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“AND IT ALL HAPPENED IN OUR LIFETIME”
– PROGRESS AND COMFORT:
THE MEANING OF TECHNOLOGY DOMESTICATION PRACTICES¹

INTRODUCTION

The process of domesticating technology coincided with the development of modern market societies. The first sociological work on home technologies referred to “the industrial revolution at home” because when the book appeared in the 1970s the term “consumer revolution” had not yet been coined (Cowan 1976). While the industrial revolution concerned the mass production and increased supply of goods, the consumer revolution involved mass consumption and increased demand. The consumer revolution was not solely the result of a greater supply of goods on the market and of consumers’ financial resources but of the requisite change in forms of organizing consumption to reflect both daily habits and beliefs and a religious worldview². Arjun Appadurai (1996) claims that there are three patterns of socially organised forms of consumption. For traditional communities, a typical form of consumption is “interdiction,” that is, guidelines for specific groups and social categories: what was or was not permissible to eat often depended on the season and was embedded in religion. Appadurai sees such an approach as reflecting a close connection between cosmology and everyday life. On the other hand, in a feudal society, where social status was assigned by birth, sumptuary law might specify, for example, the use of certain colors or types of cloth for estates of the realm. Consumption clearly has meaning for status and identity; it shows who an individual is – to what group or category he belongs. The form of consumption proper to modernity is fashion, that is, social emulation of the social environment (Appadurai 1996). This form of consumption is more flexible: there are no bans, taboos, or legally written norms about what can be consumed by whom. Flexibility requires openness to novelty, to a constant change of habits and beliefs. Nevertheless, it also has a status-and-identity function; individuals imitate the groups and categories to which they aspire, but they also have sufficient economic or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) to manifest their belonging to those

¹ This article is a result 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.

² The anthropological literature on totemism, taboos, and original forms of classification is helpful in understanding this question.

groups through consumption. The phenomenon of domestication of technology is part of the consumer revolution and involves the massive encroachment of technical infrastructure, household appliances, and audio/video devices into households. More and more new technologies are entering our daily life. They enter flexibly and have specific, individualized biographies depending on how they are domesticated in particular households (Silverstone et al. 1992). Additionally, ways of using technologies change rapidly; therefore, it cannot be said that the process of domesticating technology was completed at some stage (Hand, Shove 2004, 2007).

The United States was a pioneer in the domestication of technology and the process took place there on a massive scale in the first half of the twentieth century. Electrification, which made it possible to have an electric iron, electric washing machine and hot water heater, changed the daily life of working-class women in the 1920s and 1930s (Cowan 1976). After the Second World War, home technologies spread across Western Europe, and the Hollywood film industry and television played a huge role in awakening aspirations to the American standard of living (De Grazia 2005). In Poland, as in Western Europe, the domestication of technology occurred on a massive scale in the second half of the twentieth century (Schmidt, Skowrońska 2016). The time differences were small. A fully equipped bathroom and a kitchen with appliances became standard in Western Europe in the 1970s and in Eastern Europe in the 1980s (de Grazia 2005). The factors in the latter case were rather different. In Poland as well, American films contributed to increase aspirations to achieve a Western – and above all American – standard of living. However, films began to have an influence in the 1960s, and their widespread impact can be dated to the end of that decade, when watching television became a mass practice (Pleskot 2007). Earlier – at the end of the 1940s, and in the 1950s and 1960s – the model of the Western standard of living was also being conveyed. At that time, though, the idea was delivered privately in the main, by parcels from abroad (Kurz 2008). Although the most popular magazine then, a weekly called *Przekrój*, was state property, the editorial board was fascinated with the West and thus it “smuggled” in information about the Western lifestyle and innovations (Jaworska 2008). However, as I showed in another text (Zalewska 2017), a key factor in the domestication of technology in this period was the state propaganda of progress. The phenomenon can be described more broadly as government policy, because the government not only promoted progress in verbal and visual messages, but also actively implemented technical infrastructure in the daily life of citizens.

In postwar construction, premises were equipped with water pipes, toilets, bathrooms, and central heating. The state furthered access to what is currently considered basic infrastructure. Before the war, in 1938, 3.1% of Polish villages had electricity, and in 1954, 36.1% (GUS 1956). In 1950, the number of urban dwellers in Poland using an indoor toilet was 2.7 million, and in 1970 9.4 million (Andrzejewski quoted after: Perkowski 2008). In prewar buildings, in individual cases, the inhabitants themselves constructed bathrooms or had water supplied to their apartments (on the basis of materials they collected themselves). In the 1950s and 1960s the socialist state intensely promoted the idea of progress and technologically advanced modernity (Reid and

Crowley 2000). Poland was presented in the propaganda of the 1950s as a world of factories and machines. Even the children’s magazine *Płomyczek* described Star trucks, tippers, and beet diggers. The machines were presented as fascinating; the descriptions were supposed to create an impression of prosperity and development. There was a lot of talk about electrification, both in schools and in children’s magazines. On the *Płomyczek* cover of February 25, 1951 there were electricity pylons and the headline “Our village has electricity too.” In *Płomyczek* and *Świerszczyk*, enthusiastic letters were printed on the subject of the electrification of the countryside (Brodala 2001). New ideas were relatively easily internalized by young people and people from the prewar peasant class (Świda-Ziemia 1998). Uczestnictwo w tym nowoczesnym świecie było przez obywateli doświadczane przede wszystkim w pracy, ze względu na zindustrializowane miejsce pracy i regularne zarobki (rozwój gospodarki pieniężnej); a także w sferze konsumpcji (dóbr, wiedzy, sztuki, a także technologii) (Pine 2007). The state propaganda of progress, perhaps to a lesser degree, was also present in the late Polish People’s Republic. In the press of the 1980s, VCRs, which at that time were a technological innovation, were presented as a manifestation of modernity (Wasiak 2020).

The process of technology domestication in the Polish People’s Republic has not been studied much. This does not mean that the social sciences have not paid attention to technologies in social life. Above all, those technologies that are also media are of wide interest to the sociology of media and new media. On the other hand, consideration of the domestication of technology involves regarding technology from the perspective of daily life and the home space. In this perspective, research on the role of materiality in daily practices (Jewdokimow and Łukasiuk 2016; Schmidt 2010; Schmidt, Skowrońska 2008) and on the role of the media in everyday life (Filiciak et al. 2010, Halawa 2006) has been developing, but these studies concern the present day. In regard to the period of the late Polish People’s Republic and the political transformation, the popularization of video recorders and computers has been thoroughly researched (Wasiak 2016; 2020). I have done research myself on the domestication of technology in the early Polish People’s Republic. As part of ethnographic field research in 2005–2007 and 2012, I conducted narrative interviews and open in-depth interviews with older people. The interviews showed that the domestication of technology changed how needs were met, changed relations between household members, and made the places of daily life, such as homes, more flexible, that is, open to new types of objects and activities. For example, the advent of the first televisions (with a channel knob) opened the way for other model televisions, then for color television, remote control, VCRs, and satellite TV. The domestication of technology has also changed the structure of time, that is, the presence of home technologies means that less time must be spent satisfying various living needs, and the saving in time can be spent on participating in culture.³

³ Research in the United States has shown that home technologies caused women to devote more time to household chores because those duties came to be associated with emotions and care for the home: cleaning and washing were treated as expressions of love and concern for the family (Cowan 1976).

Moreover, electrification enabled greater control over the structure of time and made daily activities independent of the circadian rhythm (Zalewska 2011). Among my interviewees, mostly men from the war generation or the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP)⁴ generation who had experienced so-called social advancement, emphasized the progress that had been made during their lifetime and spoke with excitement about the appearance of new inventions in their households. Their narratives reflected the dominant discourse of progress. On the other hand, the majority of women from the ZMP and Thaw generations used comfort narratives in referring to their personal experiences. They recalled specific situations and practices of using domesticated technologies and the technologies they had used previously. They focused on the enormous effort put into doing the laundry, as well as other household chores, and on the relief and comfort provided by technology. Representatives of the Thaw generation of both sexes used the term “news.” They treated technologies as a luxury, not a thing for everyone: these luxuries included the telephones, televisions, and cars that appeared in the 1960s, and the automatic washing machines of the 1970s. These technologies aroused the fascination of the interviewees, but they did not change their everyday experience as thoroughly as electrification, running water, or the Frania rotor washing machine, which appeared in narratives of progress and comfort (Zalewska 2017).

As part of the National Science Center grant “The Consumer Revolution in Poland,”⁵ we continued the above-mentioned research among the elderly, as well as among several younger generations, in order to examine the domestication of technology among couples entering adulthood throughout the period of the Polish People’s Republic and during the political transformation (see the introduction to the present issue of the journal). The purpose of this article is to analyze the meaning of technology domestication practices during this period, from the material collected under the grant. I posed the following research questions: (1) what ways of talking about the domestication of technology exist?; (2) are there generational differences in the way people talk about the domestication of technology?

The term “practice” refers to the fact that human actions constitute broader wholes that are united by a certain logic – a socially shared sense (Bourdieu 2007; Marody 2014; Schatzki 2001). In this approach, the domestication of technology is considered to be a certain practice of acquiring and incorporating more and more technical devices into everyday habits (cf. Skowrońska in this volume – four phases of technology domestication, after Silverstone 1993). Contemporary researchers of practice (Hand, Shove 2004; 2007) propose an easy-to-apply operationalization of the concept. A practice consists of three elements: (1) competences and skills, (2) material infrastructure, and (3) the meaning of a given practice – the above-mentioned socially

⁴ Historical generations were briefly discussed in the introduction to the thematic section.

⁵ NCN/HS6/04811, grant director: Dr. hab. Joanna Zalewska, APS; participants: Dr. hab. Marcin Jewdokimow UKSW, Dr. Filip Schmidt, UAM, Dr. Marta Skowrońska, UAM; financed within the framework of the Sonata 8 program.

shared sense of undertaking a given practice. The different elements of the practice influence each other; some may be adapted earlier and lead to the adoption of the other elements and the implementation of a certain practice. Pierre Bourdieu (2007), who introduced the theory of practice to the social sciences, warns against seeking the principle behind the actions of people in their statements, which he calls “discourses for rationalizing them [the practices]” (p. 227). In his opinion, “(...) practice holds more truth than his [the research subject] statements can provide” (p. 228). However, subjective ways of understanding one’s own practice may, to some extent, influence and modify it in return, so in the end the subject’s statements do not turn out to be completely false (Bourdieu 2007, p. 231). In order to partially avoid the pitfalls of rationalization, we did not ask directly about the rationale behind the interviewees’ technology domestication practices but rather we tried to understand the course of events and the attitudes of the interviewees toward technology. Our research method was described in the introduction to the thematic section “Technologies in Everyday Practices.” In the case of technology domestication practices in Poland, the focus on meaning is of particular interest. Because preliminary research shows that it was precisely the meaning of technology domestication practices – the progress promoted by the socialist state, along with an element of materiality, when technical infrastructure was implemented top down – that entered daily life first. These things induced people to change their daily habits and to learn to use home technologies, that is, to develop the third element of the practice (Zalewska 2017).

THE MEANING OF TECHNOLOGY DOMESTICATION PRACTICES

The ways of talking about the domestication of technology which are presented below are organized around the dominant terms of “progress” and “comfort.” By “terms” I mean the linguistic layer of the interviewees’ statements, in which these words appeared very often. I have built emic analytical categories around these terms, that is, I have distinguished two ways of talking about the domestication of technology: the category of progress and the category of comfort. In my earlier studies as well, the interviewees viewed the process of technology domestication in terms of progress and comfort, but I did not previously undertake an analysis of these categories (Zalewska 2011, 2017).

THE PROGRESS DISCOURSE: “*IT IS KNOWN THAT PROGRESS IS ONGOING*”

Progress is the idea that:

[...] mankind has slowly, gradually, and continuously advanced from an original condition of cultural deprivation, ignorance, and insecurity to constantly higher levels of civilization, and that such advancement will, with only occasional setbacks, continue through the present into the future (Nisbet 1980, p. 10).

Piotr Sztompka (2010), in commenting on this definition, points out that it assumes the concept of linear time, where progress is a positively valued difference between the past and the present (progress made) or the present and the future (predicted progress). Progress includes the concept of improvement, development, betterment.

The idea of progress can be traced back to antiquity, but the turning point in its development took place in the age of geographical discoveries, when the enormous variety of forms of social life in different parts of the world became apparent. As Europeans recognized that their material culture was exceptionally developed compared to other societies, they also ascribed to themselves superiority in the field of spiritual culture. This is how the idea arose that different societies are at different levels of development and that European culture is at the highest observable level. During the Enlightenment, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and Jean Condorcet proposed two alternative models of progress. The former, on the basis of the development of religion, divided universal history into twelve epochs, and the latter distinguished ten periods of knowledge and science. The nineteenth century was called the “age of progress” because the idea of progress was adopted by art, literature, and science and penetrated common thinking. Science and technology seemed to carry the idea of unlimited development (Sztompka 2010).

In the nineteenth century and “still for a long time in the twentieth century” (Sztompka 2010, p. 42), progress was equated with modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. Modernity was considered a higher form of civilization in the development of societies⁶ (Lewicki 2018). In this sense, it is modernity that becomes the target of progress. However, modernity is not a static destination. Mikołaj Lewicki (2018), in analyzing theories of modernization, shows that the final stages of modernization are characterized by continuous innovation and growth mechanisms that condition each other and do not allow the “speeding train” of modernization to stop (p. 58). In other words, modernity is continuous modernization, which is in line with the idea of progress as unlimited development. Zygmunt Bauman (1991) interprets modernity as a historical epoch overwhelmed by the idea of progress. Modernity – considered dually as an analytical concept and a historical epoch – has its own specific features, which sociology has studied and collated from the beginning of its existence (for compiling and discussing the theory of modernity, see Lewicki 2018; Sztompka 2010). For the purposes of this study, it is worth mentioning that these features include “the ubiquity of technical innovations, encompassing all spheres of life” (Sztompka 2010, p. 83). Moreover, in the theory of modernity, tradition was constructed as an abstract, negatively evaluated object of comparisons for modernizing societies, containing features that were considered to hinder modernization, that is, the inability to cope with changing conditions and thus being condemned to perish (Lewicki 2018, p. 42).

⁶ This was a standard idea of twentieth-century politics. It legitimated the division of countries into first, second, and third worlds and the support by first-world countries (sometimes even extended to control) of modernization processes in third-world countries (Lewicki 2018).

For analyzing material about the category of progress, I will use Michel Foucault's (1972) discourse concept. Foucault emphasizes that discourse is not simply an expression of the order of reality through words. On the contrary, discourse weakens the semantic ties between the word and its referent because it establishes its own rules linking language with reality. In other words, discourse is obviously composed of signs, but it definitely goes beyond the function of naming/designating reality. Discourse is a practice that systematically creates the objects to which it relates (Foucault 1972, p. 49). In other words, discourse can be called a system of creating knowledge. As Łukasz Dominiak (2004) points out, Foucault established discourse analysis as a method of historical research, that is, research in which the researcher has access only to statements, or “discourse events.” However, to use a colloquial comparison, a statement is only the tip of the iceberg, and the iceberg is a discourse consisting of practices established in social relations, and above all in power relations, which enable the generation of such and not another statement. Foucault (1972) asks, first of all, who is speaking – who has the right and is legitimated to use a given discourse. Second, where can the given discourse be used (for instance, in medical discourse it is the doctor in a hospital or clinic). Third, in what network of relations does the speaker exist and what practices are associated with her position (for instance, taking into account all the complexity of hospital practices and the system of relations within the hospital and with external institutions). Foucault analyzed the knowledge-creation system from the perspective of its production. I am considering the discourse of progress, which was produced as one of the first scientific discourses. The quotation from Nisbet at the beginning of this section illustrates that the discourse of progress constructs time as linear and perceives reality as a continuous development, a movement assessed positively in every one of its spheres. The project of a modern state was based on the idea of progress, and this idea was to be implemented by such states on the basis of scientific authority (an alliance between knowledge and power) (Bauman 1991). As I showed in the introduction, the Polish socialist state eagerly pursued the discourse of progress using scientific sources but with the help of state organs. Electrification, telephony, and the introduction of VCRs were all processes constructed as progress (although it is possible to imagine them in other categories), and this is an issue that certainly requires analysis in subsequent studies. In this article I will analyze the presence of the discourse of progress in the common understanding of citizens. It could be said that I am studying the reception, not the production, of this knowledge system. The collected materials include the statements of the interviewees; therefore, in research questions at the operational level, I asked about ways of speaking. However, these statements are also the tip of the iceberg and refer to the knowledge-production system and the related system of social and power relations in the Polish People's Republic.

I wanted to try to understand what progress meant to the interviewees. They more often spoke of progress than of modernity and modernization, although sometimes they captured the scale of the changes in a descriptive way, “from youth to the present day,” by pointing to what they remembered as being the starting point of modernization or progress and where it had now reached.

Well, it's well known how it once was, when we were young, in our childhood. Then there weren't any special...well, there were already some conveniences but not any special technology in comparison to what there is now. The telephone, the Internet – that's something completely different (Waw5 K, G3K5).

Pointing to the concept of linear time and the positive difference between the past and the present – this Baumanesque “forward movement” of progress (Bauman 1991) – the terms “forward” and “up” were often used: “progress/industry/technology went/goes/pulls forward/onward.” The omnipresence of these expressions suggests that they were clichés, repeated without reflection. There were also statements in which the interviewees expressed progress in slightly different words, but their statements can still be entered into the discourse of progress:

All that happened in our lifetime! (Waw6, K, G4K5)

We've gone through such things since childhood that it's like “wow” (Alicja,⁷ Pos 4, K, G4 K5).

This way of talking about progress was common to interviewees from all historical generations. Foucault, in analyzing discourses, asks who is speaking. Among the interviewees, use of the progress discourse was inclusive and egalitarian. In the introduction, I showed that the socialist state promoted progress through workplaces, schools, community centers, and the media. By comparing the data and viewing it from the perspective of Foucault's theory, it can be said that the discourse of progress is meant to legitimize the institutions of the socialist state, and therefore becomes part of the knowledge system for every citizen. It can be argued that for a state based on the ideology of socialism, the scientific discourse of progress was particularly attractive due to the fact that a similar utopian vision of development was inscribed in both the ideology and the discourse.

These statements also show that progress is obvious, that is, necessary and inevitable, and thus that the discourse of progress actually produces a way of understanding reality.

It is known that progress is ongoing [...] industry must move forward (Pos3, G3 K4).

Various criteria for progress were mentioned. Technical progress was mentioned very often. Here, the interviewees pointed to the fact that mechanics and electronics were developing in all applications and entering all spheres of social life. Occasionally, progress in medicine was singled out as being the most important. The interviewees' statements often included the category of civilizational progress, understood in the sense of a continuous increase in the standard of living, better living conditions, and the development of equipment facilitating the activities of daily life. Occasional individuals mentioned progress in regard to households (by comparing the contemporary situation with that of the PRL) and social progress. One of the interviewees, in referring to the situation of women, mentioned that previously they married and had children very early, then the moment of marriage was delayed, and finally edu-

⁷ Names were changed in the text to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.

cation and work began to define women’s lives to the same degree as family. The category of technical progress will be discussed below (of course, categories in common thinking are fluid and the concept sometimes intertwines with ideas of other types of progress). Civilizational progress will be discussed in the section on the importance of comfort.

When it comes to the attitude toward progress (including the understanding of the concept of progress),⁸ the statements mostly reflected surprise and delight at the scope and speed of changes. The words “extraordinary” and “amazing” were often used, and there were also phrases such as “it seems incredible,” “I did not foresee,” “unimaginable.”

And it all happened in our lifetime, these TV sets, radios, all of that [...] no. [...] It has changed so much – and that you can really see it all in one lifetime... (Pos2 M G3 K4)

It is worth noting that the same phrase as in the title was used here by a person from a different city, generation, and professional category.

Occasionally, the surprise and delight were captured in terms of a “miracle,” for example, the SHL rotor washing machine was called a “miracle of technology”⁹ by interviewees belonging to the ZMP generation: a manual laborer, a trade union representative, and a housewife.

Surprise and delight with progress were also expressed in a descriptive manner, that is, it was said that the experience of everyday life changed, for example, from initially living in a dugout (sporadically), washing in a basin, washing laundry on a washing board, and receiving media communications through a cable radio, to using computers, the Internet, and mobile phones. Interestingly, this type of discourse did not occur at all in the youngest generation surveyed – members of the transformation generation, who had not experienced what was considered the starting point of technical progress (washing in a basin or by a well, outhouses, washing boards), although they had occasionally come into contact with such things, for instance, while vacationing in the countryside. In the transformation generation, there was another way of describing surprise and delight – though understandably less intense – at change/progress, namely, by listing the various household appliances that had entered the daily life of the interviewees. On the other hand, some representatives of the generation of subjectivity and community ties, who had lived in prewar housing in their childhood, had experienced the above-mentioned practices such as washing in a basin and using a privy. The child of one couple belonging to the generation of subjectivity and ties reacted as follows:

Geez, what kind of life were you living? (Pos 6, G4C3)

⁸ Due to the fact that – as I wrote in the introduction – we did not ask directly what progress is, in statements about progress the speaker’s emotions are inseparably intertwined with a cognitive approach to the concept.

⁹ Recognition of new technologies as a numinous category, applied to foreigners and strangers is discussed in Zalewska, 2015a.

In Alicja's description of progress in terms of moving "from youth to...", modernity appears as the target:

Virtually almost from nothing, not from an ordinary light bulb, no, from candles! If there was electricity then it was like someone lit a giant candle in the houses, right? Those tile stoves – those were elegant, but those pipe stoves, all those things, we knew them as children, right? From such things we've come to modernity (Pos. 4 G4K5).

So we have a contrast between modernity and the sometimes unimaginably "primitive" times (because this term also appeared occasionally in the interviews).

According to the interviewees, progress, that is, the transition between these two moments in time, was either rapid or gradual. There was talk of "steps" of progress, of "jumps," and "leaping forward," as well as "breakthroughs" and "revolutions." These included electrification, motorization, access to running water and bathrooms, refrigeration and washing machines – "automatics" – that is, automatic washing machines, apartment buildings, and finally computers, mobile phones, and the Internet. Both younger and older interviewees talked about earlier and contemporary inventions, although probably none of the younger ones mentioned electrification. The youngest interviewees also said that the world had either expanded or that it had grown smaller. Paradoxically, the point is the same: it is faster and easier to get to distant places, and it is also quick and easy to get information and even to contact distant parts of the world.

Alicja, the owner of a medium-sized company, quoted her grandfather's thoughts on television, which she had heard in childhood. The man had wondered what his deceased spouse would have said if she had seen a television set, given that she had been accustomed only to the cable radio. She had been shocked by the advent of wireless radio and been unable to understand how it worked (Pos4, G4K5). This anecdote was also a form of descriptive surprise at progress. It should be mentioned that although this story seems original, versions of it have occurred in earlier ethnographic research (Zalewska 2011).

People who implemented the idea of progress in their everyday lives were viewed positively. The interviewees used the terms "progressive person" and "modern person" to describe a person who eagerly acquires and implements new technologies. Such terms appeared in the statements of three people, with varying professions and from different cities, who belonged to either the Little Reform and March 1968 generation (G3) or to the generation of subjectivity and ties (G4). All three used the terms to describe their parents. In one case, it was the interviewee's mother – a miner's wife – who was modern because she bought home technology whenever it became available, to make her life easier. She bought her first electric washing machine from a person who had built it himself. In the other two cases, it was the fathers who willingly implemented the new technologies of the time. Such an attitude can be described as convergent with the first two features of a "modern personality" (Inkeles 1976), which are openness to new experiences and readiness to accept social change. However, in relation to the material collected, the term encompasses not only enthusiasm for

progress, but also the financial capacity necessary to acquire inventions. The parents mentioned were well-to-do.

These statements indicate a strong positive evaluation of the categories of progress, which is not only part of the discourse of progress – the basic category of progress is obviously constructed as positive, but, as will be seen in the next section, also results from the experience of the interviewees.

In the above paragraphs, I have described how my interviewees understood progress. As you can see, this understanding of progress is linked to the perception of reality itself as constantly evolving and leading to a bright future. Below I will show that while the basic statement of the progress discourse – that “progress must move on” – was distributed in an egalitarian manner among the interviewees, they nevertheless perceive their own place in the discourse of progress differently depending on their social position (point three of Foucault’s analysis).

Jan, the director of a state-owned enterprise, considers that he is surrounded by progress, to the degree that it would be difficult to avoid, and that progress is actually adopted “without conviction,” as a natural part of life.

[...] We had progress everywhere, because it forced itself upon us (Pos 11, G1 K5).

On the other hand, two married entrepreneurs (Pos4, G4 K5) pointed to the feeling of pressure from the state to be at the forefront of progress (and this was right after the political transformation). The issue was the government’s introduction of the VAT, which stimulated the computerization of companies. According to the couple, writing out invoices was so time consuming that they would have had to hire twice as many employees. They felt compelled to buy a computer.

Marian, a member of the middle class, had viewed himself as an observer of the progress occurring outside his community. He decided that through his own efforts he would position himself “within the progress.” Before his wedding and his future wife’s move into his home, Marian – despite his father’s opposition – personally designed and built a bathroom in the place of a former pantry.¹⁰ He did not justify his decision in an orderly manner. He casually referred to the idea of the need for progress and hygiene, and to his youth and ability, without pointing to any specific inspirations:

You know, I was young and so it seemed to me that I was enterprising. I wanted to do something, well... [...] you lived there somewhere, you went out, you saw that people had different things, maybe here... [...] I mean, no, because I say, well, progress, well, it has to be like that. [...] And I say – but what I appreciate more... is hygiene (Pos5 G3 K3).

Others indicated that they had acquired new technology when the external infrastructure changed and they had to adapt to it. The replacement of a single-channel television set when a second television program was launched and a model

¹⁰ This situation can also be interpreted using the innovation diffusion model (Rogers 1962). According to this theory, buyers are divided into innovators, early followers, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Marian would probably be one of the early followers, because he adopted what he had already seen in others, but in his local community he was the first.

was needed that could change channels is one example. Supply mechanisms were widely noted: when “new items” entered stores, older items became less expensive and thus more accessible. The mechanism of fashion was also important. There was social emulation; new equipment was bought because it had become widespread and everyone else in the person’s social environment owned it. Thus, for a large number of the interviewees, progress was a kind of external phenomenon that required adaptation: either the technical infrastructure (e.g., television) changed, which entailed the need to buy newer technology (a receiver), or everyone already had the product, and the store prices made the article accessible.¹¹

Some interviewees pointed out that “It’s not so much that you need to go with the spirit of the times as that you need at least to be in the tail end of the spirit of the times” (Pos 8, G4 K4). They felt that they were lagging behind – that is, progress was not something natural for them as it was for Jan – but on the other hand, it was not possible to resist the discourse and be situated outside it. This was due to the fact that changes in infrastructure at the supra-individual level, demand mechanisms, and fashion contributed to continuous change in the material element of technology domestication practices in the social environment of the interviewees. In addition, the propaganda of progress had an influence and the importance of technology domestication practices was internalized, as shown in the following quote. One of the working-class families bought an automatic washing machine after their Frania rotor washing machine broke down:

Well, because there are little children, because it’s about not going back, only – let’s say – this step forward, right? (Pos9 G5 K2)

They were inclined by necessity to make the purchase – their machine broke. However, they did not choose a machine such as the one they had had; they placed themselves in the discourse of progress. They justified this by citing the importance of progress, but materiality – as described above – probably also played a role.

In summary, for the representatives of the upper class, progress was something natural, at their fingertips, although it was also forced upon them by state regulations. For the rest, it took effort to be at the center of the progress discourse, that is, to be progressive. They were within range of the progress discourse, but were rather at the “tail end” (to paraphrase the interviewee’s earlier statement). It was basically impossible to maintain their daily practices in the face of changes to the entire social system. The purchase of the first TV or washing machine was a shock – a huge change in everyday practices. On the other hand, subsequent, newer models did not require such thorough changes in habitual patterns of action (Kaufmann 2004).

When preparing to analyze the meaning of technology domestication practices, I thought that different historical generations would use different language to talk about the domestication of technology, as well as about various technologies. I expected that the war generation and the ZMP generation would speak of progress

¹¹ So these were the “late majority” and “laggards” (Rogers 1962).

and comfort (more men would speak of progress and more women of comfort), while for the Thaw generation the most important category would be novelty. In turn, in subsequent generations, I expected to find other meanings. It is surprising, however, that these ways of speaking turned out to be quite uniform regardless of the generational affiliation. Only the transformation generation (G5) perceives progress a little more narrowly than the other generations surveyed (see p. 9). I think this uniformity also supports the interpretation that these statements are events of the progress discourse.

Interviewees are currently seeing a “breakdown in progress” in non-ICT fields, for example, in car engines and the home appliances industry. In their opinion, the new models have a similar functionality to the previous ones, that is, as Gilles Lipovetsky (1987) notes, the changes are minor as a rule and implementation does not change much in everyday life. On the one hand, the implementation of the new models is required by the market mechanism of planned obsolescence – that is, manufacturers design goods in such a way that they have a limited lifespan and then become inoperable – and on the other hand, by the fashion mechanism.

Apart from the discourse of progress, there are statements which express a negative attitude toward progress, based on aversion and fear. Only in the case of one interviewee did I notice a consistently negative attitude toward technological progress. Rajmund, a university lecturer from the youngest surveyed generation (the transformation generation), he calls himself a technophobe. He claims that the only product of technological progress that he really appreciates is the bicycle. His dislike of the others is motivated mainly by concern for the good of the planet. It is worth noting that the transformation generation does not have an incorporated memory (Kaufmann 2004) of what daily life was like when so-called home technologies were not yet available. In other words, in this case, the person rejecting technology is in a sense unfamiliar with the consequences: he has no memory of living without technology. Moreover, he is not actually able to reject technology; he functions and has always functioned within its framework.

In the case of most of the interviewees, an ambivalent or negative attitude toward technology was related to the problematic effects of technological development. Not only Bauman (1991) but also ordinary people perceive the ambivalence of modernity, situating themselves outside the discourse of progress. The first, often-mentioned effect is acceleration of the pace of life. Some interviewees, in pointing to this effect, claimed that they were neutral in regard to it; others said they had negative feelings about it. The immediate reasons for acceleration that the interviewees indicated were (1) heavy traffic, (2) TV as a “time consumer,” that is, spending several hours a day in front of the TV screen instead of in social gatherings, and (3) a labor market that promotes a sense of insecurity, making the interviewees work more hours a day than they considered appropriate. The acceleration of the pace of life was felt as a lack of free time, including time for socializing.

Some of the interviewees pointed to their real dependence on the technological infrastructure that supports our daily functioning (cf. Krajewski 2009), and above all

on electricity. In one of the interviews, Alicja and her husband Paweł (members of the transformation generation and owners of a medium-sized company) considered the possible regression of civilization if the electricity were to be cut off for a long time.

According to the interviewees, technology helps a person but also makes a person weaker and lazier. It results, for example, in the weakening of the hand muscles, which are no longer needed to wring the laundry, and of the brain, which, for example, no longer has to “figure out which way to go” but just “turns on the navigation.” In their further reasoning, the interviewees pointed to a dependence on technology – when it fails, humans are left helpless. On the other hand, two interviewees from the transformation generation, owners of a medium-sized company, claimed that thanks to new technologies the human mind develops. One of them (Alicja) believed that solely new technologies developed the mind: for example, television first caused minds to develop but later had a stultifying effect.

Technology is supposed to weaken not only the body and mind, but also interpersonal relations – this topic appeared both in connection with the accelerating pace of life and in statements about human laziness. Jarek, a computer scientist from the transformation generation, has always been fascinated by computers and therefore buys various technical gadgets that diversify his life. His statements show that a gadget is a novelty that he does not need but still wants to have. At the same time, he goes so far as to say that technology is a threat to humanity, as he understands the essence of humanity to be close interpersonal ties:

I am a traditionalist, I just am... and more and more often I simply can't understand this world. I'm an IT specialist and I work in large companies, the kind with modern computers, so technology is not a problem for me, but I think that due to this technology we've simply lost some humanity, a kind of coexistence. I know that people remember their childhood fondly...but, well, when I was a child, you would go out in the yard and play football. We would get together and the bonds between people were completely healthier. Now there is no such thing. (Waw4, G5 K4)

If we look at the statements that fall outside the discourse of progress, we will notice a certain regularity about them. Fears of the accelerating pace of life, of becoming dependent on technology, of weakening social ties, and contaminating nature – they all have a common element: they are associated with the true nature of man, free of the limitations of culture, with paradise and unspoiled nature. While the progress discourse analyzed here dates from the beginning of positive science, at that same time a second discourse classic for contemporary culture was born in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau – a discourse that highly valued the natural state and not the achievements of civilization. In the materials analyzed, the classic structuralist opposition between culture and nature can be seen (Lévi-Strauss 1955). The discourse of progress with its standard-bearing electrification symbolizes culture, of course, and the fear of losing the true nature of man and the planet symbolizes nature.

In summary, statements about the domestication of technology by interviewees from all generations and professional categories refer to the discourse of progress.

The discourse of progress is a knowledge-creation system which the socialist state adopted from scientific discourse. As part of the discourse of progress, the socialist state was actively constructing reality in terms of constant, positive change. For the interviewees, the discourse of progress encompassed practices that enabled, encouraged, or forced them to adapt to technology. First, the discourse made that domestication possible because it made the interviewees, regardless of social or generational differences, perceive reality through the lens of the progress discourse. In their opinion, progress is obvious and necessary. Second, the strongly positive evaluation of progress in this discourse encouraged some people actively to endeavor to introduce home technologies. Third, it forced the adoption of technology because functioning outside the discourse of progress was not possible. The discourse not only constructed a certain meaning, it also encompassed practices and social relations. The domestication of technology was certainly a practice that constituted the discourse of progress. Through infrastructural changes, the supply mechanism, and fashion, the discourse of progress incorporated all citizens, who were more or less willing to succumb to the practices of domesticating technology. Thus, the discourse of progress was inclusive to all citizens. Within it, however, various positions could be taken. Jan, director of a large state-owned enterprise in the Polish People's Republic (K5), saw himself as being at the heart of progress: progress was a given for him. On the other hand, members of occupational categories that can be called middle class (K3 and K4) or working class (K2) had to make some effort to find themselves at the center of the progress discourse, that is, to quickly adopt new inventions. Without this effort, they were at the tail end of progress, that is, they were forced to accept inventions that were already obvious and necessary in the system. There were also generational differences. In the war and ZMP generations (G1), Thaw generation (G2), Little Reform and March 1968 generation (G3), and the generation of subjectivity and community ties (G4), the discourse of progress was dominant in the statements of all the interviewees. On the other hand, in the youngest generation – the generation of the transformation – there were two people who primarily criticized the discourse of progress or for whom it was strongly controversial. The first person was Rajmond, who called himself a technophobe and who spoke coherently from a position associated with Rousseau's concept. The second person was Jarek, whose statements contained two conflicting approaches to technology: the discourse of progress and a way of thinking rooted in Rousseau's thought.

Why is the generation of the transformation different? Two explanations can be offered. During their youth, the socialist state was in decline and the discourse of progress had a weaker influence on members of this generation. They did not interpret the changes taking place in their lives in the same terms as previously. The second explanation is that they simply have not experienced such a radical change in their daily life (see p. 9); for as far back as they can remember they have lived with electricity and running water. Consequently, they simply do not appreciate the great change that has taken place, which older generations perceive in terms produced by the discourse of progress – that is, as progress.

COMFORT NARRATIVES:

“THERE’S NO COMPARISON WITH LIFE NOW. EH, LIFE WAS HORRIBLE”

Sztompka (2010) notes that overall, absolute progress – by which he means progress in all spheres of life – is utopian. We always have to relate the concept to some value we are approaching, to a certain criterion. Although Sztompka does not provide such a criterion, I suggest comfort as a partial criterion¹² for progress. In modern times, living in comfort came to be treated as the desired state (Shove 2003). A new idea of living in conditions of comfort, familiarity, warmth, coziness, and ergonomics developed and in capitalist societies these qualities began to be ensured, and to be provided as services. Modernization manifested itself in an increase in services providing comfort (Maldonado 1996). Historically, the idea of comfort has been associated with the hegemony of the bourgeoisie in the early modern era and the rise of the middle class. Comfort was an idea initially popular among the bourgeoisie. It was located somewhere between luxury (a privilege of the aristocracy) and necessity – living as a “struggle for survival” among the poorest (Skowrońska 2015). In the modern era, when the bourgeoisie won in the economic rivalry with the aristocracy (Elias 2011), this idea gained importance and spread. The historian Victoria De Grazia (2005) describes a process where first in the US in the interwar period, and then in Western Europe in the postwar years, living in comfort came to be the common expectation of all social classes. The rationale for universal comfort was equating morality and hygiene, cleanliness and dignity. In a word, it was believed that a hygienic population was more willing to submit to the laws of a modern state. It was a way of integrating the masses into the structures of the state. The “right to comfort” promised the population mental and physical health (Maldonado 1996; Skowrońska 2015). As we can see, the improvement of housing conditions in capitalist countries is described in the literature in terms of comfort achieved through market mechanisms.

The concept of comfort has two basic aspects: privacy – the warmth of a home isolated from the outside world, and comfort – an aspect related to the convenience and ergonomics of the material objects used in the home (Skowrońska 2015). Comfort, in the form of a dwelling for every family and easy-to-use and effort-reducing household equipment, became popular in all social classes: in the USA in the interwar period and in Europe in the postwar period (De Grazia 2005). However, as I will show on the basis of the collected materials, it was subject to progress. In other words, the standard of comfort was continually rising: certain objects or material infrastructure were first a luxury, then a convenience, then a necessity. Assuming that comfort is meant to be for everyone, the necessity as a certain standard of living for the poor has been eradicated: everyone lives in comfort. In addition, more and more items once considered luxurious begin to be considered matters of comfort. This was progress

¹² I quote the concept of a partial progress criterion after Sztompka (2010), referring to the conclusion that it is difficult to talk about progress in all areas of life, and it is easier to distinguish a specific area in which we evaluate progress. Such a sphere is precisely a partial criterion for progress.

in terms of comfort in modern societies. For example, just before the Second World War, one bathroom shared between several apartments in a building was a luxury, that is, it was infrastructure available only to a few, usually those placed high in the social hierarchy. In the 1970s, such an arrangement was a state far below the common standard of comfort. Małgorzata Szpakowska describes such an arrangement with the word “horror” (Szpakowska 2008). This advance in housing conditions in accord with the comfort criterion reflects the economic concept of “standard of living” used in consumption research. The scope of the concept includes the housing situation, the possession of durable consumer goods, the equipping of households with electricity, gas, water, and sewer systems, and other aspects of the population’s life. The standard of living around the world began to be examined by the United Nations in the 1950s, and at the national level in Poland by the Central Statistical Office. When analyzing living standards, it is important to compare the situation with the previous years; the assessment is positive if the level of comfort has increased (Piasny 1993) and thus that progress can be expected to continue. This concept has penetrated everyday thinking; many times during the interviews I heard about the increasing standard of living.

I will use the concept of narrative to analyze the material in regard to the category of comfort. Human experience is immersed in the body and emotions (Csordas 1994), and is captured *post factum* in the consciousness precisely by means of narrative (Cohen, Rapport 1995). Narratives are a way of interpreting experience into speech, gestures, and as a form of awareness (Rapport 2000). The interviewees’ statements pertaining to the category of comfort seem to be deeply immersed in the body and emotions: they seem to be a way of organizing experiences related to the domestication of technology. Let us apply this to the three elements of technology domestication practices: meaning, materiality, and skills/competences. While the discourse of progress was situated at the junction of the element of meaning and the element of materiality – and it was the first contact citizens had with domesticating technology – in the narratives of comfort, the interviewees talk about the next stage, the stage of implementing practices of domesticating technology, that is, the introduction of the third element – changes of competences and skills.

There was a strong contrast in the interviews between the effort, difficulties, and inconveniences of the world before the domestication of technology and the convenience, comfort, facilitation, and even relief of life afterwards. So the narrative was not about a process taking place in time but rather a clear memory of life “before” and “after.” In regards to comfort, there were large differences between the statements of members of different historical generations. In some cases, the narratives about the torment of daily life for women of the oldest, ZMP and Thaw generations, were even dramatic. The word “heavy” was used in every instance: “it wore a person out”; it even “killed a person”; a person “did a heap of work” and had to “carry,” “haul,” “light fires,” “scrub,” “shovel snow”; it was “beyond a woman’s strength” because “there was nothing at all”; “there’s no comparison even” to today’s conditions. “The conditions were extremely difficult”; “we had a hard life”; “heavens – that a person endured all that.” In some cases, women reported the negative health effects of such work. It got a little

better over time. In one case, a husband had been the initiator of changes; he got a voucher for a washing machine and arranged a gas cylinder. Among the technologies that made life easier, the Frania washing machine and a new apartment with a bathroom and gas stove were mentioned. A flat in a new building was said to have “all the comforts” and a private bathroom was a luxury. The Frania rotor washing machine was often considered a luxury and was associated with a sense of relief. Especially if the Frania had a wringer, only “half the work” was left. The advent of the washing machine was “an event.” “Oh my, it was an event” (Waw12 G1C5). In a few cases, men helped to wash in the Frania machine; they turned the wringer or wrung the clothes manually if the washing machine did not have a wringer, or they carried water when there was no close access to water. “Now it’s easier”; appliances “make life easier,” “make work more efficient” – such statements were very common. Now life is lived on “another level.” One of the interviewees, Jadwiga, a single parent who raised three children in the second half of the 1960s and later said, “now it’s like I’m in heaven,” because she has a small studio apartment for herself, which is equipped according to current standards and which her daughter cleans when she comes visiting.

As for the next generation – of the Little Reform and March 1968 – washing in the Frania machine was mentioned first among inconveniences such as carrying coal to the basement, the hard physical work of preparing a bath without access to a bathroom or running water, and the lack of a telephone. In the individual interviews, in regard to family life in childhood, the Frania rotor washing machine was mentioned as a convenience and facilitation for mothers – “it was easier.” But during the dyad interviews, in regard to the couple’s life together, washing in a Frania machine was mentioned as the greatest burden: “when it comes to manual work it was much more difficult,” “labor-intensive, heavy, a terrible thing.” The neighbor of one of the couples did not cook dinner on laundry days because she was so occupied with that work. It was necessary to wash, starch, iron. It was “manual labor”; it was “strenuous,” such an “amount of work” that it was always an “event” and a “special family day.” At the same time, one couple mentioned that life had been hard but happy; they had taken pleasure in more things than they do today. No member of the previous generations said anything similar. They claimed that no one felt such a life was difficult because it was normal and that they understood the weight and discomfort of their life then only by comparing it to their current more comfortable conditions. On the contrary, the older generations claimed that they felt the overwhelming burden and torment of everyday existence on an ongoing basis. Among the technologies that made life easier for the Little Reform generation the most frequently mentioned were the bathroom – a “real toilet,” “hot water” – an “incomparable passage,” and also the automatic washing machine, called an “automatic.” With the Frania machine you had to “be there and wash,” and with the automatic you could “turn it on and leave.”

In the generation of subjectivity and ties there were many fewer complaints about the inconveniences and efforts of daily life. There were complaints about washing diapers in a Frania and boiling them in a boiler at an early stage of the household. Then there were complaints about moving between dwellings while waiting for one’s

own apartment, and about the small size of apartments – a 10, 11, or 12-meter room for a family. At the same time, in this generation’s childhood, such an apartment was perceived as good conditions and even luxury, especially when there was also a bathroom and kitchen, but in the generation’s adulthood such a size was considered an inconvenience in the organization of life. The lack of a telephone, the unavailability of various products, and carrying coal from the basement were considered inconveniences. However, it was mentioned that this was normal then and had not been felt as a discomfort at the time. Lack of comfort or too low a level of comfort was noticed in comparing oneself to others. This was the case of the interviewee who had to wear knit stockings as a teenager, while her friends already had elastic tights.

For this generation, facilitation technologies and the moment of achieving comfort was a relative issue. They considered that they had lived well in childhood because they knew nothing else but that “you get used to what’s better quickly and easily”; and that expectations change and a “person gets comfortable.” So they perceive the possible lack of comfort by comparing it to the present day. As technologies that bring comfort, they mention traveling by car, a larger car, a telephone, renovation services in the apartment (instead of doing all the work on your own), new housing with a bathroom and a gas stove, where you do not need to carry coal and it is cleaner, and there is an automatic washing machine. This relativity of comfort is well illustrated by an anecdote told by one couple: at one time, one of the aspects that made them visit their parents for longer and spend the night was the fact that they could take a bath there – their parents already had a bathroom, and they did not. They bathed at work, in a public bathhouse, and pod prysznicem at the swimming pool. At present, however, they would not travel overnight anywhere where it was not possible to take a bath. This shows how what they considered comfortable living conditions had changed during their lives.

W: We even went to your parents sometimes, right? We stayed there for the night, for example, or something...but somehow, well, you didn't think about such things – that you have to bathe every morning and evening...

M: I mean, it wasn't a matter of discomfort – it was rather that there was that benefit – that we could go to my parents and take a bath (Pos6 G4 K3).

This anecdote not only shows that a home without a bathroom was considered comfortable “before” and that “after” it was considered uncomfortable but it also allows the process of domesticating the bathroom to be traced. First, the advantages of a bathroom were appreciated (“it was a real plus”) – the element of the meaning of the practice – then they had a bathroom – the material element – and in the end they changed their habits to include daily bathing (the element of embodiment, of skills and competences).

In the transformation generation, a certain turnaround occurs. Having a refrigerator, a television, and a computer is considered basic. One of the married couples, the IT specialist Jarek and his wife, had lived for some time in the unfinished house of their parents, where they had had “reduced comfort.” They had had to prepare a bath

by bringing water to the bathroom on an upper floor. They had had no electricity for some time. They had heated with wood, which they had to chop. They endured the cold, and treated these conditions as a kind of amusement, a “game” of survival and coping. The moment has thus arrived when a return to traditional daily activities can be seen as an attraction, a game. A similar situation occurred in another marriage: for some time the couple lived in an apartment heated by a wood stove, which was an attraction for the husband, although the wife was looking forward to returning to “normal living conditions, that is, a bathroom, bathtub, hot water, and radiators” (Item10 G5 K5). In turn, Rajmond believed – at the beginning of his marriage – that a refrigerator and a washing machine would not be needed at all. However, daily life convinced him that, after all, these appliances were useful, though they never had a TV set. As a luxury, this generation remembers cell phones, dishwashers, shampoos, deodorants, sanitary products for women, disposable diapers, cleaning products, and large, comfortable bathrooms, which are not only for keeping clean but also for relaxation. The inconveniences mentioned include problems with supply in the late Polish People’s Republic and the associated contriving in order to buy the articles necessary for life. One couple noted that, by comparison, “kids have a simpler life,” meaning there are full shelves in the stores. Another nuisance was the small size of apartments. Rajmund and his wife did not live together for two years after their wedding, until they got their own apartment.

In summary, comfort narratives are a way of organizing experiences related to the domestication of technology. The assimilation of this element of practices, which is related to the implementation of new operating patterns, that is, skills/competences, emerges the strongest in the statements. Especially in the case of the older generations – those of the war, ZMP, and Thaw – the narratives are a paean to life after the domestication of technology.¹³ The pre-domestication experience is presented as very difficult. There is a lot of generational variation when it comes to comfort narratives. The representatives of the Little Reform generation perceived life as being difficult before the domestication of technology, but they do not use such dramatic terms as the older generations. Viewed from the present, the problems with the small size of dwellings and with supply, which were recalled by people from the generation of subjectivity and the transformation generation, also seemed quite troublesome. These generational differences in narratives are due to the enormous extent of comfort (both in objective living conditions and subjective expectations) that has come with the domestication of technology. The huge change in comfort is illustrated by the Frania washing machine, which was a luxury for the ZMP generation and an ordeal for the Little Reform generation. Within the discourse of progress, it can be said that there has been tremendous progress in terms of comfort. This is how the interviewees perceive the phenomenon, and that is why they are so enthusiastic about progress, even if they are situated in its “tail end.” In returning to the contemporary discourse

¹³ There are also signs of resistance to the domestication of individual technologies in the statements, as discussed by Marta Skowrońska in this thematic section.

of the social sciences, it can be said that the process of domesticating technology caused major changes in the daily life of Poles in the second half of the twentieth century. The practices of technology domestication were introduced as part of the discourse of progress and the category of progress was the first meaning assigned to home technologies. However, through the practices of domesticating technology, another meaning emerged from the experience: facilitation, improvement, comfort, relief. In the statements, the two meanings come together. As I wrote earlier, there has been progress in comfort; the separation that I introduced here is the result of analytical work to understand how this process works.

CONCLUSIONS

I will start by answering my research questions. From the interviewees' statements, I distinguished the two most common ways of talking about the domestication of technology: in terms of progress and comfort. These ways of speaking reveal that the categories of progress and comfort are the essential meanings that organize the practices of domesticating technology. The concept of the progress discourse turned out to be very helpful in analyzing the categories of progress. The progress discourse is a system of knowledge production; it constructs a perception of reality undergoing constant change, which is positively assessed. The knowledge generated is rooted in the institution of the socialist state and serves to legitimize its actions. Whether the interviewees perceived themselves to be at the center of the progress discourse or to its side depended on power relations and social position. The statements of members of all the historical generations who grew up in the Polish People's Republic were dominated by the progress discourse. On the other hand, among members of the transformation generation, the progress discourse in the statements of some individuals was dominated by another approach, representing nature, or there was a struggle between the progress discourse and the latter position. Practices of technology domestication are part of the progress discourse: the implementation of home technologies and the propaganda of progress were elements of the progress discourse in the period of the Polish People's Republic. When the meaning of progress and material infrastructure (meaning and materiality are two of the three elements in the operationalization of social practice) were already present in the daily life of the interviewees, the next stage followed: shaping new habits (the third element of practice). At this stage, the second meaning of technology domestication practices was taking shape, namely comfort. I used the concept of narrative to analyze the category of comfort. In talking about comfort, the interviewees referred to personal, incorporated experiences. There is a generational variation in comfort narratives. The generations of the war, the ZMP, and the Thaw talk about the transition from “drudgery” to “paradise” – that is, these are dramatic stories. Each subsequent generation captures this transition in the process of domesticating technology in increasingly weaker terms; the change in comfort is smaller for each successive historical generation, but the members of

each generation have experienced noticeable changes in comfort throughout their life. A huge change in comfort is illustrated by the example of the Frania washing machine, which was a luxury for the ZMP generation, and an ordeal for the Little Reform generation. The interviewees understood the increase in comfort associated with the domestication of technology in terms of the progress discourse. This could also feed back into their strongly positive evaluation of progress.

Further work should deal with the process of producing knowledge within the progress discourse, that is, with the statements of socialist state agencies. Here, I analyzed the presence of this discourse in the daily life of my interviewees. The influence of the progress discourse produced by state institutions was certainly overlapped by messages from the West showing the high standard of living in capitalist societies, as I wrote in the introduction. These messages were interpreted in Poland through the lens of the progress discourse. In this text, I did not have space to address this motif, which appeared in the materials.

An issue that still needs to be explored is gender differences in the meanings given to technology domestication practices. Based on previous research, I expected that the category of comfort would be more pronounced among women, and that among men the category of progress would be more pronounced. The interviews conducted as part of the research analyzed here were longer and more detailed. Women spoke in line with the progress discourse and men used comfort narratives. In any case, this issue requires further attention.

The next stage of research on practices of technology domestication will be an analysis of the process of incorporating these practices, that is, acquiring daily habits of using them (in practice theory, the element of skills/competences). Detailed analyses of the acquisition of various technologies will be conducted as part of the National Science Center project “The Consumer Revolution in Poland.”

On the basis of my analysis, I conclude that the progress discourse was a key factor in the consumer revolution in the Polish People’s Republic. It had a very strong influence on daily life and changed practices to involve greater flexibility and the adoption of new solutions in the name of progress. In fact, it functioned on the principle of social emulation – a person at least had to be “in the tail end of” progress, that is, to buy what others already had.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Marta Skowrońska, two anonymous reviewers, and above all Joanna Mroczkowska, editor in chief of *Polish Ethnography*, for inspiring comments on the first version of this article.

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“AND IT ALL HAPPENED IN OUR LIFETIME” – PROGRESS AND COMFORT: THE MEANING OF TECHNOLOGY DOMESTICATION PRACTICES

Key words: comfort, consumer society, domestication of technology, modernity, Peoples Republic of Poland, Poland, social practices, progress

The domestication of technology in People’s Republic of Poland was the key factor in the shift towards consumer society. Drawing upon ethnographic data, this article discusses the meanings of the social practices of domestication of technologies in the second half of the twentieth century in Poland. The practices of domestication of technologies were organized around the meanings of progress and comfort. The discourse of progress was legitimized and propagated by the socialist state. The narratives of comfort were rooted in everyday experience of the interlocutors. The meanings of the practices of domestication of technology differed among historical generations.

Translation of article: Michelle Granas

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Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe

Fot. Wystawa „Nowoczesność w każdym domu” w Powiatowym Domu Kultury w Nakle, 1968 rok.
Źródło: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.