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## WHY DO WE HAVE TO TURN ON THIS WASHING MACHINE? THE PROCESSES OF DOMESTICATING HOUSEHOLD TECHNOLOGY – SITUATIONS OF RESISTANCE

### INTRODUCTION

Reductionist approaches to the issue of technology's spread define resistance to new technology as “technophobia” (Brosnan 1998), thus strengthening the ideology of progress, a certain normative postulate about the necessity to adapt to new technological innovations. Those who stray from the path of progress suffer from a “phobia” – a disorder, a disease. The use of words such as “technophobia” indicates that the dominant narrative of the need for development and progress can be oppressive. Sally Wyatt begins her article on this subject with the confession that she has never owned a car (2007, p. 67). At the same time, she emphasizes that she has passed the driving test (twice), and in extremely difficult weather conditions (a snowstorm), thus her reason for not using a car is not lack of competence. Wyatt completes her autobiographical statement with a confession that her social circles could not understand her decision not to have a car and described the choice as “weird,” “abnormal,” or even a manifestation of immaturity (a “real” adult drives a car). This experience caused Wyatt to reflect on whether people who do not use technology are considered disadvantaged and in need of help or recovery, education, or admonition, as her friends had thought in regard to her. Wyatt emphasizes her own skill – she could drive a car even in a snowstorm – and gives several arguments justifying the rationality of her choice (economics, the environment, concern for her own and others' health and life). Wyatt's arguments are intended to convince the reader that her decision not to drive is as valid, rational, and commendable as her friends' decision to drive. In other words, Wyatt argues that non-use does not have to be defined as inferior to use; it does not have to stem from a lack of competence/skill or from economic deprivation. Wyatt, however, does not explain from whence non-use derives, except in her own example, in which she points to a deliberate and rational argument – the balance of advantages and disadvantages. She also shows only two possibilities: being an active user or a non-user.

In this article<sup>1</sup>, I will look at the reasons for people's reluctance, resistance, or reserve in regard to certain home appliances (devices for cleaning, washing, and cooking),

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as well as the practices associated with such attitudes, and I will point out that in addition to the two extremes of being a user or a non-user there are also intermediate points, such as partial use, mixing old and new technologies, a partial return to older technologies, unusual uses of new technologies, and treating older technologies as a form of security. I will also show that resistance can appear in different phases of the process of domesticating technology. In my analysis, I will apply the following four phases of domestication identified by Silverstone, Hirsch, and Morley (1992):

1. appropriation: an object/technology leaves the commodity exchange system, is bought and becomes an object of possession; it crosses the threshold between the formal and moral economy;
2. objectification: the object/technology enters the categorization and classification system of a household; it objectifies the possessor's sense of self (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981), identity, values, roles, and tastes; it is placed in a certain space, among other objects;
3. incorporation: the object/technology is surrounded by practices, the temporal and spatial boundaries/structures in the home change; there may be conflicts regarding the object and its use;
4. conversion: a kind of expression – the transfer of practices toward the outside, making them public – conversations about the object/technology and its use, the manifestation of competence in using the object/technology, changes in practices (available to others and changes influenced by others).

My analysis combines the theoretical perspectives arising from the material turn and the theory of practices discussed in the second part of the article (“Research...”). In the context of resistance to the home technologies of interest to me, my synthesis of these perspectives can be summarized in the form of the following assumptions:

- incorporation of new technology into the home network of objects, practices, and meanings is a complex process, not necessarily linear and sometimes oppressive (Sørensen 2006; Wyatt 2003; Hartmann 2006; Ward 2006; Silverstone 1992)
- new home objects / technologies have a special character due to the “embodied,” habitualized nature of the home space. Technologies entering the home from the public sphere violate the border between the familiar and the foreign and are therefore associated with practices of control (Dant 2007; Edensor 2002; Kaufmann 2001; Schmidt 2010; Sørensen 2006);
- in accord with Actor-Network Theory, I assume that the new technology has the potential to create a new network around itself, disturb the existing network, and modify existing scripts (Akrich 1992; Sørensen 2006).
- home practices regarding technology not only express the characteristics of individuals but are also carriers of information; they contain a record of socially established ways of “dealing with basic existential problems and the relationships between people built on them” (Kaufmann 2004; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004).

At the most general level, the feeling of resistance or reserve in regard to new technology can therefore be explained as a fear of interfering with an existing network of relationships, meanings, and material objects. Although the network assumes a mutual connection or even entanglement of components, it is worth distinguishing these elements for analytical purposes. In my analysis, I distinguished the following sources of resistance to new technologies

1. disturbance of the feeling of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) – pleasure resulting from performing activities in a habitual and automatic manner, the developed synchronization between the body and materiality;
2. disturbance of the natural order of things (see also “mental map,” Kaufmann 2004) – the spatial and material arrangement in the dwelling ensures a sense of stability, durability, or even security (everything is in its place, it is known what is what);
3. disruption of the convention of performance practices – standards and cultural ideals connected with the understanding of acceptable activities, the quality of their performance, and the effect, that is, how clean things should be;
4. disruption of the network of relationships between household members, that is, of who is responsible for performing an activity;
5. disagreement at the level of beliefs about what is right, moral, proper, as well as dissonances between different fragments of knowledge and beliefs (e.g., buying a new technology is a luxury – something immoral – but is also attractive) and between an opinion or belief and an embodied practice (cf. Kaufmann 2001, Schmidt 2010).

I will now give examples of resistance at each of the stages, and in the third part, in presenting the results of my research, I will provide a detailed discussion of the five sources of resistance listed above.<sup>2</sup>

### *Appropriation*

In this phase, resistance is expressed in hesitating to buy an appliance or deciding not to buy it. This may be, for example, a situation where a person for whom washing dishes is a habitual activity, associated with a feeling of flow, is not convinced that he or she should buy a dishwasher. However, various pressures make the decision difficult.

### *Objectification*

In this phase, the object or technology crosses the threshold of the dwelling; a place needs to be found for it in the layout of the dwelling. Then comes the process of getting used to the new equipment, observing it, hesitating about when and how (or if at all) to use it. In this phase, the failure to use the technology may be associated with a lack of synchronization between the body and the device, or the technology may not fit

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<sup>2</sup> The research material did not allow me to illustrate the entire matrix of the situation, and thus to indicate all five sources of resistance in all four phases of domestication. It can be stated with certainty, however, that resistance can appear in each phase.

into the home system (then the user “does not think” to take the food processor out of the cupboard or sweeps the floor without thinking of using the vacuum cleaner).

### *Incorporation*

At this stage, the device is in use, but use is limited, controlled, and/or both old and new technologies are used in parallel. Users only use the new equipment in certain situations or on certain days, for example, the dishwasher is only used when there are guests and the washing machine is only for washing linen.

### *Conversion*

At this stage, after a certain period of using the new technology, there is either a return to the old technology, or use of the new technology is modified (a change of script). This could be, for example, a situation where, in the countryside, there is a return to the use of a rotary washing machine of the “Frانيا”<sup>3</sup> type for washing the dirtiest work clothes.

I will now move on to discussing the state of the art in home-appliance domestication, and then go on to discuss the research results in detail.

## RESEARCH INTO DOMESTIC TECHNOLOGIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

The social aspects of the functioning of home technologies can be (and have been) analyzed from many perspectives. Until the mid-1980s, the most popular theories were those of technological determinism, which assumes a rational individual and a linear process of adapting new technology. Today, such concepts are criticized – both for methodological individualism and, more generally, for a reductionist, simplified vision of reality, close to common thinking.

For example, the popular category of “influence” – the impact of television on the family, the impact of the telephone on relationships – ignored all the complexities that accompanied the entry of new technology into social life. Moreover, some concepts in the field of the sociology of consumption seem to oversimplify the process of new technologies entering the home space. As indicated by Josephine Mylan and Dale Southerton (2017), these works often limited consumption to the question of individual choice, considering technological change a matter of the need to adopt effective innovation, or presenting everyday life and its routines as obstacles to be overcome in order to change behavior in the proper direction.

We observe a significant shift in the reflection on consumption in the works of Arjun Appadurai (1986), Igor Kopytoff (1986), and Daniel Miller (1987); this shift is most concisely summarized in Appadurai’s words, “goods, just like people, have a social life” (1986, p. 3). The works of these authors illustrate a certain paradigmatic shift in the social sciences, which was called the “turn to things” and required many

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<sup>3</sup> “Frانيا” was the brand name of a popular washing machine produced in Poland.

corrections to be made to the rationalist, individualistic, and monocausal model of adapting to technology (of which I wrote earlier).

As Appadurai points out, instead of following the external processes of assigning meanings, values, and sense to things, we should look at things as such and place them at the center of the analysis. This would lead to a more holistic vision of the human-object relationship (in this case – home technology). Kopytoff's (1986) concept of the biography of things was of great importance for the development of work on home technologies and the processes of their adaptation. Kopytoff proposes studying the biographies of objects, asking questions similar to those we ask about human biographies. What is the social context of the "biography"? What are the cultural norms and ideals in the biography of a thing? What are the individual biographical stages, what are their cultural determinants (Kopytoff 1986, p. 252)?

These questions allow us to significantly broaden the perspective on the spread of home technologies. It is also worth noting that the biography of a technology can be considered on several levels, as Roger Silverstone, Eric Hirsch, and David Morley (1992, p. 18) emphasize: for instance, the biography of the washing machine as a technology in general, the biography of a specific model or type of washing machine, and finally the biography of an individual item belonging to a specific owner. In this sense, the biography of home technology can be traced in various ways. It is complicated: from invention or innovation, through implementation and production, through marketing, buying, use, and a whole host of practices and relationships involved in these biographical moments.

The shift of emphasis to the issue of the complexity of processes related to the acquisition and use of objects or technologies is probably most strongly present in ANT (Actor-Network Theory). This strongly constructivist approach to social theory recognizes materiality (including technology) as the central area of analysis aimed at recreating the relationship between human and non-human actants in a complex network. ANT has proven to be inspiring for a great deal of research into home technology, including the concept of a "script" (Akrich 1992), which is used in studies on the domestication of technology (Sørensen 2006), (more below).

Research on home technology has long addressed the topic of gender inequality in the context of technology-mediated housework. A classic empirical work that many feminist scholars refer to is the book by Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1976), which sparked heated discussions and controversy because it showed that home technologies such as the washing machine did not contribute to reducing women's working time as a result of a simultaneous increase in standards of cleanliness (for more on the subject, Shove 2003). Modern research, however, shows that Cowan's work took into account only the situation of middle-class women who stopped having their laundry delivered to servants and started washing themselves in a home washing machine. Cowan's work, therefore, did not consider the entire complex social context in which washing machines became popular, as well as class differentiations – working class women gained a significant amount of time with the washing machine. An interesting example of combining a feminist perspective with ANT is the study by Elizabeth

Silva (2002), which points to the role of technology in transforming scripts – for example, by enhancing or weakening the perception of certain types of housework as pertaining to men or women.

On the basis of the anthropology of consumption, the shift toward things and (partially) the ANT theory, a very important branch of home technology research has also developed, namely domestication studies (Silverstone, Hirsch 1992, Berker et al. 2006). The metaphor of domestication (and even of taming wild game) refers to a situation in which the unknown and the fearful becomes tamed, and thus becomes part of everyday life. What is domestic is familiar, taken for granted, a source of ontological safety (Giddens 2007) and comfort (Skowrońska 2015) – new objects or technologies, on entering the home from the public sphere, violate the border and are therefore a threat, necessitating the practices established for control (see Skowrońska 2015). Domestication is a process in which technology, as an object or entity but also as a carrier of what is public, is adapted to the routines and structures of the home, and must find its place (Ward 2006, p. 150). However, it should be remembered that the process of domestication is sometimes strongly determined by norms and expectations, for example, people might think that they should have a cell phone even if they don't feel like having one – and vice versa, and the process of domestication itself creates new norms and expectations in regard to using objects, understanding them, and thinking about them. In this context, it is worth considering that in the process of domesticating home appliances in Poland during the PRL period, disciplining processes were also visible, as Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz (2017) aptly indicated.

The socialist state, through such bodies as the Household Committee, but also through the media (weeklies for women), aimed to implement a model of “proper” consumer behavior. The vision of socialist progress included the promise of a better life and higher living standards, but also a change of habits and the development of more effective models for housework, using modern appliances. Numerous propaganda activities showed new household appliances as “tokens of progress,” and the resistance to their acquisition as “backwardness or obscurantism” (Stańczak-Wiślicz, p. 128). Attachment to the old, traditional ways of working on the farm was defined in this discourse as irrational and hence “requiring pedagogical measures to be applied” (ibidem, p. 141). The effect of this type of policy was the “permanent disciplining” of women. At the same time, as the author also notes, the pressure to automate work at home did not correspond to the availability of household appliances. Washing machines, refrigerators, and dishwashers were expensive and difficult to access.

The concept of domestication is akin to and fits well with ANT: Knut Sørensen writes, for example, that domestication is a script-translation process where a material object or technology is combined with practices, actions, people, and other objects in the process of constructing intersecting networks (Sørensen 2006, p. 47), although it happens that users have anti-scripts. As the author notes, the perspective of domesticating technology makes the rather abstract theory of ANT more concrete; in addition, it provides a more subjective view of the user, due to its focus on meanings, practices, and learning.



An important paradigmatic shift in the social sciences, as reflected in home technology research, is the so-called “practice turn.” Practice theories are not in competition with the above-mentioned trends in anthropology or the sociology of things, including ANT theory, but are strongly connected with them, especially since their basic component is materiality. Concepts of domestication can even be treated as falling within their scope. In the spirit of practice theories, research has been conducted on refrigerators and freezers, on showering, heating, and air conditioning, on transport practices (Dant 2004; Shove 2003; Walker, Shove and Brown 2014), on sensual aspects of washing (Pink 2005), on the organization of everyday life, for example, in regard to washing (Mylan, Southerton 2017), and on emotional and temporal elements of home technologies (Silva 2002). While it would seem that studies looking closely at day-to-day relationships with technology could be accused of lingering at the micro level, practice theories allow the identification of broader social mechanisms. In the routine daily activities through which practices are created, patterns of action that reproduce (and/or modify) the social order are intensified or modified. Theories of social practices are “theories of the middle” (Bourdieu 2005, Giddens 1984), that is, they go beyond the dichotomies of micro versus macro, subjectivity versus structure, or purposeful-rational action versus the functionalist model. Practice recreates the features of the social order, but at the same time these features are updated and modified in action (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2002). In addition to the important role of materiality, these theories also focus on the body and emotions, and on tacit (habitual) knowledge – that is, habitual activities.

They also emphasize the relationality and contextual nature of human action, its spatial and temporal dimension. This is of great importance for research on home technologies, in that – as many authors have pointed out (Kaufmann 2001, Schmidt 2010; Shove 2003, Sørensen 2006, Żadkowska 2010) – it is the practices in the home space that have a particularly “embodied,” habituated character. As Tim Dant (2007) writes, a home is a place where social and material relations are almost indistinguishable due to their close interrelationships in everyday practices. Ways of performing activities mediated by objects (such as doing the laundry, washing dishes, or cooking) are passed on and create the natural order of things (Edensor 2002, p. 11). The habitual use of an object makes a thing and a person merge into one.

The embodied nature of habits does not mean, of course, that they are “biological” in nature. Jean-Claude Kaufmann defines them as individually incarnated fragments of social memory (2001) – habits, as Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2004, p. 129) write, are information carriers; they contain a social record of well-established methods of “dealing with basic existential problems and the relationships between people built on them” (ibidem 2004, p. 130; see also Zalewska 2011). In the context of the subject of this article, Stefan Czarnowski’s essay, which was cited by Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (1956, after Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004, p. 19), about people’s rejection of tools with “evidently higher efficiency” – enabling achievement of the effect with less effort – is helpful. These types of tools not only violated individual habits (the sense of comfort resulting from the knowledge and smoothness

of action, freedom, “flow”) but also relationship patterns, the shape of social relations – introduction of the plow threatened the position of the farmer-landowner (the plow made him basically redundant). The violation of certain habits can break down the strongly assimilated and often silent natural order of things (Sørensen 2006) or sustaining regimes (Krajewski 2009; see also Zalewska 2011). This aspect in the context of the domestication of technology is indicated by Meintjes (2001), who describes in her work how the incorporation of the washing machine into a community living in the Soweto district of Johannesburg, South Africa, aroused strong resistance due to the strongly entrenched practice of hand-washing and its symbolism referring to norms and expectations of women. The author thus pointed out that new objects and technologies may have a problem in joining the existing socio-material networks – as a link in conflict with other elements of these networks, violating the existing connections and relationships between people and objects.

In summarizing the changes and shifts that have taken place in the field of social research devoted to home appliances and technologies, it can be stated that in the place of deterministic and linear theories (cause and effect, invention and dissemination) and analyses based on the dichotomy of the individual and the social system, in recent decades home technologies are increasingly often treated as actants – elements of a wider network, consisting of materiality, meanings, knowledge, and social practices and their rules. For this reason, the emergence of new technologies and their dissemination can be quite a complex process. It should be taken into account that the new technology carries a load of new meanings and potential practices and has the potential to create a new network around itself. Moreover, its addition to existing networks may cause a number of consequences that are not always predictable. The entry of a new object (related to the new mode of operation) into the house is associated with script-translation processes, as it constitutes a kind of violation of the familiar, habituated space by something alien – an object or technology.

#### METHODOLOGY

The research that forms the basis for the analyses in this text was carried out in 2018–2019 by a research team of sociologists from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and APS in Warsaw, under the supervision of Dr. Joanna Zalewska, in connection with a grant entitled “The Consumer Revolution in Poland.” A description of the methodology can be found in this volume’s introduction by Joanna Zalewska and Marta Skowrońska. Here, I just want to emphasize that although the research project concerned a wide range of home technologies, including home utilities (electricity, gas, water) and electronic utilities, my analysis focused solely on home appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, dishwashers, food processors, and vacuum cleaners.

In accord with Silverston and Hirsch (1992), I assume that technologies may be more or less controversial; I also assume that technologies may be more or less simple or difficult to use. Difficulties with the use of a computer, which is a very complex technology, and at the same time the connection of this technology with many other



controversial issues (computer games, health issues, addictions), seemed to me too imposing a topic in comparison to resistance to a washing machine or refrigerator. Moreover, technologies such as computers, mobile phones, or TVs are not related to the issue of ease or improvement in the performance of household duties, which was supposed to be fulfilled by a refrigerator, washing machine, dishwasher, or food processor. The different roles, contexts, and functions of various devices appeared too large to me. The limitation to appliances designed to facilitate or improve household activities, such as cleaning, washing, and cooking, allowed me to take a closer look at specific practices and the material-meaning networks that are associated with them.

#### THE DOMESTICATION OF TECHNOLOGY – SOURCES OF RESISTANCE

Let me now turn to the five sources of resistance or aversion to new technologies identified earlier. The first typology I developed was based on the literature, but its final shape emerged from an analysis of the research material.

*Disturbance of the feeling of flow – the pleasure deriving from accomplishing an activity in a habitual and automatic manner through a practiced synchronization between the body and materiality*

Both common perceptions of old age (“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”) and the results of research (Zalewska 2011) indicate that elderly people have particular difficulty in changing their practices. In their case, some of their habits are very firmly established and resistant to changes that would entail the need to develop new patterns and routines. The most strongly embodied habits allow a person to feel the pleasure that comes from the smoothness of movements and developed automatisms. Eighty-three-year-old Marzena<sup>4</sup> (G2/K2) is still not convinced by the electric meat grinder. “It’s different somehow,” she says, looking for a justification for her reluctance. “Since it’s [only] for myself, why would I take it out, when I’d have to wash it later?” she wonders, even though the mechanical machine she uses also requires washing.

*W:*<sup>5</sup> Well, yes. I don’t even use it. I have an electric machine for meat. And I also have those... But I say, since it’s only for myself, why would I take it out, when I’d have to wash it later? So, I grind meat for myself on such a thing.

*R:* An ordinary hand-grinder.

*W:* A hand-grinder. Yes, with a crank [...] Yes, yes, as I told you – I have that electric machine for grinding, but I don’t use it. If I have to get all that out, I’d rather grind it... Yes, when I make paté, for instance, I use this one, because it seems to me that that one mashes it; it’s different somehow; here it goes in differently. Paweł says to me, “Mama, what do you have it for?” But I make paté in this one; I crank it in this. But I have that electric one, too.

However, reluctance to implement new products is not felt only by the elderly. Part of the narrative about the slow implementation of technological changes concerned

<sup>4</sup> The names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy.

<sup>5</sup> W = woman, M = man, R = researcher.

people who were young adults in the anecdotes recounted. Mariola and Janusz, born in the 1950s (G4 / K3), recall that in their youth they were not interested in using the centrifuge washing machine. Their classic “Frانيا” did not have a wringer. Mariola, who later opted for an automatic washing machine, is surprised by her lack of interest in the new spin technology at the time. “Somehow I’m used to it [the old way],” she told her neighbor, who encouraged her to try the new machine.

*W: We didn’t even have a machine with a spin cycle, did we?*

*M: No.*

*W: Because I know that when we moved here, my neighbor used to say “As you like, Aśka, wring them yourself.” I’d say, “You know what, somehow I’m used to it.” Now a person can’t imagine it, can they?*

Mariola and Janusz also talk about their grown-up daughter and her husband. The young couple furnished an apartment, which also had a place for a dishwasher. For several years, however, the dishwasher has been unused – the “enemy” of the dishwasher, as Janusz expressed it, is his son-in-law. This is probably related to the fear that the dishwasher will smell, but it must also be noted that the son-in-law is entirely responsible for washing up and he clearly does not want this practice to be replaced by a new appliance.

*M: My daughter bought herself... furnished her apartment, put in a new dishwasher, which has never been used. The fasteners haven’t even been taken off or something like that [...] Well then, I’m not that against it. My son-in-law is more against it. He just won’t let it be turned on...*

*W: And these are young people, you know?*

*M: He [the son-in-law] does all the washing up at home. [...]*

*R1: Do you know why it’s like that?*

*W: No.*

*M: He’s generally sensitive to smells and he thinks...*

*W: That the washing machine – eh, the dishwasher – will smell.*

Janusz and Mariola cannot get over the fact that their daughter and son-in-law (“young people!”) don’t want to use the dishwasher. However, they themselves, elsewhere in the interview, recall how their highly habituated practice of washing on a washboard aroused amusement; the couple owned a centrifuge washing machine at that time. However, Janusz recognized – like the aforementioned Marzena, who did not want to pull out the electric meat grinder – that the learned, habitual sequence of movements during washing on a washboard was more familiar to him than implementing a new, unknown sequence (even if considered by his social environment to be more effective, faster, or easier).

*W: Everyone laughed that Janusz was using the washboard. I said, “Why should we turn on the washing machine. Outside, everything’s... it was summer...”*

*R1: But you had a washing machine? And yet? [...]*

*M: The washing machine was this one, this “Światowid” [...] a centrifuge machine. [...]*

*W: Yes, but as I say, it didn’t occur to us to turn on anything, but [...]*

*R2: And people were asking about it, right? For them it was sort of...*

*W: No, it wasn’t like...*

*M: No, it wasn’t that it was strange, but they were probably surprised that...*

*W: That he was doing that – that he wanted to. That he wouldn't put it in the washing machine, right? And Janusz [...] says, "I like it." [...]*

*M: Because having to fill this washing machine, then to drain the water from the machine, then to drain it, wipe it...*

The reason for reluctance in regard to novelty is not always easy to explain, especially since it is not the attitude toward the new device that comes to the fore, but attachment to the old one. The familiar system of action, the coupling of the body with the tool, the tautological feeling that a thing is good the way it is means that new solutions do not come to mind (*it didn't occur to us*) or are treated as redundant. Ludwika (71 years old, G1 / K1) cannot answer when asked why she waited a long time to buy an automatic washing machine: "You know, well, I did the washing in the basement here [in a Frania]." Her husband adds that "It worked very well, very well." As it turns out, Ludwika, even though she finally purchased an automatic washing machine, uses the Frania at the same time (the third phase of domestication – new technology is included in the home network of practices, but to a limited extent). Why does she use the Frania? Ludwika seeks for an explanation, considers. In answering, she refers to the habituated activity of washing in the Frania. In her narrative, it is clear that her body, when *set in motion* (Kaufmann 2004, Schmidt 2010), works smoothly and without disturbances:

*B1: And why do you prefer to wash that underwear in the rotor machine and not in the automatic one?*

*W: Well, here, I [put them] at once in hot water...*

*R1: Hmm.*

*W: I take the powder, I pour it in there and a little bit of bleach, because you know, I only have white panties.*

*R1: Hmm.*

*W: So none of these – or bras, that's all...and then I swirl them a little and put it on rinsing, right? And the spin cycle.*

*R1: Mmm. Is the point that it's faster that way or that there's that hot water...?*

*W: Well, maybe it's even faster, because here it's quick, and there – because here I spin it; I wash it well, and there's only the spinning and rinsing...*

*R1: Hmm. And you say that...*

*W: I'm done, right? But when I have bed linen, or my husband's T-shirts, or something else, then that's for the full washing machine there, right?*

*R1: Hmm.*

*W: I do the laundry [in it].*

*R1: Hmm.*

*W: Well, the bed linen, all that sort, then in that one.*

In the case of bed linen, a decision has been made to use the automatic washing machine – the new technology has been partially adopted, on limited terms. This is a strategy also known to Lucyna (G4 / K4), who does not run the dishwasher on a daily basis (her statement was cited as an illustration of the third phase of domestication). Like Ludwika, who doesn't wait until enough clothes are gathered to fill the washing machine drum, Lucyna doesn't like to wait for the dishwasher to fill up. On a weekday, she prefers to wash the dishes by hand, on a regular basis, *normally*.

(“Then I wash them normally. Or my husband does [laughs]”). Agnieszka (G5 / K1) speaks of her mother, who refuses to use the washing machine at home: “[my mother says] Oh, when I have so little, why would I?” As mentioned earlier, waiting to collect enough clothes or dishes may be counter to someone’s concept of cleanliness. Elsewhere, I have described the need to immediately restore order as a “short cleaning cycle” (Skowrońska 2015). Out of place objects arouse anxiety that disturb everyday functioning (a person cannot sit down, rest, or drink coffee until everything has been returned to its place). The use of the washing machine and dishwasher conflicts with the need for immediate cleaning – there is a need to wait until the washing-machine drum or dishwasher compartment is full of dirty items. For some people this waiting is hard to bear – they feel it on a physical level, as if independent of their will (they later explain that it “happens on its own somehow,” “I did it at the same time as something else,” “I’m not even aware that I washed it”).

The advantage of habituated action is that there is no need for reflection, no cognitive or decision-making effort. Edward, a man just under fifty (G5 / K4), whose daily work requires considerable cognitive effort (he is an academic), admits that he does not want to learn how to use the washing machine. Hand-washing seems easier to him than throwing clothes into the device and pressing a button: the latter would require reflection, choosing the right program. When his wife decided that washing in the washing machine was more economical, he stopped washing altogether; he only puts the clothes in the drum, and his wife chooses the program.

*On the other hand, I have never ever wanted to handle such a complicated device as a washing machine. You know, on trips, especially solo ones, and on trips in general, when I have something that’s sweat-soiled, dirty, I just wash it by hand. At home, too, when I needed to wash something quickly, I didn’t mention it to Anka, I just washed it by hand. The moment she started telling me that that uses more water – better put it in the washing machine – I gave it up. And I just put it in the washing machine now.*

### *Disturbance of the natural order of things: stability, continuity, order*

In connection with the phenomenon of the disruption of embodied habits that we have just described, the appearance of new technology may result in a sense that the natural order of things has been disturbed. The living space is a source of a sense of stability and durability, and as Edensor (2002, p. 116) writes (quoting Spooner), the spatial-material system enables people to cope with the complexity, speed, and changeability of the contemporary world by providing “points of security and order.” It emerged that in Karolina (G5 / K1) and Krzysztof’s (G5 / K4) household, the washing machine was just such a “point of security” for the man. Karolina joked that her husband was “attached to that Frania with a mooring line” – but not because he had so strongly embodied the practice of washing in the Frania (in their house, Karolina washes anyway), but because this object expressed a certain continuity in his of life: “the Frania’s always been there,” “Mama washed in a Frania.”

*M: Yes, I wanted to insist on a Frania washing machine for Karolina. My mother still uses a Frania. She had a new Frania brought specially from Hungary, because her old one had broken.*

*W: My husband was taught that Mama always knows best, but, well, I said that we had to buy an automatic washing machine, and my husband said that the Frania was good enough, because Mama washed in a Frania. I remember that we fought a war for a few months over this washing machine because it was supposed to be just... equipment like a TV set, a computer, a radio – like that. A Frania! And he wouldn't hear a word otherwise [...]*

*R1: Going back to this Frania – it didn't appear, but was the laundry your task at the time?*

*W: Oh. I was so stubborn then. It was just... it was hard core. I wasn't able to explain it to my husband. I don't know why. He was attached to that Frania with a mooring line.*

*M: I'd spent my whole life with a Frania, so that's the way things were.*

Perhaps it is precisely the disruption of the *natural order of things* – the stability of the existing networks that bind people, objects, practices, and beliefs – that makes it important for some people to increase their sense of control over reality by preserving the old, known technology while using the new one. Paweł (G3 / K3b) recalls that his father, who was distrustful of electric agricultural machines, still kept the horse mill: “my father did not want to part with the horse mill. He says ‘What if there's a war – they blow up the power plant – then what'll I do...?’” Łucja (G2 / K3) recalls that all her friends who bought automatic washing machines still kept the rotary ones in the basement.

*W: Everyone who had new washing machines – my acquaintances bought them – they kept their Frania in the basement.*

*R2: Hmm.*

*W: They said, “When this one breaks down, there'll still be the Frania – we'll have to make do with it.”*

Such practices were also described by other respondents. Lucyna and Karol (G4 / K4) keep a Frania machine in the basement to this day, in case the automatic washing machine stops working.

*R1: And that other one was still good?*

*W: And that one is good in the basement.*

*R1: It is. Hmm.*

*W: [laughs] In case it breaks...*

*R2: Yes, it will be...*

Perhaps the need to control the instability of a changing world was also one of the reasons for the above-mentioned practice of *watching over a washing machine*, which was popular among people who had made the transition from a rotary washing machine to an automatic one (for distrust toward technology, see also Zalewska 2011, p. 215). Anna (G3 / K3) and Paweł (G3 / K3), who finally trusted the washing machine enough to leave it alone, talked about the practice:

*W: Yes. But I had to make sure that... I was afraid the door might open or something...*

*R: Hmm.*

*W: ...the water would spill out... well, you kept watch over it, and now a person's gotten used to it [laughs].*

...as did Mariola and Janusz (G4 / K3) – whose watching over (and distrust) has not completely disappeared.

*W: And in contrast to my husband, who until today...*

*M: The principle of limited trust...*

*R1, R2: [laughs]*

*M: The machine is an automaton, but someone has to keep an eye on it.*

*R2: [laughs]*

Some people started looking for other functions for the Frania, which had come to be inscribed in the domestic landscape, so that it would still be useful. A transformation of the script occurred. The Frania was used for washing work clothes, for dying, but also for many other things, from making butter to physical therapy.

*M: As a curiosity, [...] my uncle was appointed director in [city name] and they produced such small washing machines there.*

*R2: Oh?*

*M: Which were used by farmers to make butter.*

*Andrzej (G3 / K4)*

### *Disturbance of cultural standards/criteria/ideals concerning practices*

A third source of resistance to new home technologies may be that they disrupt cultural standards or ideals related to the understanding of acceptable activities, the quality of their performance and the effect: for example, how clean things must be, what color, texture, or smell they should have, and so forth.

Teresa (G4 / K5) recalls first observing an automatic washing machine at her neighbor's. In the case of Teresa, it is difficult to talk about resistance or aversion to this technology; she was rather uncertain and skeptical. Her doubts had been reinforced by her parents, "What can a machine wash, right?" Teresa recalls that they watched the first wash cycle with their neighbors, sitting on stools in front of the machine and staring at the drum. After more than an hour, the laundry taken out of the machine seemed unsatisfactory to the owner of the washing machine – it seemed insufficiently clean. The company sat for over two more hours (four in total) watching the second wash cycle. The housewives were used to the fact that washing lasts – the day when they washed at home in a Frania (and earlier on a washboard) was called a "holiday" or "holy washing." Instead of soaking, boiling, rinsing, and wringing out, now all you had to do was add the powder and press a button – to many people it seemed unlikely that such a radical change of practice could result in a comparable effect. Teresa says:

*W: So she turned on the simplest such program, and we sit there and watch the water pour in, and how the level's rising, yes – and oh my, how high will it get? What's going to happen [...] And how will it stir the clothes? Well, it won't wash. Now when you go to the laundry – it's boiling, yes, you pour water into the cauldron... [...]*

*M: And of course the general opinion was very negative.*

*R1: Hmm.*

*M: Everyone, I can confirm this, because everyone said so – everyone, the elderly – everyone said that they couldn't wash in there, because what kind of a washing is that? What does it do? It turns to the left, turns to the right.*



Teresa recalls that the belief in the cleanliness of washing was built on observation of linen boiling in a cauldron – after boiling, the linen was white, and the water (which was often used for washing, for instance, floors or stairs) was gray. The kitchen smelled of suds and steam, and washing took all day. This practice built an image of cleanliness, a standard of cleanliness based on sensual experiences: fragrance, steam, whiteness, a tired body. Such an effect could not be obtained after washing in a washing machine.

*W: They got used to tradition, to boiling...*

*R1: Yes, yes, that's it.*

*W: ...to that fragrance – to, to, just, well, it was great, no... and then suddenly – she pulls it out – she says, “Oh my, it seems rather gray” [...]*

*M: Well, because that was the judgment – it was so gray...*

*W: The assessment was negative.*

*M: ...It wasn't white like...*

*R1: It wasn't so white.*

*M: ...like after boiling, yes.*

*W: The way it was after boiling, the water from boiling the linen was gray – that water...*

*M: Because the washing machines didn't boil; it was probably a maximum of ninety degrees, and...*

*R2: Hmm.*

*W: In that cauldron, after all, when the fire was going properly, all the sheets came out – well, shining, such a white, well...*

Aneta (G5 / K4) also mentions discussions about insufficiently washed bed linen – Aneta's grandmother criticized her aunt who was washing in the machine, saying that the things were “spotty,” “the washing machine is so far from washing things completely.” Bronisława (G1 / K3) was also initially unconvinced about the automatic washing machine. She has therefore retained some of the practices associated with the previous washing technology – doing a kind of prewash and scrubbing the items with soap by hand before tossing them in the washing machine.

*So, you know how it was: on the inside, you just didn't believe that something like this could happen, that it would be washed, that it would be clean... I had doubts and even I remember some such things and so forth – it was first soap, soap at the same time and only later I threw it in the machine – in order to be sure that it would really be washed clean [...] Yes, I had, well, such an impression – that I couldn't believe it; I simply couldn't believe it.*

It took some time for new standards of cleanliness to spread, based on different sensory perceptions and beliefs (the smell of fabric softener, awareness that things were washed in the washing machine). For some people, such as Eugenia, the transformation of practices and standards was not complete – machine washing was either supplemented with additional steps (pre-soaking) or the use of new technology was restricted, according to strict criteria. Even if the instructions or the label on the clothes indicated that an item of clothing could be washed, in the eyes of the housewife it might not seem possible. As a result, two or even three washing technologies – manual, rotor, and automatic, coexisted, on the principles set and controlled by the user.

Agnieszka (G5 / K2), for example, washes in an automatic washing machine, but rinses her socks first. She thinks that the washing machine will not be able to wash them:

*And thus, no, socks – socks only need to be rinsed there a bit, well, because when they're walked around in, because in my home, just like you, there aren't any scuff-slippers, nothing, just barefoot all over the house. Or they come and take off their shoes and socks, you know, and run around barefoot. [...] Well. It's only the socks because the washing machine won't get socks like that clean.*

Marzena (G2 / K2) does not trust the labels on blouses – she decides what to hand-wash and what to wash in the washing machine based on her intuition and experience:

*W: Well, as I say, for example, blouses or something. Well, so I don't put them in the washing machine. Well, that's it, you know.*

*R: Well, the tag also contains information about what can and cannot be put in the washing machine. That is, the clothes have tags.*

*W: But a person doesn't look at that. Well, these are things that come into a person's mind – that it's not for the washing machine, so then I won't put it in the washing machine.*

Zofia and Ryszard (G1 / K5), in recalling the times of the rotor washing machine, say with conviction that this technology did not allow all types of textiles to be washed. Gosia (G3 / K5), although she usually washes in the washing machine, from time to time boils the laundry in a cauldron, which gives her the feeling that the clothes meet a deeply assimilated standard of cleanliness – they are shiny white. Agnieszka (G5 / K2), on the other hand, uses a food processor, but she still does some things by hand: although theoretically a food processor can grate, churn, or knead dough, Agnieszka is not convinced: she did not find a food processor “that would grate my potatoes as I want,” or “to beat eggs till they foam, to knead dough, so that – you know, a yeast dough or other dough has to be done by hand anyway.” The effect of the device's operation does not meet the criteria of what dough, foam, or grated potatoes should be – their consistency or appearance differs from the accustomed pattern.

### *Disturbance of the network of relations*

New technology on the farm, as described, for example, by Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2004), also interferes with the home network in terms of relations between family members – it may lead to a change in the hierarchy and the role system. Elizabeth Silva (2002) pointed out that the spread of the dishwasher and garbage collection systems introduced changes to the family division of household chores, with the result that women took over from men the duties of washing up and throwing away garbage. In our research, we saw a different phenomenon. A recurring theme was the inability to use the washing machine by men who had sometimes helped do the laundry by hand or in the Frania. The same men who can repair cars, install a TV, or work on a computer use the argument (which is accepted by their wives) that operating a washing machine is too difficult. Hanna, whose husband

used to do the laundry by hand, now operates the machine herself. Hanna (G3 / K4) admits that for men, washing machines are black magic: “They don’t know anything about it.” However, when the researcher insists on asking if operating the washing machine is really too complicated for men, Hanna concludes that it may be something else. Hanna’s husband helped her for as long as the laundry work “required a lot of effort” – that is, was a hard, physical activity – but the automatic washing machine transformed the washing script and turned doing the laundry into a more stereotypically feminine activity, because it did not require the use of force.

*W: Usually, yes, usually I load it, but now everyone puts things in the dishwasher, but, for example, whether to do the laundry, then guys don't know anything about it, where it turns on, where you press the button on the washing machine...*

*R1: Really? Because your husband did the laundry before, didn't he?*

*W: When it was set...well, by hand.*

*R1: Manually, hmm.*

*W: But with this machine, he doesn't know where to press – no, no, it's not that. And the washing machine – with that, with the dishwasher he knows now that he has to put this tablet there and then it closes and turns on, but with washing machines, it's rare that a guy knows where to turn it on, or, well, how to set the program.*

*R1: Interesting, [incomprehensible] complicated?*

*W: I don't know. They sit and do things on the computer, right?*

*R1: Right.*

*W: That's all rational, but washing machines are black magic.*

*R1: But above all, I'm curious that your husband helped you when it involved so much work, and then in fact he was doing the washing.*

*W: Yes, yes. Well, it was like that, you know, it was doing the laundry, only it was more physical work, wasn't it?*

*R1: I understand. It required...*

*W: It required physical – physical help.*

*R1: ...physical exertion. Hmm.*

*W: And now a machine like this, you press it somewhere and...*

A similar situation is described by Mariola and Janusz (G4 / K3). Janusz refuses to set the washing machine, using the same argument as Andrzej (“it’s too difficult for me”, “new washing machines keeping appearing – what am I to learn?”). However, when asked by the researcher, he admits that when washing required physical strength, he “felt needed... as that main force.” “Anyone can push the button on the washing machine,” complains Janusz, pointing to the above-mentioned transformation of the washing practice script. Washing no longer allows male strength to be exhibited.

*Disagreement at the level of beliefs, dissonances between various fragments of knowledge and beliefs, and between an opinion or belief and an embodied practice*

The last source of aversion or resistance to new home technologies has to do not only with embodied practices, sensory feelings, and relationships, but also with beliefs or opinions about what is right, moral, or proper. These types of beliefs can be consistent and involve an unequivocal decision to use or not use a device. They can

also be heterogeneous. It may happen that various pieces of knowledge are mutually contradictory: from the most common-sense and self-justifying type (“this is how it is,” “it just happens”); through fragments of common knowledge, acquired in a family, locally, or from national culture (“yes, my mother always did it”); to elements of various types of media, scientific, or guidance discourses (“this is ergonomic,” “it’s healthy,” “it’s better because it’s more practical”) (Skowrońska 2015). It also happens that elements of knowledge or beliefs conflict with modern practices (this is exhaustively described by Kaufmann 2004; cf. also Schmidt 2010). Finally, contradictions may occur between partners (an example of such a situation was the quarrel about the Frania between the married couple Karolina and Krzysztof).

In Hanna and Andrzej’s (G3 / K4) household, Andrzej was convinced that the purchase of a new technology was a “luxury,” but the argument about the necessity of progress triumphed (for narratives of progress, see Zalewska 2015).

*W: A luxury, even more of a luxury.*

*M: You can also do the laundry.*

*W: You can do the laundry. Why do you need such a washing machine? You have so many other expenses in this new apartment – you’ll need this or that. I said, maybe so, but...*

*R1: And what made you want this washing machine so much?*

*W: I don’t know. I just liked it [laughs] and I said, “Oh, we’ll do the laundry.”*

*M: This is the march of progress. Something has to change.*

*W: Yes, in order to have this washing machine.*

“Luxury,” the argument to which Andrzej refers, is an expression of the moral conviction of the need to be modest, to avoid excessive consumption and to distinguish between real, actual, or basic needs and conspicuous consumption (Veblen 2019), as well as the conviction that the attitude of “being” is superior to that of “having.” This argument was also mentioned by Ola and Michał (G4 / K3), who want to teach their children not to be guided by the mechanisms of fashion and imitation:

*For example, we’ve never tried to live in such a way that because others have something, we should also have it, [...] we tried to explain to our children that not everything that others have is useful and necessary in life.*

Karolina (G5 / K1) and Krzysztof (G5 / K4) also emphasize that they are not guided by the attitude of “having” in life and that they distinguish between real needs and those resulting only from the will to imitate or gain prestige:

*For us, it is not at all a determining factor that someone else has a certain thing. For us, it is actually... We always consider our own needs. When we see a need, we satisfy it. It’s not like – because the Joneses have a thing, we have to have it too; we’re the first in the apartment building to have a thing, whatever it is.*

Another set of beliefs standing in the way of implementing new technologies at home is related to the work ethic. In several narratives there is a theme of “laziness” or of “becoming lazier” as the result of the spread of certain technologies. This thread was highlighted by the above-mentioned Meintjes (2001), who described resistance to

the washing machine in a community living in the Soweto district in Johannesburg, South Africa, due to the cultural expectation that women should work hard – being hardworking was inevitably associated with the assessment of a woman as a good wife and mother.

Agnieszka (G5 / K2), in mentioning the purchase of an automatic washing machine, emphasizes that the purchase was not related to her laziness – that it was not about “not wanting to do it,” but that the rotor washing machine broke down:

*W: I mean, it wasn't a problem for me to do all of that.*

*R1: I see. Hmm.*

*W: No, I never bought it because – I have to have a new washing machine because I don't want to, say, to do it, no.*

*R1: Ah.*

*W: Not in that respect, only because it broke – the Frania.*

*R2: Yes, yes.*

*R1: It broke. Hmm, I understand.*

Karolina (G5 / K1), on the other hand, felt pressure from her mother-in-law, who used the argument about the need to be hard-working (“she believes that dishwashers are only used by lazy women”). However, Karolina bought a dishwasher. She did not reject the belief that using the dishwasher was a sign of laziness but chose to accept herself as a lazy person (“I can have one fault”).

## CONCLUSION

Stories about home technologies in everyday life show that new devices sometimes have trouble connecting to existing socio-material networks. First, they violate the existing relationships between people and objects, which are expressed in habits and accustomed actions, that is, in the synchronization between body movements and materiality. The new technology requires the development of new automatisms and patterns of action. Second, the appearance of a new object in the home space and the formation of a new network of practices around this object may cause a feeling of uncertainty due to the disruption of the stability and durability provided by objects embedded in the home network. For some people, the stability of objects allows them to deal with the volatility and instability of modern reality. Third, new technologies and related practices are associated with the development of new standards and criteria, for example, of cleanliness and order. The effect of the new technology is experienced differently: it causes different sensory impressions (tactile, olfactory, visual), and engages the body in different ways. Fourth, technologies can disrupt existing relationship networks, for example, by modifying gender scripts for certain practices or by violating the home hierarchy. Fifth and finally, ways of doing household activities are connected with opinions and beliefs about morality and equity.

I have shown that in order to deal with difficult feelings, with conflicts and dissonances, users employ several different strategies, depending on the stage of

domestication of the technology. In the appropriation phase, users postpone buying a new technology, wait for the existing device to break down or even never decide to buy it. In the objectification phase, the new device “waits” – the user gets used to it, talks about it, until the moment comes for its first use. In the switch-on phase, the device is in use, but the practices of use are restricted, controlled and/or both old and new technologies are used in parallel. In the conversion stage, either there is a reversion to the old technology, or the script is transformed, and the technology is used differently than intended.

In conclusion, the model of domesticating technology proposed in this article assumes that resistance to new technology is not the result of “technophobia,” nor is it merely an initial stage on the road to progress but is rather an expression of the fact that new objects are alien links that conflict with other elements of home networks: they disturb the existing connections and relationships between people and objects, as well as unsettle various and often mutually contradictory elements of knowledge and beliefs. However, there are several issues that definitely require further research. First, while it is clear that resistance to technology can arise at various stages of domestication, it is not known whether all or some of the sources of resistance may emerge at each stage. Second, the model I have presented does not take into account generational or class differences, due to the fact that situations of resistance were present in less than half the households surveyed and the sample did not allow such conclusions to be drawn.

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WHY DO WE HAVE TO TURN ON THIS WASHING MACHINE?  
THE PROCESSES OF DOMESTICATING HOUSEHOLD TECHNOLOGY  
– SITUATIONS OF RESISTANCE

**Keywords:** theories of practice, technology, resistance to technology, domestic appliances, everyday life, qualitative research, Poland

The author argues that resistance to new technology does not result from “technophobia” but rather from the fact that the new technological object is inscribed with new meanings and frameworks of action that may disturb the existing networks of practices, beliefs, and knowledge. Based on an analysis of 24 dyadic in-depth interviews and 52 individual in-depth interviews with people aged 47–91 living in Warsaw and Poznań (Poland), five sources of resistance to new domestic technologies were identified: (1) disruption of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) – the pleasure resulting from a habitual and automatic action, the synchronization between the body and its material surroundings; (2) disruption of the “natural order of things” (the “mental map,” Kaufmann 2001) – a sense of security, durability or safety resulting from the stability of the spatial and material arrangement of the home (a sense that everything is in its place); (3) differences of standards and cultural ideals regarding acceptable practices, the quality of their performance, and their effect; (4) possible disturbance in relationships between members of the household; (5) beliefs about what is right, moral, or correct, as well as dissonances between different pieces of knowledge and beliefs, and between an opinion or belief and an embodied practice.

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