A fitting 'social model': culturally locating telemadres.com
Comments from Pille Runnel,
Estonian National Museum/University of Tartu

Following the already established pattern to present the responses to the discussed paper rather in the form of impressions and comments than coherently organised "assessment", I'll try to fit in and present for the opening of the seminar, with a few remarks and impressions. I'm intentionally leaving out several significant topics and outline some issues concerning the media/new media part only, hoping that we will come across several of the other topics, including the social model, during the week as well.

From my perspective, the paper's main strength is that the authors have picked up several topics, mainstream media studies are not approaching, or have failed them to see as relevant (though they should, I believe), therefore the text provides us in a way an introduction to some central paradigms within the anthropological approach to media/media technologies. It is said for not to legitimate the research object of the paper, but rather to try to identify some of those.

ICTs and daily practices

Media anthropology has been identified by Nick Couldry as a discipline, approaching media by going beyond a narrow focus on audience practices and treating the practices connected to it rather open-endedly, moving the research area therefore away from texts and production structures. Though there are various other ways to explain, what media anthropology is, I'd like to depart from that description, to point to the first connection with media and ICT studies.

Within this framework, the phenomenon of *telemadres* addresses one of the surprisingly "easy", but still central research question: how are media/ICTS involved in people's daily practices both directly and indirectly? Although for anthropology it might be taken for granted that in respect of ICTs, people are more than 'end users' with no role in the technological process beyond adopting ready-made technological artefacts, the technological determinism is still prevailing in the public approaches to ICTs and in much of social sciences.

For example, when looking the working paper slightly from the point of view of social studies in general, namely the discussions upon digital divide, *telemadres*, labelled as a „neat anthropological curiosity" by the Sarah Pink and Ana Martinez Perez, appears to be a significant example, showing how new media can „work" also for those people, who are directly not linked to the ICTs (here I'm also referring to the in a way marginal part of the telemadres web site in the whole interaction).

In information society and digital divide studies, also the authors briefly refer to at page 14, the housewives would quite likely belong to the socio-demographic group among whose „non-users" or minor users of ICTs would prevail, in this way contributing to make them a socially disadvantaged group. Housewives would need special attention to make them more active ICT users and agents in the information society and the whole situation would definitely be "treated" through policies and various actions, as the ways people use the

technologies, is based on individual's ,reading' or making sense of technology. Obviously their Internet use cannot be described as "rich", as they apparently used that web site just for establishing the connection with *telehijos* and neglected the page later on.

For me, the paper therefore refers to the fact that we need, either in digital divide debates or in information society and ICT research in general to identify these much more varied and richer ways the (media) technologies have "fitted in" or "work for" the personal lives of individuals, than studies of the direct 'uses' are able to provide us. This is, what anthropology might do. And I believe that yet in initial stages study upon Telemadres hopefully helps to approach the seemingly marginal, yet, as the study shows, actually central, but indirect use of ICT primarily in terms of understanding the needs of the individual rather than the perceived needs of society. Or even instead of needs, a concept rather belonging to rational choice paradigm, we should rather talk about understanding situations, conditions and events, where media technologies appear to be relevant for individuals. From what moment we in fact can tell, that the person is "on the other side of the digital divide" (p 14)? And to finish up this topic, the latter question also leads to another, I'd rather leave without answer at the moment myself: how relevant it is for these cultural practice-oriented media and ICT studies, the Telemadres paper represents in my mind, to contribute to the general problem-solving-oriented digital divide studies and if it is to some extent, how to make the voice heard?

Media and new media: identifying relationships

A second major topic, obviously still to be developed, as yet briefly outlined in the initial paper, is the question about the convergence of various medias, firstly through real practices of the people, and secondly, through creating continuous representations of each other. I'll come back to the latter later on.

Again, what user–studies or audience studies often have found too difficult to deal with, is how the uses of different medias are mixed and not only overlapping, but interdependent from each other in daily lives of the people. As the authors show, rather than the web page, phones are crucial in setting up the 'model' from the telemadres point of view and finally the 'official medias' almost disappear, move to the background, until they are needed again and are replaced by food and taxis as a communication "medium". The whole situation is created by the means of web, phones, other medias, but the whole interaction is not depending it in every phase. Therefore, while obviously being, besides the virtual relationship, as well an mediated relationship, we can imagine, how the medias are sometimes switched on and sometimes off.

Here I'm briefly leaving the main track in order to mention one more fascinating topic in the paper – namely, how new media has helped us take the 'voice, both heard or read, out of communication' and learn to study these phenomenon. The paper reminded me my own experience of studying as a student an online music community, whose main medium of communication was music with no ongoing conversation to accompany it, and me as an ethnologist trained in interviewing people, trying to rely on peoples musical profiles (and changes in it) only - although the participants were persons with their own music-based identity, the usual, significant factors of identity were in fact hidden (age, sex, fields of activity). It showed me, how despite the "channel" of communication, whether it is voice, visual image or food, the ways to communicate trust, taste, behaviours and various forms of knowledge to each other are instantly developed through the means of media. With telemadres, a situation is in a way similar, as the web page itself, representing the 'model' is not quite information-rich in a sense that it rather reminds a statement or advertising than a

business environment, but yet it participates in creating all these complex relationships, described in the paper. It is a task for the researches to imagine and learn to study the whole world opening up through this interface.

Still, when looking upon the page, I discovered that I had expected to learn more about the producers of the site: though we can see, that the site has been established as a medium for economic transactions primarily, its authors remain invisible yet (though links and other media texts should be studied for that, I assume). Their identity is also not revealed in the working paper. I believe that although media anthropology in some cases tries to reject following the production structures as being approached in the traditional way, here the owners/producers of the page are part of this established network and deserve further attention in the study.

But from here I'd like to return to the other relationship between different medias, mentioned earlier. Namely, the authors mention that telemadre.com has been the subject of various media reports both in national Spanish and international press and on television. We also learned that several Telemadres told the press, they had found about the site from earlier stories in the media. Referring again to the mainstream media studies and their preferences, it can be said, that they have largely overlooked this topic. It is hard to find any coherent studies, where it has been analysed, how traditional media represent, construct and reflect new media/Internet. In the case of telemadres we have a even more interesting situation, a media studies person can dream of, as also the audience of traditional media is present and even more, has been obviously testing this connection of medias in real life situation, by picking up the offered service and making their own everyday realities out of this image, created by media.

Pille