

Watching the Photograph

Adjani G. Arumpac

University of the Philippines Diliman

ABSTRACT

The essay advances critical information literacy (CIL) as a framework that complements fact-checking within media literacy initiatives, emphasizing the need to situate information production and circulation in their historical and political contexts. As a methodology, CIL is demonstrated through an analysis of the virality of Raffy Lerma’s 2016 photograph *Pieta*—a searing image of the Philippine drug war’s atrocities. Drawing on archival and documentary principles, the essay traces the circulation of *Pieta* across digital platforms, showing how its sustained visibility was propelled by activist interventions. By foregrounding the labor of artists and human rights advocates in contesting state-controlled narratives, the study positions CIL as an interdisciplinary approach that highlights the urgency of proactive, critical engagement with digital media to resist authoritarian disinformation and safeguard historical truth.

Keywords: critical information literacy, disinformation, documentary, archives, Philippine drug war, Rodrigo Duterte

Prologue

December 17, 2021—In a small room in a quaint rundown commercial area in Cubao, Quezon City, a small group of artists, media practitioners, and cultural workers opened a box of chocolate cake topped with red icing that spelled out “RESBAK @ 5, Stop the Killings” (Fig. 1). Five years prior, Respond and Break the Silence Over the Killings (RESBAK) was launched in Barangay San Roque, a slum community in Quezon City identified as one of the areas with the most number of extrajudicial killings (EJK) brought by the early months of President Rodrigo Duterte’s crackdown on the illegal drug trade in the country. At the time of the launch, more than 6,000 extrajudicial killings in less than six months had been

reported (Regencia) impelling concerned members of the art and media community to coalesce and initiate a campaign against the violence committed with impunity. The community launch in early 2017 saw the vibrant collaboration of around forty volunteer artists. Coordinated with progressive community organizers in Barangay San Roque, the art activities included community workshops, art installations, and free zine giveaways in the morning and a free concert in the evening. The hesitant residents of Barangay San Roque gradually joined the lively exchange. At the end of the launch, a resident community organizer guided the artists out of the bowels of Barangay San Roque and confided that just a few weeks earlier, another human rights group had difficulty engaging with the families of the victims of extrajudicial killings who remained inside their homes, silenced by fear of reprisal. “Ngayon lang sila lumabas” (“It’s only now that they went out”), he observed.



Fig. 1. RESBAK fifth anniversary
Source: Arumpac, Adjani (2021)

In 2021, less than ten RESBAK members were present during its fifth anniversary. Many were absent due to the transient nature of a long-running volunteer-based arts and culture group and the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The event, attended mostly by masked mothers of EJK victims and representatives of human rights and cultural groups alliances, proceeded with a somber and sober unified reaffirmation to continue the long-drawn-out struggle against violence. At the end of the party, when almost everyone had gone home, the last guest arrived. Photojournalist Raffy Lerma was supposed to deliver a solidarity message as representative of the Nightcrawlers but got caught in the holiday traffic. The small group continued the simple celebration, mulling about life during the pandemic, the continued mass popularity of Duterte nearing the end of his presidential term, the looming national presidential elections where the son of the deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. consistently topped the polls, and the role artist advocates could play within such conditions.

Disinformation and Victory of the New Oligarchs

Reflecting on the spirited launch of RESBAK in 2017 and its sobering fifth-year anniversary in 2021, I position this research on a photographer's image of the Philippine drug war's victims within my own experience as a member of RESBAK, in a time shaped by disinformation. In 2025, almost a decade after, Duterte was arrested by the Philippine National Police and Interpol, acting on an International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant for crimes against humanity linked to the Philippine drug war. Nevertheless, Duterte's mass popularity remains (Calimbahin). The disinformation that put him in power was likewise instrumentalized by the Marcoses for their political comeback with the presidential win of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos Jr. in 2022. Indeed, the parallel rise of fake news and demagogues is a global malady and the Philippines was "patient zero" (Deinla et al.). Filipina journalist Maria Ressa's pioneering reports about the insidious role of social media-driven disinformation in the outcome of the 2016 and 2019 Philippine elections (Ressa "Propaganda War"; Ressa "How Facebook Algorithms"; Hofileña) earned her the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize. In her Nobel lecture, Ressa highlighted the need for "information ecosystems that live and die by facts," referring to the rationalist framework of fact-checking or authentication that has become a "journalistic subfield associated with the press' traditional watchdog function" (Labiste). Developments in 2023 and 2024 saw the Philippine government under Marcos Jr. launching nationwide media

literacy programs to counter fake news, deploying the same journalistic method of fact authentication. However, in 2025, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced that social media company Meta Platforms will discontinue its US fact-checking program, causing an uproar worldwide amongst journalists. It is in this context that I decided to resume writing this essay in order to contribute to the media/information literacy campaigns that combat disinformation in an increasingly menacing networked digital era.

Correspondingly, this essay also serves as constructive criticism of the current information literacy paradigm. Is fact-checking enough to counter fake news? The rational framework of information literacy programs is a problematic legacy of standards-based information literacy that fails to highlight structures that underlie information production and distribution itself. The awareness of information production and dissemination as a situated sociocultural process is an emergent locus in library studies called *critical literacy* (McNicol XI) or *critical information literacy* (CIL) (Downey 1; Elmborg 194; Tewell 25). The abovementioned examples illustrate how the most influential knowledge and information institutions such as the Nobel Peace Prize and Facebook/Meta—are predominantly Western in origin and operate within orthodox and regulatory frameworks. These institutions not only shape the production and validation of knowledge but also delineate its boundaries, determining which forms of thought gain legitimacy. Jonathan Ong and Jason Cabañes’ groundbreaking research on networked disinformation in the Philippines demonstrates the subtlety of the dynamics of information production control through validation or the lack of it. The results of their research on the outcome of the 2016 Philippine elections shifted liability from low-level wage-earning disinformation machinery pawns such as trolls to a spectrum of middle-class complicity—from executives of advertising and PR industries that crafted the Duterte presidential campaign, to the progressive leaders of the Left who have failed to counter the Marcoses’ myth due to “their failure to listen” to a public disgruntled by the undelivered promises of post-EDSA liberal democracy (Ong “The World Should Be Concerned”). Ong and Cabanes’ analyses bypassed Philippine colonial history that propagated the current forces and relations that created conditions for fake news production, in particular the imperialist genesis of disinformation in the form of anti-communist propaganda seeded in the grassroots that were ultimately weaponized by the Marcoses and Dutertes in their bid for political power (Arumpac,

“Decentering Disinformation”). The Marcoses and Dutertes form part of the new middle-class oligarchs who are not merely political clients of advertising and public relations firms but knowledgeable technocrats actively shaping the fields of media and communication. To exclude them from the roster of complicit middle-class disinformation actors effectively absolves these dynasties—and the enduring colonial-imperialist narratives that have sustained them—of accountability. CIL reorients media literacy toward these unvendible sociopolitical narratives that expose the anti-communist and imperialist origins of global information systems. By foregrounding marginalized histories suppressed within neoliberal knowledge economies, CIL interrogates how information production and dissemination continue to structure and regulate contemporary societies.

Combatting disinformation is a stronghold of journalists and technocrats. I am interested in knowing how other sectors can also substantially contribute to the campaign. Building on critical information studies that is “cross-disciplinary and offers concrete structures as points for analysis that are relevant to all disciplines of study” (Downey 116), CIL is utilized in the essay as an overarching interdisciplinary methodology that harnesses and merges key ideas from documentary filmmaking, library and archival studies, and digital media studies. In lieu of fact-checking/authentication, it seeks to analyze the authenticity of a viral photograph. Borrowing from the principles of documentary and archives that problematize the concept of truth and provenance, *authenticity* is defined in this study as the narrativization of an image in relation to an archive that authenticates it. This concept of narrativization builds on a prior study by the author that theorized grassroots cultural networks as regenerative: a horizontal and perpetually emergent coalition that is formed not by a fixed identity but by the shared ethical commitment to social justice. By articulating these connections among disparate but aligned precarious movements, narrativization becomes an ontogenetic act, meaning it helps bring into being the very system it describes (Arumpac, “Regenerative Documentary”). By honing in on the ephemeral solidarities that enabled the virality of a photograph, the essay offers a more precise analytic tool for understanding the regenerative capabilities of media in the context of repressive governance and extrajudicial violence. In doing so, the study complements and augments traditional fact-checking approaches by asserting that, beyond the curated ecosystem of verified facts, the literacy campaign is a contested and political terrain—a site of active struggle.

The image studied in the research is a well-known photograph depicting the Philippine drug war—the *Pieta*. On July 23, 2016, photojournalist Raffy Lerma took the photo of a grief-stricken woman, Jennelyn Olayres, cradling the body of her dead lover. The man, Michael Siaron, was a pedicab driver killed due to his alleged involvement in illegal drugs. A placard near his lifeless body read “I am a drug pusher.” These placards were ubiquitous markers left by perpetrators in the crime scenes of the extrajudicial killings of the “war on drugs” in the Philippines. Siaron was one of more than the 6,000 killed during the first six months of the Duterte administration whose presidential campaign hinged on eliminating illegal drug trade in the Philippines (Regencia). The photo which was first published online on July 24, 2016 by Inquirer.net. went viral and has since been dubbed *Pieta*, the photograph that drew the attention of the global press to the Philippine “war on drugs” impunity (Hegina; Phippen). Consequently, Lerma stepped up to the role of representing the Nightcrawlers, an informal group of photojournalists, journalists, and filmmakers documenting the slaughter (“Stop the Killings”). The next two sections provide key literature about image, photography, and digital labor, followed by an analysis of the virality of the *Pieta*—and Lerma’s trajectory as the photographer of such a politicized photograph. The discussions entwine foundational concepts from respective disciplines to establish the authenticity of the viral photograph. In the process, the essay illustrates the inventive ways CIL can be deployed in analyzing the many forms of information in various platforms beyond the current media literacy fact-checking paradigm.

Vulnerability of the Ambivalent Image

This research focuses on a sole image due to deficient accessible data on the Philippine drug war. The premise of the study, thus, is the lack of reliable data itself. In 2019, various groups had already started working on databases on the Philippine drug war. Official sources included data from the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), and the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB). Independent research was made by media organizations, the academe, and civil society organizations. Between the two sets of data, most of the independent data sets were kept undercover for various reasons, such as to protect the victim-families. Consequently, the public gathered information from state official sources. However, the PNP identified only 6,600 drug-related killings from July 1, 2016 to May 31, 2019 (Tupas). The total number of casualties was funneled

into numerous categories based on the nature of death to keep the death toll low (Quintos; Kishi et al.). The wide discrepancy between and among sources, ranging from 6,600 to 27,000 as of April 2019, established the unreliability of the state's official count of victims (Coronel). The ubiquitous yet uncounted casualties of the drug war find a mirror in historian Vicente Rafael's account of dreams that reify authoritarian populism in his essay "Photography and the Biopolitics of Fear: Witnessing the Philippine Drug War" (2020). Both—the countless deaths and the bereaved families' immaterial dreams of vengeance for the slain—are specters that haunt Philippine society, embodying the Kantian sublime: overwhelming and incomprehensible, yet emerging from a distinctly human awareness of reason's limits. Subsumed under the study of aesthetics, the spectrum of emotions of the sublime ranging from pleasure to terror accordingly primes the human to agree on what is universal, pure, and moral. Kant's aesthetics was that of disinterestedness that preserves the "object's unified form in a state of indeterminacy, a state of suspension that is purposive without having a purpose" (Dalton 10). Walter Benjamin took on the task of redefining purpose in aesthetics in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," published in 1935. Enthralled by the newness of cinema ensconced in grand theaters, he saw how this novel art form—unlike traditional art displayed in museums—engaged not the individual but the masses. Cinema, for him, exemplified technological reproducibility, and the crowds it drew to theaters challenged the bourgeois notion of art as exclusive property defined by its "authenticity." Inside the theater, the popular appeal of the moving image brought people together, giving the masses a shared capacity to understand art—and, with it, the potential for autonomous social formation.

Mark Poster argues that Benjamin's proposition ultimately provided a visionary blueprint for the analysis of a technological mediation that goes beyond its original intent ("The Aesthetics of Distracting Media"). In essence, it created a preliminary schema of communication that preceded the pioneering mathematical theory of communication (MTC). The MTC was a model outlined by mathematician Claude Shannon to define communication as a closed one-way transmission model where signals are sent by a sender through a channel and decoded by a receiver (7). The model was strictly an engineering solution where information "must not be confused

with meaning” (Warren 8). Shannon explains that “... frequently the messages have meaning; that is they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities. These semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem” (379).

To draw a parallel between Poster’s reading of Benjamin’s thesis on technological mediation and Shannon’s formulation of communication as a process stripped of meaning, Benjamin conceived art as the message and its technological reproducibility as the channel through which it reached its audience—the masses as receivers. In this analogy, Benjamin’s notion of reproducibility anticipates a communicative model in which technology mediates not only the transmission of art but also the transformation of the social relations surrounding it. Art’s reproducibility—the very condition that enabled its mass communication—liberated it from the burden of fixed meaning, rendering it a sign open to interpretation and collective decoding by the masses. Yet, reproducibility also depends on machinery and, therefore, on capital; whoever owns the means of technological reproduction ultimately controls the channels of communication and the messages that circulate within them. The shifting and volatile economic and political conditions of the 1930s compelled Benjamin to publish two more revisions to “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in 1936 and 1939. In the same year that he first published his landmark essay, Leni Riefenstahl premiered *Triumph of the Will*, a commissioned documentary extolling Nazism and Hitler that was widely lauded. Astutely, Benjamin’s essay foretells how the liberative tendency of the moving image/cinema could be overturned and exploited by the image-maker. In the midst of revising “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin was also drafting “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” which was published in 1938. Otherwise known as *The Arcades Project*, the research was a comprehensive catalogue of an array of Paris historical objects tracing the emergence of urban commodity capitalism. In the thick of research in the archives of property relations, Benjamin as an exiled German-Jewish intellectual was likewise observing how the fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and communist Soviet Russia all deployed the arts in their bid for world power. He predicted, just a few years before the onset of the Second World War in 1939, that the fascist governments’ aestheticization of politics could only culminate into the ultimate capitalist enterprise—war. Set against an era of constant upheavals, Benjamin’s conclusion on the instrumentalization of

reproducible art by fascism was a brief counsel: “Communism replies by politicizing art” (“Technological Reproducibility” 42). Benjamin saw the need to reclaim art by restoring its purpose through class struggle.

Poster’s sobering response to Benjamin’s laconic thesis statement is that the great expectations for cinema to foster socialist revolution never materialized (“The Aesthetics of Distracting Media”). Nonetheless, Benjamin’s hope for the politicization of art merits a rereading through *Jetztzeit*, a notion of time he expounded on in the essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History” published in 1969. Hannah Arendt annotated Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* as an idea that pertains to *nunc stans*, a Christian philosophy of the atemporal and eternal present time (261). But in the context of his materialist analysis of history, Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit* necessitated a redefinition outside of its theological underpinnings (Khatib 2). Following his “figure of thought” or the method of inscribing philosophical thoughts in tangible imagery, Benjamin outlined the task of the historian as not one of recounting history as commoditized progress and productivity but one of critical curation of events to determine a monad (Eiland and Jennings 3). The monad refers to a holistic perspective of history that is dialectical and seething with “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (“Mechanical Reproduction” 263). As a rejoinder to Rafael, this essay latches on to Benjamin’s ideation of a monad as the mandate of the historian to comprehend that what they conceive as a whole is one that materializes. It foregrounds recognizing and resisting the sublime hegemon that reproduces—in various nuances, forms, and imaginations prone to either valorizing or laying prostrate before capitalist and authoritarian phantoms—the prevailing aesthetics of fascism.

At the frontline of the campaign against the Philippine drug war, the Nightcrawlers became the key source for local and international media outfits. As the kill list increased, so did the visibility of the mediators who likewise gained recognition for their documentations. The robust circulation of the drug war images in liberal media is discussed by Rafael in his essay where he asks: “What might account for the limits of photographic intervention in the drug war, on the one hand, and the continued popularity of Duterte, on the other?” (919). The mode of inquiry rests on an ideal inverse proportionality between the visibility of the photographs/

photographers and the popularity of Duterte and his drug war. The false equivalence indirectly placed on images—produced by photojournalists and media workers who are obliged by their profession to document and circulate representations of current events—was the impossible burden of countering authoritarian populism. Putting the photographs side by side with the fantasies of revenge by the family of the victim, Rafael concludes that dreams provoke more than the images of dead bodies that have only elicited indifference (927).

Rafael cites Ariella Azoulay's concept of *civil contract of photography* to conjure an ambivalent imagined community of spectators desensitized by images of impunity, thereby reifying the failure of the photographic critique of power (908). However, Azoulay's thesis on indifference is itself the strength of a photograph. The idea of the *civil contract of photography* purged a photograph of a singular interpretation. It is this openness that re-ontologized photography as a site of political agency that can accommodate social negotiations among all the stakeholders of the image (13). Azoulay explicitly locates this covenant outside of ruling powers. Rafael's critique, on the other hand, reads the drug war photographs within the framework of consumerism and authoritarianism. The pedantic referencing and overturning of the emancipative underpinnings of Azoulay's discourse already received backlash from the photojournalists during an earlier presentation in the "Photographing Duterte's Drug War" panel as part of the *Watching the Philippines, Reporting Duterte* conference at Columbia University in 2017 (Rafael, "I Heard").

Indeed, the subject of interpretation usurping the work of art is an age-old problem. In her 1964 essay "Against Interpretation," Susan Sontag laments how interpretation itself mirrored commodity culture, whose excess dulled the senses to art (12). In Hito Steyerl's thesis on the *poor image*—or the low-resolution piracy-driven images that proliferate in the digital world—she notes how interpretation through speculative valuations displaced art, ushering in the "conceptual turn of capitalism" that, in turn, produced information capitalism where the poor image navigates (42). Sontag and Steyerl's arguments both point to how interpretation has been instrumentalized in the inevitable reduction of art/image to its exchange value (and the lack of it). To rehabilitate the image, Azoulay denies the photograph of the sole authorial.

Her conception of the emancipative ambivalence of the photograph, freed from ownership or the singular source of meaning, indicates how “repeated observation” of one photograph fostered synergistic insights beyond fetish for the visible (391). Likewise, Steyerl finds agency in the “velocity” of the poor image, whose resolution degradation due to constant transfers elided the tyranny of ownership and whose popularity proved to be its potency for forging circuits outside of dominant forces (41). Sontag outlines how resistance to the powers that diminish art to the manageable can be had “by making works of art whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be . . . just what it is” (11).

The failure of interpretation is a key factor in determining the framework of this study as critical posthumanist, a theoretical lens defined by Rosi Braidotti as a critique of the humanities characterized by masculine Western reason and human exceptionalism (1). Employing CIL as methodology and critical posthumanism as theoretical framework, this study in no uncertain way expresses its support for the call for justice for the victims of the Philippine drug war. It favors praxis over the disassociated pedantry of humanities scholarship and refocuses attention to the matter at hand. By re-evaluating the *Pieta*, the analysis seeks to establish the value of a photograph that has supported the campaign against the Philippine drug war. The method for assessing the photograph comes from the polemics mentioned on interpretation that contain analogous prescriptions. Sontag’s *momentum*, Azoulay’s *repeated observation*, and Steyerl’s *velocity* are abstractions of the agency of the photographic image pertaining to movement. By *watching the photograph*, attention is given to its movement and reproducibility through time and (cyber)space. Using the critical posthumanist lens, this study focuses not on the interpretation of the photograph per se laden by subjectivities of the interpreter, but on the technological migration of the photograph. The result of the research is a database of virality metadata that comprises its narrative as a “moving image.”

Rendering Digital Labor Visible/Reconstituting Authenticity

What Henry Jenkins called the online *participatory culture* or counter-consumer culture at the onset of the internet has devolved in the 21st century into an obligatory addendum on the merits of the internet’s hypothetical potential for inclusive social change (3). Aspirations for the egalitarian promise of collective agency afforded by

the platform have been tempered by its increasing commoditization and exploitation by authoritarian populist demagoguery. Without the urgency of materially grounded approaches to social change, recent internet studies have often focused on the formal dynamics of self-replicating mimetic content like memes and viral posts. The emancipation of the image from proprietary binds propelled its visibility but only for it to converge into what Ryan Milner and Whitney Phillips call the “ambivalent Internet,” whose ambivalence is due to the contronymy of the meanings and behaviors that proliferate online (19). Milner and Phillips’s concept of ambivalence covers the whole networked online platform, as opposed to Azoulay’s concept of indifference that is attached to a single photograph (389). The latter recognizes the potential plenitude of meanings that can arise from a single stable image while the former reduces the productive profusion into a singular entity of excess. To be sure, Milner and Phillips’s ambivalence is a function of a limited imagining of the internet as a homogenous multitude. In a way, this idea of ambivalence relates to the technological utopia of automation. The heterogeneity of voices online appropriated and neatly packaged as the alienated and alienating ambivalent internet correlates with the seeming autonomous efficiency of the machine—both of which are illusions propped up by digital laborers.

Christian Fuchs defines *digital labor* as labor that is exploited and unrecognized under the anesthetic participatory promises of the internet (237). For example, during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Facebook received numerous complaints for taking down posts that allegedly went against their community standards. Later on, it was revealed that the reason for the faulty moderation was because of algorithms and artificial intelligence that could not do the work as efficiently as the human content moderators outsourced worldwide who could not report to work due to the pandemic (Dwoskin and Nitasha Tiku). The growing economy of outsourced content moderators for the biggest social media platforms was investigated in the documentary *The Cleaners* (Block and Riesewieck). The documentary elucidates how the platforms’ manuals could not anticipate the various contextual situations moderators from the Philippines encounter daily, necessitating the employed individuals to use their own socio-political moral compasses for judgment. This has produced a spectrum of consequences—from the trauma of the moderators due to watching global violence daily, to religious censorship of progressive liberal content due to the conservative culture the

moderators were brought up in, fostered by centuries of Catholic righteousness. Limor Shifman lists the features that intensify the propagation of internet memes and viral posts which include humor, emotional incitement, packaging, prestige, positioning, and participation (66). What was missing on the list was wage-earning. The anonymous multitude and automation are some of the myths that invisible digital laborers from developing nations buoy for a price. This development of the ICT sector as a largely low-skill enterprise in the Philippines likewise fuels the informal economy of troll farms. As such, the teeming ecosystem of digital labor in the Philippines informs the position of this research on the value of acknowledging the materiality of the invisible online digital laborer.

Fuchs proposes to make digital labor visible by transforming it from exploitative, unpaid activity into “playful digital work”—a fusion of play and labor that generates collective social benefit. He defines this as “the specific communist form of work” (286). Similarly, following the movement of *Pieta* was a “playful digital work” in that it reified the digital labor that went into sustaining the visibility of a viral digital photograph. It followed the process of building an archive by tracking down the iterations of the digital photograph online and gathering its metadata. Watching the viral digital photograph then became both an archival and documentary practice. These two institutional practices that problematize indexicality inform the conceptual reconstitution of authenticity in this study.

Film critic and theorist Bill Nichols states that in cinematic documentary practice, the authentic record is the material documentation of the event that contains the moving image. With the raw material itself comprising the authentic, issues of authenticity in the documentary discipline mainly focus on the veracity of the recorded representation with regard to the realism it claims to portray. One of the earliest documentaries, Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, remains a point of contention on authenticity in a documentary because its filmmaker hired actors to play the role of family members of Nanook and staged scenes, among others. Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d’un été*) scrutinize the authenticity of the recorded testimonies of their subjects by letting the subjects watch themselves and each other. After listening to the subjects’ varied assessments of their own and each other’s performance for the camera, the directors conclude that the truth they endeavored to represent eventually became the subject of inquiry in the end. Authenticity has long been a contested issue in documentary

filmmaking—so much so that Chris Marker experimented with digitally processed images in *Sans Soleil* (*Sunless*). In this essay film, he ruminates on the digitally-altered moving image documentations of the failed Sanrizuke Struggle against the Narita Airport construction in Japan in the sixties, expressing that “...at least they proclaim themselves to be what they are: images, not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality” (00:40:07). At best, what documentary filmmaking guarantees is the evidentiary nature of its discipline, a limitation it shares with the archival discipline.

Archival theorist Luciana Duranti asserts that authenticity “only warrants that the record does not result from any manipulation, substitution, or falsification occurring after the completion of its procedure of creation, and that it is therefore what it purports to be” (3). The authentic record/archive, as evidence of an activity, is valued not for its veracity but for its reliability. The reliability of a record is secured with a form, or a record with date and signature; and a procedure of creation, or “the body of rules according to which acts of portions of them are recorded” (6). Crucially, authenticity is unverifiable and only an assumption. Deducing from this standard archival definition of authenticity set by the ISO 15489, a document that established the standards of records management, Julia Kastenhofer points out the loopholes in the core concepts of archival studies. In her study on forgeries in archives, Kastenhofer questions the concept of reliability based on objectivity “that is impossible for a human being to attain” (168). Hence, the authenticity of a record that is premised on its reliability “can never be more than an informed opinion” (176). The abundance of forgeries in the history of archives invites a rethinking of such phenomenon not as anomalies but instead as “a source of documentary practice in itself,” their authenticity marked “to the extent to which the document is assumed to be authentic” (176). Kastenhofer proposes that the authenticity of the anomalous record can be recuperated by the archive itself that lends authenticity by acknowledging its disruptive presence.

Kastenhofer’s reorientation of authenticity as a reiterative process is a helpful way of finetuning the method of “watching the photograph” through CIL. As a general rule, the domains of library and archival knowledge emphasize the authenticity of the original digital object through its provenance. The concept of the provenance of an object is tied to its intrinsic value that has long been used by archivists to describe

historical materials that should be retained in their original form rather than as copies. The purpose of such verification is to ensure the quality of the institutional memory. However, this rule simply does not hold for the networked digital era where copies abound (Moreno et al.). In this light, Kastenhofer's reorientation of authenticity—that does not come from the original object but instead is determined by the archive that authenticates the copy—enables a more expansive analysis that factors in the different contexts and conditions with which the digital photograph was produced, published, and reproduced. Meditating on its authenticity becomes the viral photograph's own agency in telling its story. Crucially, this narrativization provides a lead to the institution that bestows its authenticity on the ambivalent viral digital photograph.

Mapping the Virality of Compassion

In a digital photograph, the technical metadata establishes its administrative (creation date, location, format), descriptive (visual content information), and copyright information (Fig. 2). *Pieta*, with filename RRL_2432.JPG, was from an array of digital photographs taken by Lerma in the Siaron crime scene on July 23, 2016.

```
ExifTool Version Number : 11.20
File Name : RRL_2432.JPG
Directory : .
File Size : 9.7 MB
File Modification Date/Time : 2019:04:28 10:57:06+01:00
File Access Date/Time : 2019:05:20 22:39:16+01:00
File Inode Change Date/Time : 2019:05:20 22:39:14+01:00
File Permissions : rwxr-xr-x
File Type : JPEG
File Type Extension : jpg
MIME Type : image/jpeg
Exif Byte Order : Little-endian (Intel, II)
Make : Canon
Camera Model Name : Canon EOS-1D X
Orientation : Horizontal (normal)
X Resolution : 72
Y Resolution : 72
```

Resolution Unit : inches
Modify Date : 2016:07:23 01:29:36
Y Cb Cr Positioning : Co-sited
Exposure Time : 1/320
F Number : 3.2
Exposure Program : Shutter speed priority AE
ISO : 25600
Sensitivity Type : Recommended Exposure Index
Recommended Exposure Index : 25600
Exif Version : 0230
Date/Time Original : 2016:07:23 01:29:36
Create Date : 2016:07:23 01:29:36

Fig. 2. Portion of the technical metadata of *Pieta* retrieved through Exiftool

At the time of taking the photo, Lerma was a staff photographer of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* hence, technically, *Pieta* is owned by *Inquirer*. The Siaron crime scene is one of the many similar crime scenes in 2016 with dead bodies and placards denouncing the dead as illegal drug users. The verisimilitude of these photographs was no coincidence. The scenes were staged in order to intensify the message that these deaths wanted to convey. Duterte's presidential campaign promised the eradication of the illegal drug trade and he was fulfilling his pledge by sanctioning the police to conduct the drug war campaign. The ownership and creative direction of the *Pieta* was not that of the photographer. Instead, Lerma and his colleagues who reported for duty were instrumentalized in the transmission of the state message, one that served to warn the unproductive sectors of society.

The virality of *Pieta* refers to two parts—the initial and the organic. In their research on viral posts, Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley identify virality as the sum of social aspects of sharing the information, its speed, and reach in terms of number of spectators and distance that the information travelled (26). The virality of *Pieta* was established during its initial widespread circulation within the extensive media network of *Inquirer*, a newspaper with a reach of fifty-four million people. A highly provocative newsworthy image, *Pieta* viscerally engaged the public to the horrors of the ongoing violence of the drug war. However, what this study is

interested in is the *organic* virality of the *Pieta*, pertaining to the relational fabric that sustained its visibility after it firmly established its movement online. After the preliminary momentum, a viral settles to a steady expansion before the onset of its *decay* or decline in views (37). In the intermediate state before its decay, the viral had already shed its shock effect opening it to a multitude of reflective and reactive interpretations.

In a viral digital photograph, technical metadata takes the form of information about the webpages that uploaded and/or shared the image—including the URL, IP address, last date modified, among others. Using the Google Image search engine primarily, augmented by Google, Facebook, and Twitter search engines, the researcher manually identified websites and social media platforms that shared the *Pieta* photo. These website URLs were then run through an algorithm that scraped the photo URL of the uploaded *Pieta* and yielded the metadata of the uploaded *Pieta*, particularly the “Date Modified” information, which indicates when the photo was uploaded online (Fig. 3). The photo URLs were then rearranged chronologically. The research gathered a sampling of 132 postings—or the extent in archival terms—of *Pieta* in various websites from its first upload in July 23, 2016 to May 29, 2019. This sampling is not in any way comprehensive but indicative. A chronological arrangement of the trajectory of the viral image in webspace through time revealed the forces that maintained the visibility of *Pieta* for more or less three years.

```
--2019-05-29 09:56:42-- https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Cqk0pvlUMAABMQj.jpg
Resolving pbs.twimg.com (pbs.twimg.com) . . . 93.184.220.70,
2606:2800:134:1a0d:1429:742:782:b6
Connecting to pbs.twimg.com (pbs.twimg.com)[93.184.220.70]:443 . . .
connected.
HTTP request sent, awaiting response . . .
HTTP/1.1 200 OK
Accept-Ranges: bytes
access-control-allow-origin: *
access-control-expose-headers: Content-Length
cache-control: max-age=604800, must-revalidate
Content-Type: image/jpeg
Date: Wed, 29 May 2019 08:50:52 GMT
Last-Modified: Tue, 23 Aug 2016 21:45:46 GMT
```

```
Server: ECS (lcy/1D1E)
strict-transport-security: max-age=631138519
surrogate-key: media media/bucket/3 media/768203103195639808
X-Cache: HIT
x-connection-hash: 959f781cef86abd3156a4d741b34bc3b
x-content-type-options: nosniff
x-response-time: 272
Content-Length: 154340
Length: 154340 (151K) [image/jpeg]
150K 100% 1378G=0.02s
2019-05-29 09:56:42 (7.11 MB/s) -
Modification date of file = (2016, 8, 23, 21, 45, 46, 0, 1, 0)
```

Fig. 3. Metadata of a *Pieta* iteration in Twitter scraped through Beautiful Soup script

In 2016, the initial postings of the *Pieta* appeared in official local and international news websites and their social media platforms. This was followed by reiterations in religious and personal blogs, websites, and on Facebook. During the first year of its visibility, the *Pieta* was mostly reposted along with messages of moral outrage over the killings relating to the religious undertones of the *Pieta*. Some pro-administration supporters and citizens living in and outside the country also

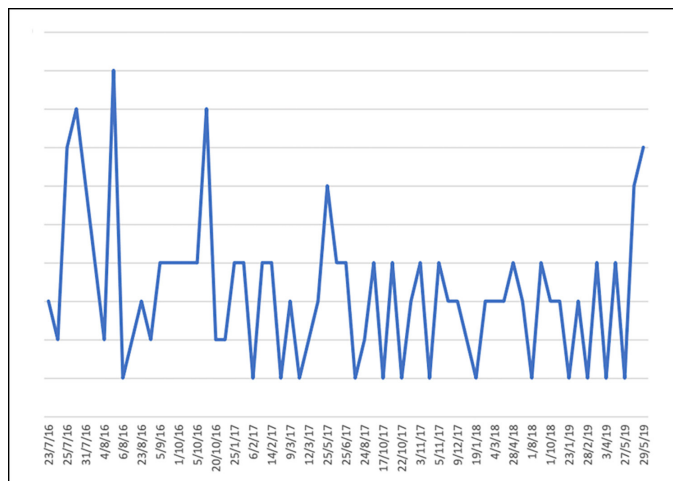


Fig. 4. Graph of *Pieta* virality from 2016 to 2019

posted it to commend Duterte's swift action on perceived criminal activities. The plurality of meanings attached to the *Pieta* mirrored the diversity of responses within the liberal news media circuit.

In the virality graph of the *Pieta* (Fig. 4), its visibility went down from its initial release in 2016 but rose dramatically in 2017. Around this time, the images of carefully curated bloody tableaux of the drug war slowly came to an end, in part due to the pushback by sectors of civil society. Most of the postings of *Pieta* in 2017 were made on Twitter by individuals. In the researcher's interview with Lerma in 2019, he recounted:

We were covering the stories in the hopes of stopping this violent drug war. But it didn't. Actually, it became more like a fuel for the president. He did not stop. Then it came to a point that called for [state] accountability.

The second rise of *Pieta's* visibility, after its initial circulation, saw an organic collective digital labor authenticating the viral photograph by identifying Lerma as the photographer. In 2017, Lerma resigned from his post as a newspaper photojournalist to become a freelance photojournalist. He then actively participated in the campaign against the Philippine drug war and invitations to his talks and interviews were posted by participants and organizers on Twitter along with the *Pieta*, to identify his "authority." As stated, Lerma does not own *Pieta*; he, however, imbued the viral photograph with the reliability of his testimony as both witness and advocate. The effectivity of the campaign efforts against the drug war was such that it was promptly countered by the digital labor of state-sponsored disinformation machinery in the same year. On Facebook, postings of the *Pieta* were made to channel accountability to drug syndicates and not the police.

The visibility of the *Pieta* slightly slumped in 2018 and climbed again in 2019. Its postings in 2018 showed more international news outfits reporting about the Philippine "war on drugs" story, a development brought on by the International Criminal Court (ICC) launching a preliminary examination into the human rights violations of Duterte's drug crackdown (International Criminal Court). Noticeably, the individual Twitter posts went down as the Nightcrawlers, along with human rights advocacy groups, focused on gathering material evidence to meet the stringent

requirements of the ICC—including authenticated photographs, crime scene artifacts, and video interviews. In 2019, the Philippines withdrew from the ICC relaunching the visibility of the *Pieta* in social media and local and international news websites as Lerma and fellow advocates as well as local advocacy groups engaged in talks to support the ICC investigation of the Duterte administration’s impunity (Supreme Court of the Philippines).

Fundamentally, it was the collective proactivity that sustained the movement of the *Pieta*. Its organic virality rhythm was fettered to the actions of the advocates and the sympathetic public. The *Pieta* initially circulated as content produced for and by the mainstream media but, upon the author’s decision to join the ranks calling for state accountability, the persistence of its visibility was in due course powered by aligning with a larger campaign that saw the drug war as a class war—a war against the poor (Wells; Pangilinan et al.). The specific space inhabited by the targeted group has been a historically constructed vulnerability. The Filipino urban poor are mostly rural migrants seeking better pastures or urban dwellers dislocated by resettlement programs and urbanization (Constantino-David and Regala-Angcangco 20). They converged in the slums, where most of the killings took place. The Duterte administration exploited the heterogeneity of these communities to fuel its drug war. Its campaign against illegal drugs deepened mistrust among Filipinos, especially in poor areas where the drug trade had become a means of survival. In these communities, illegal drugs helped people endure long hours and multiple jobs just to make ends meet.

This study concludes that the authenticity of *Pieta* as a viral digital photograph is rooted in the Philippines’ protracted history of class struggle, in which visual documentation has often served as both witness and weapon. Nonetheless, the photograph’s power lies not solely in its content—the grief-stricken woman cradling a slain loved one—but in how its people-powered trajectory resonated with historical narratives of state violence and social injustice. To further elucidate on the concept of authenticity in this context, the study draws on Kastenhofer’s elaboration of archival logic, initially defined by archival theorists Heather MacNeil, Bonnie Mak, and Luciana Duranti. Accordingly, archival authenticity is not an intrinsic quality of the record itself, but a relational and institutional construct. Kastenhofer clarifies that records are deemed authentic not because of their standalone qualities,

but because of the trustworthiness of the archival institution in which they are kept. “The archive is considered trustworthy by users, and this trust extends to the authenticity of its entire holdings . . . [it] lends them authenticity” (“The Logic of Archival Authenticity” 167).

The *Pieta* draws its trustworthiness from a revolutionary archive—the Filipino people’s history of lived struggles, aspirations, and collective agency. This is where Benjamin’s insight becomes crucial. In his short but influential essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin proposes a dialectical and holistic perspective on history: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (255). This politicized view of authenticity cannot be measured using neoliberal assessment tools, which prioritize quantifiable outcomes, metrics, and short-term outcomes. Instead, this study insists on CIL as a crucial paradigmatic shift. CIL does not just interrogate what is true or false; it asks who has the power to define truth, how that power is operationalized, and how it can be challenged.

In this light, fact-checking, though necessary, is only a preliminary step in the fight against disinformation. While it addresses the surface symptoms of disinformation, it often overlooks the epistemological violence at play—the discrediting of a people’s struggle and the rewriting of history to serve the interest of those who wield power through capital and technology, forces that are deeply entwined. As disinformation evolves to become more insidious and algorithmically amplified, it becomes clear that the most dangerous aspect of fake news is not its content, but in its systematic erasure of historical memory and accountability. By centering *Pieta* within this exigency, the study advances a deeper and necessary understanding of the full potential of literacy as a critical tool forged in collective memory and political resistance.

Vitality Beyond the Virtual

The capacity to see movements through CIL in the technological landscape is a necessary skill. Focus is a core competency in the information era. It is also a critical technical skill, as it requires an understanding of *what needs to be watched*, as well as a creative skill, as it entails strategizing how to relay the story. The CIL skill is the *practice of care*. Technology philosopher Yuk Hui posits an alternative

possibility of a technological culture beyond the current extractive informational capitalism by rethinking archival as a practice of care. An awareness that control can be had in the virtual world starts with a deliberate understanding that we can be archivists of our data and not just users whose digital labor is harnessed. In “Archivist Manifesto,” Hui proposes for individuals, as archivists, to regain the knowledge and skills of organizing data and digital objects, and in turn, recoup the control appropriated by alienating internet service providers. Hui’s idea of care, that emphasizes the “links between objects and archives,” relates to a notion of care that Azoulay sees as crucial in understanding the dynamics of the covenant among the image and its spectators (7).

Watching the photograph is a transformative act of “caring for its sense” (Azoulay 25). Watching the viral digital photograph, on the other hand, creates a database from this practice of care. And this practice of care transcends platforms. It is important to note that the virality information gathered for this research did not end with its reiterations online. Appropriation of the viral usually turns it into a meme (Shifman 58). The viral status of the *Pieta* did not translate it into one. As a politicized viral image, the gravity it carried moved directly from the virtual straight to the physical space after its decay. Its appropriation happened offline and in place of memes was the politicized image stabilized as protest art. For example, in 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Philippine political art collective, Panday Sining Makati, appropriated the *Pieta* by painting it as graffiti on a street wall, calling attention to the extrajudicial killings that only intensified under Duterte’s militarized response to a health crisis. In 2023, sculptor Julie Lluch Dalena “tattooed” painted images of the *Pieta* on her sculptures of body parts to remind the spectators of the unceasing impunity despite and because of unrelenting crises brought by the pandemic and a newly instated regime under the son of the deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

The sustained visibility of Lerma’s *Pieta* across platforms underscores the transformative potential of proactive collective digital labor and activist engagement. Neither a result of social media algorithms nor media framings, watching the *Pieta* in this study yielded a counter-narrative that was marshalled through a deliberate curation of actions. In an era dominated by disinformation, artificial intelligence, invisible digital labor, and visual pollution, *watching the photograph* is an archival

intervention that becomes an act of care and resistance. As a methodology, CIL overcomes the limitations of traditional research paradigms in analyzing images in an era of visual saturation and AI-driven manipulation. The emphasis on activity of the image across platforms highlights its narrativity that is crucial for critically interrogating the socio-political structures that shape the production, dissemination, and manipulation of information. Likewise, CIL contributes to the fact-checking paradigm for combatting disinformation by foregrounding the role of power, technology, and historical struggle in shaping digital narratives. As such, CIL is an open invitation for experts from different disciplines to participate in expanding its lexicon to adequately define and understand various multimodal networked digital systems phenomena. Indeed, the archive that authenticates *Pieta* is an evolving repository of media and mediation shaped by ongoing historical and political struggles. *Watching the photograph* serves as one method for tracing the contingent, fleeting, and often fragile expressions of resistance that emerge within this landscape. As authoritarian regimes and corporate-controlled digital platforms increasingly influence how information is produced and circulated, the role of the concerned citizen extends beyond critical consumption. It demands an active engagement in curating and mobilizing knowledge—and, through these acts, in expanding and refining forms of literacy that serve the people.

Works Cited

- Arumpac, Adjani Guerrero. "Regenerative Documentary: Posthuman Art in the Context of the Philippine Drug War." *Plaridel*, vol. 17, no. 1, June 2020, pp. 111–42. doi.org/10.52518/2020.17.1-04armpac.
- _____. "Decentering Disinformation." *Philippine Internet Studies: Mga Kritikal na Tugon sa Pambansa at Pandemikong Krisis*, edited by Roland Tolentino, et al., forthcoming, Ateneo de Manila UP, 2026.
- Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Zone Books, 2008.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century." *Perspecta*, vol. 12, 1969, pp. 165–72.
- _____. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 217–51.
- _____. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version." *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, translated by Edmund Jephcott et al., Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2008, pp. 19–55.
- _____. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 253–64.
- Braidotti, Rosi. "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 36, no. 6, 2019, pp. 31–61.
- Calimbahin, Cleo Anne. "Polarized Opinion: The Arrest of Duterte." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25 Mar. 2025, carnegieendowment.org/posts/2025/03/polarized-opinion-the-arrest-of-duterte?lang=en.
- Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a Summer)*. Directed by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, Argos Films, 1961.
- Constantino-David, Karina, and Ofelia Regala-Angangco. "Studies of Urban Poverty in the Philippines." *Asian Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1975, pp. 17–36.
- Coronel, Shiela, et al. "The Uncounted Dead of Duterte's Drug War." *The Atlantic*, 19 Aug. 2019, www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/08/philippines-dead-rodrido-duterte-drug-war/595978/.
- Dalton, Stuart. "How Beauty Disrupts Space, Time and Thought: Purposiveness Without a Purpose in Kant's Critique of Judgment." *E-LOGOS*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2015, pp. 5–14.
- Deinla, Imelda, et al. "Philippines: Diagnosing the Infodemic." *The Interpreter*, 1 Dec. 2021, www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/philippines-diagnosing-infodemic.
- "'Stop the Killings:' Photojournalist Raffy Lerma on Duterte's Deadly War on Drugs in the Philippines." *Democracy Now!*, 10 Nov. 2017, www.democracynow.org/2017/11/10/stop_the_killings_photojournalist_raffy_lerma.
- Downey, Annie. *Critical Information Literacy: Foundations, Inspiration, and Ideas*. Library Juice Press, 2016.
- Duranti, Luciana. "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science, Part I." *Archivaria*, vol. 28, 1989, pp. 7–27.
- _____. "The Reliability and Authenticity of Electronic Records." *Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records*, edited by Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and Heather MacNeil, Springer Netherlands, 2002.

- Dwoskin, Elizabeth, and Nitasha Tiku. "Facebook Sent Home Thousands of Human Moderators Due to the Coronavirus. Now the Algorithms Are in Charge." *The Washington Post*, 24 Mar. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/03/23/facebook-moderators-coronavirus/.
- Eiland, Howard, and Michael W. Jennings. *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. Belknap Press, 2016.
- Elmborg, James. "Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice." *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 32, no. 2, Feb. 2006, pp. 192 – 99. doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.a2005.12.004.
- Hegina, Aries Joseph. "Pietà'-Like Photo, PH Drug War Story on New York Times Front Page." *Inquirer.net*, 4 Aug. 2016, globalnation.inquirer.net/142353/pieta-like-photo-ph-drug-war-story-new-york-times-front-page.
- Hofileña, Chay F. "Fake Accounts, Manufactured Reality on Social Media." *Rappler*, 9 Oct. 2016, www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/148347-fake-accounts-manufactured-reality-social-media/.
- Hui, Yuk. "Archivist Manifesto." *Metamute.org*, 22 May 2013, www.metamute.org/editorial/lab/archivist-manifesto.
- International Criminal Court. "Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, on Opening Preliminary Examinations into the Situations in the Philippines and in Venezuela." *International Criminal Court*, 8 Feb. 2018, www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-prosecutor-international-criminal-court-fatou-bensouda-opening-preliminary-0.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York UP, 2006.
- Kastenhofer, Julia. "The Logic of Archival Authenticity: ISO 15489 and the Varieties of Forgeries in Archives." *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2015, pp. 166 – 80.
- Khatib, Sami. "The Messianic Without Messianism." *Anthropology & Materialism*, vol. 1, 2013, journals.openedition.org/am/159.
- Kishi, Roudabeh, et al. "Duterte's War: Drug-Related Violence in the Philippines." *ACLEDDATA*, 17 Oct. 2018, acleddata.com/2018/10/18/dutertes-war-drug-related-violence-in-the-philippines/.
- Labiste, Ma. Diosa. "Fact-Checking in the Philippines: The Quest to End Disinformation in Elections." *Fulcrum.sg*, 13 Dec. 2022, fulcrum.sg/fact-checking-in-the-philippines-the-quest-to-end-disinformation-in-elections/.
- Lerma, Raffy. "The Story behind the Viral Photo." *Inquirer.net*, 31 July 2016, opinion.inquirer.net/96101/the-story-behind-the-viral-photo.
- MacNeil, Heather Marie, and Bonnie Mak. "Constructions of Authenticity." *Library Trends*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2007, pp. 26 – 52.
- McNicol, Sarah, editor. *Critical Literacy for Information Professionals*. Facet Publishing, 2016.
- Milner, Ryan M., and Whitney Phillips. *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online*. Polity, 2017.
- _____. *The World Made Meme: Public Conversations and Participatory Media*. MIT Press, 2016.
- Moreno, Estefania, et al. "Digital Memories: Ethical Perspectives." *JRC Science and Policy Reports*, 16 – 17 Jan. 2014.
- Nahon, Karine, and Jeff Hemsley. *Going Viral*. Polity Press, 2013.

- Nanook of the North*. Directed by Robert Flaherty, Revillon Frères, 1922.
- Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana UP, 1991.
- _____. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana UP, 2001.
- Ong, Jonathan Corpus, and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes. "Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines." Communication Department Faculty Publication Series, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2019. doi.org/10.7275/2cq4-5396.
- Ong, Jonathan Corpus. "Why the World Should Be Concerned by the Marcos Victory." *Time*, 10 May 2022, time.com/6174739/bongbong-marcos-election-philippines/.
- Pangilinan, Maria Karla Abigail, et al. "Examining the Effect of Drug-Related Killings on Philippine Conditional Cash Transfer Beneficiaries in Metro Manila, 2016–2017." *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2020, pp. 110–26.
- Phippen, J. Weston. "Can This Photo End Vigilante Killings in the Philippines." *The Atlantic*, 6 Aug. 2016, www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/08/la-pieta-philippines-duterte/494330/.
- Poster, Mark. "The Aesthetics of Distracting Media." *Culture Machine*, 15 Jan. 2019, culturemachine.net/the-ethico-political-issue/the-aesthetics-of-distracting-media.
- Quintos, Patrick. "Are #RealNumbers Real? Rights Defenders Question State Data on Drug War." *ABS-CBN News*, 18 Jan. 2019, www.abs-cbn.com/focus/04/06/18/are-realnumbers-real-rights-defenders-question-state-data-on-drug-war.
- Rafael, Vicente L. "I Heard That Some Photojournalists . . . Were Upset." *Facebook*, 24 Oct. 2017, www.facebook.com/vicente.rafael1/posts/10159393146055328.
- _____. "Photography and the Biopolitics of Fear." *Positions: Asia Critique*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2020, pp. 905–33.
- Regencia, Ted. "Duterte's Drug War: Death Toll Goes Past 6,000." *Al Jazeera*, 16 Dec. 2016, aljazeera.com/features/2016/12/16/dutertes-drug-war-death-toll-goes-past-6000.
- Ressa, Maria A. "Propaganda War: Weaponizing the Internet." *Rappler*, 3 Oct. 2016, www.rappler.com/philippines/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet/.
- _____. "How Facebook Algorithms Impact Democracy." *Rappler*, 8 Oct. 2016, www.rappler.com/newsbreak/148536-facebook-algorithms-impact-democracy/.
- Sans Soleil*. Directed by Chris Marker, Argos Films, 1983.
- Shannon, Claude. "A Mathematical Theory of Communication." *The Bell System Technical Journal*, vol. 27, 1948, pp. 379–423, 623–56.
- Shifman, Limor. *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press, 2013.
- Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966.
- Steyerl, Hito. *The Wretched of the Screen*. Sternberg Press, 2012.
- Supreme Court of the Philippines. Marvic MVF Leonen, Senator Francis "Kiko" N. Pangilinan, et al. Vs. Alan Peter S. Cayetano, et al./Philippine Coalition for the International Criminal Court (PCICC), et al. Vs. Office of the Secretary, represented by Hon. Salvador C. Medialdea, et al./Integrated Bar of the Philippines Vs. Office of the Executive Secretary, represented by Salvador C. Medialdea, et al. G.R. No. 238875, 16 Mar. 2021.
- Tewell, Eamon. "A Decade of Critical Information Literacy: A Review of the Literature." *Communications in Information Literacy*, vol. 9, no. 1, June 2015, pp. 24–43. doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2015.9.1.174.

- Tupas, Emmanuel. "Drug War Death Toll Now 6,600 – PNP." *Philstar*, 19 June 2019, www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/06/19/1927750/drug-war-death-toll-now-6600-pnp.
- Weaver, Warren. "Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication." *Institute of General Semantics*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1953, pp. 261–81.
- Wells, Matt. "Philippines: Duterte's 'War on Drugs' Is a War on the Poor." *Amnesty International*, 4 Feb. 2017, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/02/war-on-drugs-war-on-poor/.

Adjani G. Arumpac (agarumpac@up.edu.ph) is a documentarist and an assistant professor of the University of the Philippines Film Institute (UPFI). She was awarded a British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Chevening scholarship in 2018 through which she finished her MA on Digital Media and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths University of London.