also known as the intellectuals or the intelligentia. The intellectuals have the capacity to go beyond the horizons of common sense presently shared as well as connect these horizons of meanings.

According to Hannerz there is a way of connecting the disconnected. In spite of the diversities there is some kind of unity that exists between the different fields of meanings. There is a pattern of uniformity within a certain culture that is sensible to an outsider. Thus opening an avenue for understanding. Attempts to homogenized knowledge or arriving at a consensus are observed to have been violent. In history we have seen the violent consequences of this process. Hannerz himself described how "meanings" and "information" can be monopolized by a dominant group (e.g. market and state) or how such dominant group imposed their meanings on others. Resistance against this imposing dominance has also been violent.

III Symbolic Rejection

It is in this point that I would like to propose a symbolic non-violent rejection of domination. Violence is spiral once you reject a violent domination through violent means, the spiral of violence will escalate and a greater violent condition occurs hence elusive to peace. Peace is a condition for an abundant life.

He who controls information holds power. As Hannerz has shown that this possession of power could be used to perpetuate a particular self or class interest detrimental to the

common good. A particular class who holds a cherished set of meanings, as mentioned above, resists new meanings especially if these new meanings threaten the status quo. Notwithstanding, these new meanings may be open to a more abundant way of life.

It was seen from the exemplification above how "meanings" or "information" could be a source of power. However, meanings are also indeterminate they can be open to several possible horizons of interpretation. Albeit interpretation cannot be also that arbitrary. There is something in meanings that eludes interpretation and determination. It reveals itself at the same time it is a revelation shrouded with a veil. Given this obduracy we seek refuge in symbols.

Hence we may resist such domination in a symbolic way through symbolic gestures. As symbols are potent tools so symbolic resistance is a very potent resistance. As has been said: "*The humanization of the world is as powerfully written by the symbolic rejection of power.*"

The symbolic rejection of power is itself a "power". A power that is beyond power. In itself evokes an appeal to a moral order. Like the "face" of Levinas that itself possesses a power that commands. Or the "communicative rationality" of Habermas which appeals to a higher moral order or reason to unmask any masks of interests. Or the "satyagraha" of Gandhi, which itself is a powerful appeal without the use of physical power.

To be more specific, I have in mind the symbolic rejection of power as exemplified by the Gospel. For instance in Matt: 5:39-41; in saying to turn one's cheek to the one that strikes you, to turn your coat to the one that takes your shirt and to walk for an extra mile, is not a passive attitude towards the oppressor but an active resistance.

According to Niall O'Brian turning the other cheek is daring the other not to strike back. Giving one's coat is to stand naked before the oppressor thus attacking his heart and conscience and making him aware of the evil that he/she has done. Walking for another mile is also a way of active non-resistance. At that time, Roman soldiers would ask local inhabitants of their conquered territories to carry their baggage. This has created resentments among the inhabitants and most often caused some rebellions. So the Roman Government promulgated a law that soldiers are only allowed to ask the inhabitants to carry their baggage for a mile. To walk for another mile would put the soldier in violation of the law.

Scriptures play a crucial role in the humanization of the world through the rich symbolic narratives. According to Verstraeten:

"An interpretative environment with meaningful text such as the Bible opens the way to a new poetic imagination that protects people from suffocating from the entropy of social existence."

Scriptures seen in this context could "demythologize the closed ideological framework of modern thinking." That is, it could deconstruct the dominating power through symbolic narrative and gestures.

IV Recapitulation

The exposition above, particularly the use of symbolic narrative and gestures presupposes a metaphysical element. As can be seen in Hannerz the emergence of contemporary complex culture lies deeply in the emergence of meanings and symbols which took concrete forms.

Furthermore, Verstraten asserted that symbols, metaphors, codes and narratives are very powerful in binding people. These are more potent than abstract idea of humanity, reason, or economic or technical efficiency. At the same time it could also break people.

The conflict among the spheres occurs in the in the symbolic world. Hence, the solution may be best found in the symbolic, e.g., religion, faith, prayer, narrativity particularly of the Bible.

However, I would hasten to add that this does not pose a flight from the concrete human life. In fact it has a very strong imperative for praxis. As Verstraeten, for instance, argued that narrativity in the Bible confronts us to act. It has an imperative which is very difficult to deny. Rather, what I am trying to portray here is more of a reaction to the praxis which overemphasize material praxis and dismiss the metaphysical. There is more than the material. There is something in being that resist reduction to pure matter or pure determination.

Living out these symbolic gestures entails a community where such belief is shared and acted. Acting such beliefs requires a certain degree of heroism or in the words of John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor*, it requires "martyrdom" To try something new and creative entails the risk of ridicule and failure. But, I think, this is how we should live our vocation as Christians, to be ready to jump beyond the clouds of unknowing. To die (could be literally) for others to live and live an abundant life.

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