

**Discussant comments on Sebastian Ureta's paper "Locating the TV. Television placement and the reconfiguration of space in low-income homes in Santiago, Chile"**

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Based on ethnographic fieldwork from a low-income neighbourhood in Santiago, Chile, Ureta presents an analysis of how the families he has gathered data from display their television sets in their homes, and how they relate to them. In my view the author operates with two analytical dimensions; one is distinguishing between three types of spaces in the household; ceremonial, functional and private places. These are used to expose the different kinds of practical and ideological concerns that the television sets necessarily are linked to. Secondly, a distinction is made between the television set's symbolic and practical functions.

As I read the paper a common quality of the informants' relationships to their sets is ambivalence. In general, they all value their sets as symbolic objects, but are critical to how they disrupt ideal family life. As a symbol the TV is an almost necessary display of belonging to a social order - it "is a symbol of normality and social participation" (p. 7). On the other hand, as the informants' statements are presented most are highly critical to how television sets - as media - affect families as functional units.

First, in the ceremonial spaces of the household (normally the living room) the television always has a central position. This space (place?) can be characterised as semi-public - as it is the part of the home that is usually used to entertain visitors - and hence the set's symbolic function is important. It is described as being a monument or a fetish (p. 6). But there is a dissonance between the set's symbolic value and how it is valued as media. It is seen to disrupt what the interviewees consider to be good family life. (p. 9); the informants feel it is rude to let the TV be turned on if visitors arrive - it kills conversation and hence displays the family as a less than ideal social entity. Thus, the author concludes this discussion with stating that it is not valued as a practical object within the ceremonial spaces of the household.

In the functional spaces of the household (kitchen and bathroom) the TV apparently does not have an accepted place at all. As I read the paper this is foremost because of the practical qualities of the media; you can't do household chores while watching TV. Besides, this is a part of the apartment that is not considered to be 'public' and hence there is little need to display it as a symbol of belonging and normality vis a vis outsiders. Thus, the radio is the preferred ICT in this part of the household.

In the private spaces of the household (i.e. the bedrooms) there is again no need to use the TV as a 'monument' since it is normally not visibly accessible to outsiders. However, it seems to be a chosen site for TVs in many households - partly because of the wish to keep it out of the ceremonial part of the home, and partly because informants consider it to be a pleasant way to watch TV. However, there are also disadvantages to this positioning; it might affect the relationship between spouses negatively, and it might disrupt children's sleeping routines.

I like the paper, it is clear and structured, and there are some distinct analytical points in it. However, I wouldn't be an academic if I hadn't had anything critical to say. There are three points I want to raise - one about methodology, and two analytical that are not so much

arguments against what is in the paper, as suggestions to how I think the whole research theme might be expanded.

1. Here and there in the paper Ureta mentions morality and it is evident from informants' statements as well as arguments presented that this is an underlying premise in the arguments: that ICT-use in the home is a highly moral issue. Informants talk about 'good family life', about talking with each other, etc. The author uses Domestication Research perspectives, and Roger Silverstone in particular, and it would in my opinion have been analytically rewarding to pick up his term 'the moral economy of the household'. For Silverstone a core point is that in order for ICTs to become domesticated they need to be practically and culturally accepted. Here the moral economy of the household comes in; it is a way of conceptualising the interplay of practical and moral issues that the domestication process entails. Silverstone and adversaries do, admittedly, not write much about what this morality consists of, but some clues are given; the home is the hearth of interpersonal, intimate (and hence existential) concerns, and anything that have the potential to disrupt such concerns is automatically threatening. As I read the paper this is exactly what takes place in the studied households, and I believe that a more explicit treatment of what kind of moral concerns - founded in hegemonic family ideology - that are at stake here would give the paper an extra dimension. (Interestingly enough, in the latest publication by Silverstone I have read he suggests that it is precisely a more thorough study of the mores of family life that looks to him as a promising development of the Domestication Research perspective.)

2. This brings me to my second analytical point. As I and a colleague have argued in an article that will appear in *New Media & Society* in the near future, there is an unfortunate ambiguity in the analytical apparatus of Domestication Research - 'domestication' connote both a 'taming of the wild', and of bringing public objects into the private (the domestic). We have argued that the term should only retain the 'taming'-connotation because the idea that the home = private is ethnocentric and hence hinders us from using the term in societies where there is no clear private-public distinction and/or where the home is not necessarily unequivocally belonging to the private. And as I know next to nothing about Chilean society it would be useful for me to know more about what kind of ideology/mores that guides the actions of poor people in Santiago; is the resonance I feel when reading the paper based on common ideological stuff? In other words, a more explicit discussion on the mores that guide the actions and attitudes of the low-income people of Santiago would not only bring more clearly to light the premises that the discussions are based on but it would perhaps also open up for interesting comparisons of family ideologies across continents, cultures and classes.

3. Lastly, Ureta states that the paper is based on ethnographic methods (e.g; 'ethnographic fieldwork' in the abstract, 'ethnographic approach' on p. 4). This brings up something that I am sure that it is not only I who feel a bit uneasy about. I have conducted what might be called 'classic fieldwork' in Africa, and my professional upbringing has been one, long inculcation of the importance of doing proper fieldwork. So when I now have been gathering data on uses of ICTs in Norwegian homes I am very reluctant to use the word 'ethnography' about what I have been doing. As all who have been collecting data in homes in late-modern Western sociality know it is impossible to do what most(?) of us think ethnographic fieldwork should include: participant observation. I might be a purist, and I am certainly not going to attack Ureta for labelling this ethnography, but this paper is a suitable background for raising the issue. It is evident that 'media ethnography' has become a buzz-word in much media research, and serves an important rhetorical function; it is meant to signal a thorough knowledge about the everyday life of those we study. We can't of course claim exclusive ownership of the term but after I have encountered a couple of examples of shameless misuse of the term in various

media research I believe that it is important that we - anthropologists studying media and media technology - should be a critical voice against the inflation of the term. My impression is that Ureta's research is based on interviews and visual data. In my view it is not much more one can get from such a private setting (without great designs that would require way more resources and time than most of us have), and careful and systematic analysis can indeed produce heaps of data from such sources. But my (open) question is; is it right to call this ethnographic methods?

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