

Living (with an Idea) in the time of Social Media and Fake News: Emancipatory Politics and Critical Media

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Abstract

In this paper, I will specifically sketch how living (with an Idea) should engage the social media. To live is to live with an Idea, reminds Badiou. And as the Idea “proposes the perspective of a new possibility,” living should open thought towards the construction of the new. This means critically engaging the social media as a means of an incorporated subject towards the achievement of an emancipatory politics.

The paper will specifically deal with Philippine circumstances. First, in elucidating the Badiouian emancipatory politics, I shall share the experience of the Indigenous People, the *Lumads* of Mindanao. Second, in exploring social media’s limits as well as potentials, I will specifically engage issues concerning fake news and oppose these to critical media. Lastly, in proposing a critical engagement of the media, I will return to the model proposed by the *Lumad’s* resistance via Fuchs’ theory of critical media.

Keywords: Idea, Emancipatory Politics, Event, Truth, Subject, *Lumads*, Fake News, Critical Media

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Introduction

Nothing is really more pressing an issue in Philosophy than the question of a life well lived. Grandiose thoughts and complex philosophical systems do not fail to touch on the problem of existence (and how to achieve its authenticity) and subjectivity. An interesting philosophical endeavor, for example, started from a seemingly irrelevant field which apparently possessed no relation to life, but only to end up on the more personal and highly relevant question: what is a life worthy of the name? I am specifically referring to Alain Badiou's progression of thought. Badiouian ontology, demonstrated in his *Being and Event*, commenced through a rigorous appropriation of set theory mathematics. But the seemingly detached ontological axioms of his system gradually touched on the process of subjectivization and the category of the subject. In his *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, Badiou now interrogates the Idea as one having a central position in the process of subjectivization, the making of a subject. And hinting on the third volume of an extensive work, Badiou explains in his *Philosophy and the Event* that "subjectivity is signaled by the possibility of an Idea, of a new Idea – to use the terminology of the third volume of *Being and Event*... which doesn't yet exist!"²

In this paper, I will sketch how living (with an Idea) should engage the social media. To live is to live with an Idea, reminds Badiou. And as the Idea "proposes the perspective of a new possibility," living in the time of the social media should also open thought towards the construction of the new. This means critically engaging the social media as a means of an incorporated subject towards the achievement of an emancipatory politics.

The paper will specifically deal with Philippine circumstances. First, in elucidating the Badiouian notion of truth, event and the subject, I shall share the experience of the

² Alain Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 74.

Indigenous People, the *Lumads* of Mindanao, as an important model of emancipatory politics. Second, in exploring social media's limits as well as potentials, I will specifically engage issues concerning fake news. Lastly, in proposing a critical engagement of the media, I will return to the model proposed by the *Lumad's* resistance via Fuchs' theory of critical media.

Truth Process and the Incorporation of a Subject

At a time when postmodern thought seemingly gains the upper hand in philosophical discourse, not to mention the demise it caused to the central tenets of philosophy like truth and the subject, Alain Badiou takes a further step not only to redeem philosophy from the crippling charges of the likes of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Rorty, but also to advance the claim of the need to think, or to live with an Idea. In *What is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger had expressed this concern: most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking.³ While there could be an element of truth to Heidegger's statement, it left uninterrogated however the contradictions underlying (un)thinking today. I am referring to what Badiou distinguishes, in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, as democratic materialism on the one hand, and materialist dialectic on the other.

An interesting video ad currently aired on Philippine televisions portrays a couple showing the readiness to live life. The video starts with the man messaging the woman with the imperative, "get ready to live... NOW." Along the video, certain appealing statements are displayed, of course for the viewers, for the potential recruits. These statements read thus: "every day a new adventure," "we cover you," and "for a lifetime of possibilities." The video paints a world of constant adventure, of unlimited lifetime possibilities, but of course with certain dangers; hence the need for a cover, an insurance. The video ends with the woman, symbolic of her decidedness to live life, jumping

³ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred Wieck & J. Glen Gray (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 144.

off from over a cliff towards a small boat where his man boarded and waited. And just before the video ended was again flashed on the screen the statement “get ready to live.”

Analyzing the ad’s message and content, we can suppose the underlying existential question it aims to answer: *how is it to live?* How is it to live in a world where every day is a new adventure, and a single lifetime is full of possibilities? Simply by being ready. Hence, the slogan *get ready to live*. But strikingly thought-provoking in this phrase is the condition of readiness one has to assume before he/she could even start living. It altogether denies the Sartrean zero-condition of existence, the nothingness as the point of departure for existential construction.⁴ Its philosophical message is clear: one has to be essentially prepared in order to live. Ironically, it is not so much of life as the unexpected occurrence of death that is actually prepared here. One is insured (only) to die.

This message reinforces the current cultural sensation, a re-modification of Horace’s *Carpe Diem*: you only live once. Heflick mentions several types of research of how being aware of death influences behavior.⁵ But we are not so much interested here in the psychology of YOLO as the philosophical or existential message it sends. In YOLO, life, as a totality of biological instances, is placed within the horrifying limits of death. While the mantra invites patrons to enjoy life to its fullest, there is, however, nothing more pronounced in it than bodily satisfaction and finitude. In both the ad and the mantra, the body gains a central importance, an importance which however is not near to being a subject as it is “reduced to bear life.”⁶

In the *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou echoes the most cherished principle of democracy: no principle whatever should be advanced other than that proclaiming there are no

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 22.

⁵ Nathan Heflick, *The Psychology of YOLO*, retrieved July 7, 2017 from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-big-questions/201309/the-psychology-yolo>.

⁶ Slavoj Žižek, “From Politics to Biopolitics... and Back,” in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103(2/3): 506.

principles.⁷ Democratic tolerance could accept every form of opinion, discourse or alternative so long as this does not challenge tolerance itself. In other words, nothing intolerant to tolerance is admissible in the democratic public space. What this means essentially is the unhampered proliferation of opinion while restricting that which is deemed subversive or totalizing. Democracy works on the condition that everyone is granted their freedom of opinions and that these opinions are treated equally. In a supposed democratic space, one can confidently claim that his/her self-caring activities (like diet, workout, and beauty enhancement) are as equally important as the unionizing efforts of oppressed laborers. Badiou in another work describes this as democracy's axiom of the equality of intelligences.⁸ This intelligence, however, is highly dependent on one's efficiency in using language as a medium for constructing meaningful statements. Language becomes the omnipotent medium for the construction of meaning, the resolution of conflicts, and the winning of elections. The democrat's dexterity in employing language for opinion-making is reminiscent of the sophist's adeptness in relativizing truth. The democrat is our modern sophist for like the latter, he/she maintains "that thought is caught in the... effects of discourse, in language games (Badiou, 2008, 6)."⁹ Here, what really counts is not truth but meaning, and the latter's construction is not so much on the syntactical consistency of its presentation as the rhetoric's persuasive tonality and popularity.

Democratic materialism follows this dictum: there are only bodies¹⁰ and languages.¹¹ Since there are only bodies, what counts

⁷ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 17.

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Verso, 2012), 27.

⁹ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2008), 6.

¹⁰ Badiou however, unlike my discussion, does not limit bodies to the biological and human ones. For example, he explains: [d]emocratic *materialism*. The individual as fashioned by the contemporary world recognizes the objective existence of bodies alone. Who today would speak of the separability of our immortal soul, other than to conform to a certain rhetoric? But certainly, my focus on the discussion of bodies, enjoyment, finitude and the market still works within his conception of bodies. In the same text, he further discusses thus: Who does not

under democratic materialism is the endless possibility of bodily satisfaction which in the modern world is possibly achieved via the market. And since there are only languages, what flourishes under democratic materialism is the fluidity of individually or socially constructed meaning guaranteed by the equality of opinions. Under market fundamentalism, bodies and languages fluidly work as they reinforce each other in the construction of flexible meanings, opinions, and identities at the service of the market's endless motion. Badiou (2003, 10-11) explains that

[c]apital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle of movement to homogenize its space of action; identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as the others to the uniform prerogatives of the market.¹²

Democratic materialism is the dominant ideology in the advanced stage of capitalism. But what escapes the grasp of democratic materialism is a certain exception which has been eternally presenting itself, albeit on rare occasions and in varied conditions. This exception is something "which cannot be identified with either individual singularities or cultural constructions" and hence "functions in a transworldly fashion..."¹³ This sort of exception, although constructed from a particular individual or cultural context (or world), is valid and true in virtually all context (or worlds). Emancipatory politics, for example, is as true as it was then with Spartacus' rebellion against slavery as it is today with the *Lumads'* resistance against development aggression. This exception Badiou regards as truths, and they are produced in different conditions: science, arts,

de facto subscribe, in the paradigm of desires and the obviousness of commerce, to the dogma of our finitude, of our carnal exposition to enjoyment, suffering and death? See Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, 1.

¹¹ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Verso), 1.

¹² Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 10-11.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, 20.

politics, and love.¹⁴ A truth is not an opinion in the sense that while an opinion is valid and acceptable only within the context that constructs it, a truth, however, accepts a certain indifference to its context or in fact resists being limited by contexts as a truth could equally be true in another world, culture, or individual.¹⁵ A character of resistance marks the being of truth.

Against the sophist and the democrat, the philosopher must declare that there are eternal truths.¹⁶ The axiom therefore of a philosopher cannot be that of a democrat nor of the sophist.¹⁷ Between opinion and truth, the philosopher must rigorously work on the latter. Badiou advises that “we must follow Plato in distinguishing, first, between correct and mistaken opinions, and second, between opinion and truth.”¹⁸ This is the dictum of materialist dialectic: there are bodies and languages, except that there are truths.¹⁹

That truth *is* has been rigorously demonstrated by Badiou in *Being and Event*. Here, he elaborates on the notions of an intervention and faithful connection or fidelity. That truth *appears* is the task of the second volume of the same book. Here, he presents the concept of a subjectivizable body.²⁰ Every construction of a truth is conditioned by an event, or that “a truth can only originate in an event.”²¹

While evental occurrences mark structural ruptures upon a particular situation, and while events promise the maximal or the restitution of existence of what was then prior to an event an inexistent, their happening, however, is in the order of the

¹⁴ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, 11.

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, 20.

¹⁶ See Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, 11, and Quentin Meillassoux, “History and Event in Alain Badiou,” trans. Thomas Nail, in *Parrhesia*, (2011), 12: 1.

¹⁷ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 19.

¹⁸ Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants*, 28.

¹⁹ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, 4.

²⁰ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

effervescent.²² Badiou captures this effervescent nature of an event in the following statement:

[I]et an event have taken place – it will, as such, have vanished, for the transcendental pathology constituted by the coming to appearance’s surface of its basis in being... is incapable of setting in or lasting.²³

Although effervescent, the event, however, leaves traces or consequences: the ruptured state that conditioned the restitution of the inexistents. That which was nothing comes to be everything through the supplementation of the event’s consequences. That which was impossible comes to be the very possibilities of the new.

The restituted inexistents, the Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao or the *Lumads* for example, who just decades ago were more defenseless against development aggression and military/paramilitary atrocities, and who then were left neglected by the state, now firmly stands united in their fight for a new world.²⁴ The process of restitution announces a primordial statement:

[s]ee what is coming to pass and not only what is. Work for the consequences of the new. Accept the discipline appropriate to these consequences’ becoming. Make of the whole multiple, the ineffaceable manner of the True.²⁵

²² Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), xii, and Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, trans. Gregory Elliot (New York: Verso, 2012), 56.

²³ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 83.

²⁴ Ronald Simbulan, “Indigenous Communities’ Resistance to Corporate Mining in the Philippines,” in *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, (2017), 28(1): 29-37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2016.1130373>.

²⁵ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 84.

The *Lumads* become a new body. Their resistance is incorporated within a truth process: the organization of the event's consequences as well as the construction of the new. The *Lumads* still echo (or are still faithful to) a long lost cry of a group whose lands in the past were taken away by colonial intruders. The cry reverberates in the enduring resistance of the *Lumads* against modern development aggression driven by neoliberal globalization which only serves the interests of the market. Theirs is a fight, owing to a long tradition of fidelity, to build a better world. That their fight is a mark of a truth process is proven by the universality of their struggle: supported by social movements that represent a broad cross-section of the population: by church groups, environmental groups, students, farmers' associations, lawyers, and scientists.²⁶ Their resistance resists being limited to their own ancestral domains as the primordial statement that raises them up also resurrects a nation fatally (literally and metaphorically) attacked by foreign aggressors and local oppressors all serving neoliberal capitalism. This is the mark of the true: resistant.

Theirs is a body not reduced to bare life as this body becomes the body of the truth, a subjectivizable body incorporated into a truth process. It must be noted that their existence also originated from the Sartrean zero-condition, a minimal existence or inexistent. But unlike the brand of preparedness for life proposed by the video ad mentioned earlier, the *Lumads'* kind of living does not take as a precondition any form of cover, security, or insurance. Theirs is a kind of living simply conditioned by an event (a mark of an accident) and a maximal identity with a primordial statement. Unlike a lover who wants guarantees for a safe love, or a warmonger who longs for a war without casualties, the *Lumads* are driven by nothing less than an eventual happening, and so constructs life (and the world) not conditioned by any primordial cover but according to the disciplines emanating from the truth. And surely, this enterprise

²⁶ Ronald Simbulan, "Indigenous Communities' Resistance to Corporate Mining in the Philippines, 31.

is not something secure and safe as the *Lumads* have to pay for their lives and blood for this cause.²⁷

Subjectivization or becoming a subject, therefore, is a process. The process highlights the crucial idea that a subject is not immediately given. Subjectivization opposes the substantialist conception of a subject reduced to inert categories like race, nation, or culture.²⁸ Identitarian politics is far from being able to enter into a subjective process. As politics like this tends to limit to the context of a particular identity, it is short of achieving the mark of universality and is rather imprisoned from within its own self-defined definitions. Badiou in his earlier work *Theory of the Subject* clarifies that “when politics amounts to making a subject, the most stringent condition demands that we conceive of it [not as a] substance...”²⁹ The process proper to the subject, therefore, is one which serves as a mark of an event’s disappearance, and a truth’s appearance, for “a truth is not a body subtracted from the transcendental prescriptions of appearing, but the consequence of a local modification of these prescriptions.”³⁰ In this, the subject must endure, in fidelity and in militancy.

The Eclipsing of the Idea: Social Media and Fake News

The kind of living allowed to us today is a living divested of thought, of Idea. When President Duterte threatened to bomb schools of the *Lumads*, he actually is preparing for them not so much of an illiterate as an unthinking life.³¹ It must be noted that decades of government neglect forced the *Lumads*, with the help of religious organizations and NGO’s, to build their own alternative learning systems, but only to be destroyed in one

²⁷ Vanessa Lucas & Azadeh Shahshahani, “The Philippine People are Under Attack from Washington – and their own Government,” in *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 3 Dec. 2015, retrieved from <http://fpif.org/philippine-people-attack-washington-government/>.

²⁸ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 96.

²⁹ Alain Badiou, *Theory of a Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009).

³⁰ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 73-74.

³¹ Amanda Lingao, “Duterte Threatens to Bomb Lumad Schools,” in *CNN Philippines*, 30 July 2017, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/07/25/Duterte-threatens-to-bomb-Lumad-schools.html>.

stroke by a president notoriously famous for aerially bombing peasant and Muslim communities (if indeed he will realize his prior threats).³² The same thing can be said of the state of junior and senior high school curriculum stripped of any Philippine history course, or of the erosion of nationalist and critical courses in the higher education curriculum: the preparation of unthinking graduates. These ironically happened after a major educational “reform” was implemented in the Philippines. It is no wonder however that the most obvious neoliberal reforms today in the Philippines happen to be in the education sector: in capitalism’s most severe period of crisis, unthinking individuals are desperately needed to restore capital. Desperate moments require the eclipsing of the Idea.

The materialist dialectics allows us to think of exceptions to bodies and languages. As Badiou reflects, starting from a particular situation, one realizes that there indeed is something other than bodies and languages: the Idea.³³ Going beyond Platonic idealism, Badiou explains that the Idea “is not a body in the sense of an immediate given..., nor is it a language or a name.” This simply means that other than the immediacy of means towards bodily satisfaction (a prostitute for sex, a gym for self-care, a vegetarian pizza for a diet, or a fake news for (mis)information), and other than that which the polls conveniently describe as the opinion of the Filipinos, there is that which “proposes the perspective of a new possibility,” the Idea. Here we can see how an Idea is connected to the notion of an event which is the rupturing of a situation for the organization of new possibilities: there cannot be an Idea, without an eventual rupture. While an event opens a new possibility, the Idea names this new possibility.³⁴

To think (the Idea) therefore is not to confuse thinking with preoccupying one’s thoughts with the contingencies of the

³² Yolanda Punsalan, “The Lumads Long Years of Languishing for Land and Life,” in *Rappler*, 30 Sept. 2015, <https://www.rappler.com/views/imho/107609-lumad-languish-land-life>.

³³ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II*, 9.

³⁴ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 14.

given or the immediate. The latter does not require rigor and discipline. All it takes for one to “think” in this case is a skill resembling that of a journalist and a penchant for gossips. This kind of thinking is not so uncommon among proponents and patrons of fake news. In the Philippines as elsewhere in the world where almost everyone is celebrating the postmodern era of post-truth, fake news is an epidemic.

Just recently, the Senate Committee on Public Information and Mass Media made an inquiry into the proliferation of fake news in the Philippines. While in the “19th century, cheap newsprint and improved presses allowed partisan newspapers to expand their reach dramatically,”³⁵ in the 20th century where technological and media seemingly develop autonomously, “hyperpartisan, highly opinionated, fake news and propaganda go viral.”³⁶ While almost everyone (those with access) are celebrating social media’s ubiquitousness, such ubiquity, however, creates cave-like conditions where “social media platforms may be especially conducive to fake news.”³⁷

Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2017, 5-11), in studying the current research related to fake news from 2003-2017, helpfully created a typology of fake news. Following extant researches, they argue that fake news can be news satire, news parody, news fabrication, photo manipulation, advertising and public relations, and propaganda.³⁸ While some news programs, like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* succeeded in employing satire “to reveal the artificiality of elected officials as well as the journalists who write about them (Balmas, 2014, 432),” many if

³⁵ See Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election,” in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, (2017), 31(2): 211-236.

³⁶ As discussed by Sheila S. Coronel, the cofounder of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and dean of academic affairs of Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism. See Doyo, Ma. Ceres, “Journalism in the Age of Fake News,” in *Inquirer.net*, 13 July 2017, <http://opinion.inquirer.net/105540/journalism-age-fake-news>.

³⁷ Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzko, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election, 211.

³⁸ Edson Tandoc et al, “Defining Fake News: A Typology of Scholarly Definitions,” in *Digital Journalism*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>.

not all of what we consider fake news here in the Philippines are mere fabrications and manipulations to influence public opinion.

No less than the assistant secretary of the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCCO) Mocha Uson erred in this regard. This came at a time when the administration of President Duterte desperately needed favorable public opinion in relation to its declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao. Posted on Uson's blog is a supposed picture of Filipino soldiers kneeling in prayer, with the caption, "let's pray for our army..." But those on the picture actually are neither Filipinos nor soldiers, but Honduran police. The original caption states "Honduran police call on God to stop violence in Honduras (see de Jesus, 2017)."

Another similar incident was fabricated by a supposed news site, News Portal. Again, this came at a time when the administration badly needed the public's consenting opinion on the possible nation-wide declaration of Martial Law. A week before this, the President has threatened to declare Martial Law nationwide but was openly challenged in various forms by opposition groups.³⁹ Among the activities was a planned nationwide protest on the 45th commemoration of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos' declaration of Martial Law on 21 September 2017. A day before the protest, News Portal published an article with a supposed photo of protesters from Visayas and Mindanao who allegedly were paid contingents for the massive protest in Luneta and whom the anonymous author described were exhausted and starving. The article's aim is obvious: to discredit the nationwide protests of that day as nothing more but a paid campaign of the weak Yellow opposition. The anonymous author claims that local organizers of the protest had a "communication problem with the shipping company because the protesters are supposed to arrive tomorrow afternoon until night so they will not wait long, but they arrived a day earlier, which

³⁹ Alexis Romero, "Duterte Threatens Martial Law if Reds take to Streets," in *The Philippine Star*, 11 Sept. 2017, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/09/11/1737913/duterte-threatens-martial-law-if-reds-take-streets>.

became a big problem.”⁴⁰ The fictitiousness of the article’s charge was however busted when the same photo was circulated online this time explaining the real story i.e. passengers waiting in line at a bus station going home for the Christmas vacation.⁴¹

Viewed from another angle, these fake news sites are but expressions of discontent (but not of resistance). In another site (included in the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines’ list of fake news sites)⁴² ironically named as Thinking Pinoy, it describes itself as “a 30-ish-year-old Filipino citizen journalist that has recently caught a bit of attention from netizens for his personal political blog...”⁴³ The description continues that “[t]hinkingPinoy [sic] ultimately aims to help regular Filipinos make better choices in the 2016 National Elections, all without asking anything for return.”⁴⁴ The political content and aim of these sites cannot be underrated. Many of these mushroomed during the electoral campaign of Rodrigo Duterte. Whether they are paid propagandists or not, the fact is that Duterte, at that time, became a popular symbol of hope for discontented Filipinos toiling under the corrupt, incompetent, and fascist regime of then President Aquino. But along with their charismatic leader’s assumption to state power was also their normalization by the state. Badiou has already clarified that singularities “can always be *normalized*: as is shown, moreover, by socio-political History; any eventual site can, in the end, undergo a state normalization.”⁴⁵ This is, of course, granting that theirs was an eventual happening,

⁴⁰ News Portal, “Pagod at Gutom and Inabot ng mga Protesters na Galing sa Vis-Min para sa Rally sa Luneta,” in *News Portal*, 20 Sept. 2017, <http://www.newsportal.ph/pagod-gutom-ang-inabot-ng-mga-protesters-na-galing-sa-vis-min-para-sa-rally-sa-luneta/>

⁴¹ Frame, “Going Home for Christmas,” *Inquirer.net*, 23 Dec. 2015, <http://frame.inquirer.net/1880/going-home-for-christmas/>.

⁴² Esmaguell, Paterno II, “CBCP Guide Lists Websites Peddling Fake News,” in *Rappler*, 24 June 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/173832-cbcp-list-websites-fake-news>.

⁴³ Thinking Pinoy, “Who is Thinking Pinoy,” *Thinking Pinoy*, n.d., <http://www.thinkingpinoy.net/p/who-thinking-pinoy-thinkingpinoy-tp-is.html>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁵ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, 176.

which is far from being real as continuity rather than rupture characterizes the Aquino-Duterte relation.

Divested of any eventual rupture, the surging tide of fake news is far from being able to think of the Idea. The Idea is something which they could not think as they are more abhorrent to it. Merely emanating from the particular contexts of a popularity-driven partisan movement, fake news sites, their proponents, and their patrons could not be more universal as they are unconsciously tied to the interests of a new set of oligarchs. Never can you read from their sites extensive and rigorous discussions on issues that really matter: land reform, national industrialization, universal access to education, health and other services, improvement of workers' economic and political conditions, environmental destruction and compensation, and many more. Most of what they publish are mere partisan propaganda if not glaring apologetics for President Duterte's war on drugs.⁴⁶

I specifically included the role of patrons (or audience) in the construction of the news as their role in this regard is crucial. As Tandoc, Lim and Ling argue, without an audience's passive reception, deception is impossible and "fake news remains a work of fiction. It is when audiences mistake it as real news that fake news is able to play with journalism's legitimacy."⁴⁷ The dialectical relation between the medium and the reader constructs the message. Here, the medium is not itself the message but an important if not a crucial component for the

⁴⁶ See for example News Portal, "Duterte: Aquino did not bother to Solve the Drug Problem," in *News Portal*, 15 Nov. 2016, <http://www.newsportal.ph/duterte-aquino-not-bother-solve-drug-problem/>; Thinking Pinoy, "Debunking Inquirer's 'Kill List': Ten Illogicalities," in *Thinking Pinoy*, 16 Aug. 2016, in <http://www.thinkingpinoy.net/2016/08/debunking-inquirers-kill-list-part-1-of.html>; Thinking Pinoy, "Duterte's War on Narcopolitics and Rappler's Bad Math," in *Thinking Pinoy*, 8 April 2017, <http://www.thinkingpinoy.net/2017/04/duterte-war-narcopolitics-Rappler-bad-math.html>; and Pinoy Trending, "Former High Ranking Official Slams US Congress Following Probe on Duterte's Drug War," in *Pinoy Trending News*, 21 July 2017, <http://pinoytrendingnews.net/former-high-ranking-official-slams-us-congress-following-probe-on-dutertes-drug-war/>.

⁴⁷ Hunt Allcott & Matthew Gentzkow, "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 12.

construction of the message. If the danger lies in the message's construction, surely the saving power does not grow along with it.

Thinking, Critical Media, and Emancipatory Politics

Heidegger, quoting the poet Hölderlin, and with much optimism on technology's autonomous revealing, reminds that "where the danger is, grows the saving power also."⁴⁸ But when the danger can only be constructed through an active corroboration of a comprehending body, then salvation could not be hoped to lie in the medium or technology itself. Subjects that are incorporated into a truth process are needed in order to put under their subjective command the operations of the social media in particular, and technology in general. How? Through critical media.

There is a need for social media to be critical. Fake news sites are far from achieving this. As driven purely by the tide of a popular culture, fake news could not go further than what (accepted) opinion can offer. Fake news is an exemplar of how symbols, including language, can be manipulated either to create or preserve opinions that serve the structures of domination. Critical media however

are characterized by critical form and content. There is oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives that reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc. Such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. So there is counter-information and counter-hegemony that includes the voices of the excluded, the

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Philosophy of Technology: The Technological Condition an Anthology*, ed. Robert Sharff & Val Dusek (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 314.

oppressed, the dominated, the enslaved, the estranged, and exploited.⁴⁹

In questioning domination, critical media does not hesitate in proclaiming partisanship. But unlike fake news proponents and patrons whose hyperpartisanship narrowly belong to oligarchic interests who share political power among themselves, critical media's partisanship is for the oppressed and therefore endures despite of whosoever are holding political power.⁵⁰ Critical media is not so much about maintaining popularity as it is the thinking of a new possibility.

Critical media theory provides us with a distinction between manipulated and critical reception. Manipulated reception, a common end among fake news proponents and a shared misfortune among patrons, interprets content "in ways that create false consciousness," while critical reception interprets content "in ways that allow the recipients to question domination."⁵¹ While there is in both manipulated as well as critical reception the dialectical relation between the reader and the medium in relation to the message, the former however *constructs* messages that reinforce domination. Recipients are left with either passively accepting such a condition of domination or actively defending it. This is the very point I raised earlier that fakes news are nothing more than apologetics of expert propagandists. The latter, however, *opens* a message of a new possibility. Hence, recipients, pushed⁵² by the Idea breaks away from the given condition in order to construct a world conditioned by the eternal message of the truth.

Feenberg has also affirmed the democratic potentials of the internet albeit in non-traditional forms. In advancing the community model of the internet, Feenberg was optimistic that "the most innovative democratic implications of the Internet are

⁴⁹ Christian Fuchs, "Alternative Media as Critical Media," in *European Journal of Social Theory*, (2010), 13(2):179 and Christian Fuchs, *Foundations of Critical Media and Information Studies*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 300.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 303.

⁵¹ Ibid., 300.

⁵² Badiou (2011a, 110), alluding to Deleuze, comments that "[w]e are always... *forced* to think. Thought pushes us, as it were, from behind."

only beginning to emerge, and they have less to do with traditional politics than with new forms of agency that will redefine and enlarge the sphere of politics.”⁵³ Repositioning sites of resistance within the Internet or the virtual world and the small cyber communities it creates, Feenberg misses three things. First, the epidemic of fake news suggests that the internet could be a site of manipulation and domination, and not resistance. Second, granting that internet resistance is possible, net critique, as other scholars describe it, could only work in “an exploding electronic public.”⁵⁴ But in a country where only 3 out of 10 or 37% Filipinos have Internet access, net critique could become an elitist enterprise.⁵⁵ This is not just an issue of tactics as this is more telling of a socio-economic condition that excludes millions from enjoying the fruits of technology’s developments.

Third, still granting that net resistance is possible, this still has to function within the wider actions of a broader collective body. Feenberg made mention of how the Internet crucially influenced the Arab Spring. True enough. However, such social movements’ commencement and endurance were merely aided by the internet but never culminated in the virtual world: their intensities were felt in the real world. Critical media suggests of larger critical movements “that make use of these media for information, communication, co-ordination, and co-operation process.”⁵⁶ Here, I would go back to the model of resistance the *Lumads* displayed. Espiritu examines the role of alternative media in the *Lumad* struggle for social and environmental justice and “approaches alternative media as social movement media used for the purpose of social mobilisation by civil society groups and

⁵³ Andrew Feenberg, “Introduction: Toward a Critical Theory of the Internet,” in *(Re)Inventing the Internet: Critical Case Studies*, ed. Andrew Feenberg & Norman Friesen (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012), 14.

⁵⁴ Christian Fuchs, “Towards Marxian Internet Studies,” *Triple C*, (2012), 10(2): 395.

⁵⁵ Rappler, “UN Report: Only 37% of Filipinos have Internet Access,” *Rappler*, 23 Sept. 2014, <https://www.rappler.com/business/industries/172-telecommunications-media/69836-un-report-filipinos-access-internet>.

⁵⁶ Christian Fuchs, “Towards Marxian Internet Studies,” 305.

networks.”⁵⁷ Alternative media became partners for the social movement of the *Lumads*. Espiritu, would go so far as to say that alternative media have made social movements’ offline activism visible.⁵⁸

That the *Lumads*’ resistance is an incorporation into a truth process, and that a truth process appears as a body within a given world surely suggest that the *Lumads*’ resistance has been *visible, with or without the alternative media*.⁵⁹ The eventual rupture and the consequent primordial statement certainly reinstated the *Lumads* into an intensified existence and visibility. What rather happened is an inverse of what Espiritu claims: the resistance of the *Lumads* made the online activism of alternative media (visible). Here, social media is under the command of an emancipatory politics guided by no less than a truth process. The authority of the command solely emanates from the Idea, and not from any individual since “the individual is not the author of this thought but merely that through which it passes.”⁶⁰

While today’s capitalist world demands a living equated with the body’s security and finitude, and while its culture of popularity suggests an unthinking body, resistance to this tide is, however, a possibility if not a necessity. To resist in this regard is to think, to live with an Idea. This kind of living is possible if not demanded in the time of social media. And as the Idea is nothing less than the naming of an eternally re-appearing truth procedure, thinking bodies, therefore, become subjects to the eternal. As Badiou maintains,

the subject experiences a kind of immortality
when it participates in one way or another in
something that is of the order of truth... With
incorporation, there appears a kind of

⁵⁷ Belinda Espiritu, “The Lumad Struggle for Social and Environmental Justice: Alternative Media in a Socio-Environmental Movement in the Philippines,” in *Journal of Alternative and Community Media*, (2017), 2: 45-59.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵⁹ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

immortality that is potential but, nonetheless, effective since truth procedures, in their products or results, are eternally available.”⁶¹

In thinking, death has been conquered, and one does not simply live once, but exists eternally.

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⁶¹ Alain Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event*, 60.

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