

TECHNOLOGIES IN THE PRACTICES OF DAILY LIFE – SPECIAL THEMATIC SECTION

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TECHNOLOGIES IN THE PRACTICES OF DAILY LIFE: INTRODUCTION

The articles in this part of *Polish Ethnography* are devoted to the subject of technologies in the practices of daily life. Our study stems from research on the development of modern market society, which we view from the micro-scale perspective, that is, from the perspective of the household. In the first two articles¹ – *Why Do We Have to Turn on This Washing Machine? The Processes of Domesticating Household Technology – Situations of Resistance* by Marta Skowrońska and *Progress and Comfort: The Meaning of Technology Domestication Practices* by Joanna Zalewska – we focused on analyzing the process by which successive technologies have been domesticated in the second half of the twentieth century. A third text, by Marek Krajewski, is a review of research on the sonification of automated devices used in the everyday life of households.

Research on the domestication of technology was conducted in 2018–2019 by a team of sociologists from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw under the guidance of one of the writers of this introduction (Joanna Zalewska), as part of a grant entitled *The Consumer Revolution in Poland*. The team conducted retrospective in-depth interviews with marital dyads (Schmidt *et al.* 2018) in regard to how each couple's household, on being established, was equipped with technology and how this home landscape changed over the course of years. The interviews focused on utilities (electricity, water, gas), bathroom technologies (shower, bath, toilet), washing machines, televisions, and other technologies the respondents considered important. The study was initially intended to include 30 in-depth interviews with married couples, followed immediately by individual interviews with each spouse separately (60 in total). In the end, it was not possible to conduct two of the interviews, and in four cases the dyad interview form was abandoned in favor of individual interviews. This was due to

¹ These texts contain analyses of materials collected within the framework of the grant NCN/HS6/04811, *The Consumption Revolution in Poland*, UMO-2014/15/D/HS6/04811, financed within the framework of a Sonata 8 competition.

the difficulty in recruiting couples from the oldest generations. The interviews were supported by photos of different models of the above-mentioned technologies. The pair of researchers conducting the interview also made observations on the basis of instructions they had been given earlier.

Half the respondents came from Poznań and the other half from Warsaw. They were differentiated mainly on the basis of their historical generation and occupation. According to Hanna Świda-Ziemba's (2010) concept of historical generations, a generation is linked by similar socio-cultural experiences and the worldview that these produce. Consequently, from time to time a clear historical generation emerges and may include people born in several successive years, although it also happens that people born in certain years may not belong unequivocally to one such generation. We distinguished the following:

- G1. The oldest generations, born before 1936 – in this group, we differentiated two sets. The first was the war generation, encompassing people whose youth or early adulthood coincided with the Second World War. The second was the generation of the Union of Polish Youth, which includes people whose youth/early adulthood coincided with the immediate post-war period. They were subjected – with varying results – to strong propaganda because at that time there was a mass political organization, the Union of Polish Youth, which indoctrinated young people (Szatur-Jaworska 2000).
- G2. The generation of the Thaw, that is, people who were born just before the war, in the years 1937–1939, and who entered adulthood during the period of waning terror following Stalin's death (Szatur-Jaworska 2000). Hanna Świda-Ziemba called people born between 1937 and 1941 the generation opposing traditional mores (*ibidem*, p. 160). During their school years they were subjected to Stalinist indoctrination. Świda-Ziemba's (2010) research shows that they adapted to a double standard: in official life, they obediently followed all instructions, while among their peers they valued everything that was not communist and a cult of the West prevailed.
- G3. The generation of the Little Reform and of March 1968 – born between 1943 and 1950, these people's adolescence coincided with the so-called Little Stabilization period. Members of this generation showed a lack of interest in politics. They were focused on getting an apartment, on their job, and on their family (Świda-Ziemba 2010).
- G4. The generation of subjectivity and community ties – born in the 1953–1960 period, these people entered adulthood in the 1970s, when there were increased opportunities to buy goods in the Polish People's Republic and young people rebelled against the impersonal world of consumption (Świda-Ziemba 2010).
- G5. The generation of the transformation² – born between 1964 and 1973, these people entered adulthood during the political changes. They experienced the

² In the material, quoted speech is marked with the letter "G" and a number referring to the given respondent's generation, in accord with the above.

instability of institutions, the plurality of values, and the destruction of axiological models (Świda-Ziemba 1995).

For occupational categories, we made the following distinctions:³

- K1. Housewife/person not working outside the home
- K2. Unskilled workers and manual laborers
 - a. Unskilled workers or workers from the countryside
 - b. Skilled and/or established workers, masters and foremen
- K3. Petty bourgeoisie/lower middle class
 - a. administration and office workers (with secondary or higher education) and technicians with at most a secondary education,
 - b. private entrepreneurs: trade, crafts, and other kinds of enterprises (PRL)/trade and small businesses (III RP)
- K4. Intelligentsia/specialists meeting two conditions: (1) a higher education, (2) being engaged in specialized work
 - a. intelligentsia in the humanities/creators (scholars, writers, journalists, artists)
 - b. intelligentsia in technical fields (engineers)
 - c. others (teachers, doctors, etc.)
- K5. Managers, directors, party and central administration officials, and the financial elite (PRL)/the capitalist elite – owners of medium-size and large enterprises, and well-to-do retirees (III RP)
 - a. senior managers and directors and, in the PPR, the party and administrative elite,
 - b. the financial elite, including wealthy private business owners (PRL)/the capitalist elite – owners of medium-size or large companies and well-to-do retirees (III RP).

The couples were mostly homogeneous in terms of generation and occupational category, though in a few cases it was not possible to adhere to this principle due to the difficulties in recruiting elderly couples.

All the interviews were transcribed. The qualitative analysis of the material was performed with the use of MAXQDA software. In keeping with grounded theory (in Marta Skowrońska's article) and the qualitative content analysis used in ethnography (in Joanna Zalewska's article), the ultimate form of the analytical categories emerged as a result of repeated reworking (coding and re-coding) of the material.

The texts presented here are the result of the first phase of analysis of the collected materials. We wanted to look at the meanings given to the technologies adopted, at the cycles of acquiring technologies, and at resistance to their adoption (mainly in connection with existing habits). These interests were inspired by the theory of practices, which is discussed at length by Marta Skowrońska in this volume and

³ Occupational categories concern the respondent's occupation at the age of 40. Quoted speech is marked with the letter "O" and a number, in accord with the above.

which proposes that practices should be studied by paying attention to three elements and the relations between them: (1) competences and skills – embodied schemas, (2) material infrastructure, and (3) the meanings of a given practice as expressed through the discourses and personal narratives present in society (Hand and Shove 2004; 2007). Therefore, Marta Skowrońska analyzes the sources of resistance to the domestication of technologies, and Joanna Zalewska focuses on the meanings of domesticated technologies and ways of speaking of them. Marek Krajewski's text was written independently of these analyses, outside the framework of "The Consumer Revolution in Poland" grant, and was included in the section due to the thematic convergence.

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