

JOANNA ZALEWSKA  
Maria Grzegorzewska University

MARTA COBEL-TOKARSKA  
Maria Grzegorzewska University

## **Rationalization of Pleasure and Emotions: The Analysis of the Blogs of Polish Minimalists**

*Abstract:* In this paper, we focus on consumption practices reflected on blogs of Polish minimalists. We analyzed 16 top blogs of the minimalists present in the Polish blogosphere. The objective of the minimalists is to consume less and live simple life without the excess of material objects. We studied the instructions of everyday conduct which the minimalists give on their blogs, as well as the meanings they assign to their practices: their personal stories of becoming a minimalist and statements of their values. The authors belong to one generation—their childhood took place in the times of the shortage economy in the 1980s. This influenced the whole trajectory of their lives and their consumer choices.

To interpret their practices we use the categories of rationalization of Max Weber and modern hedonism of Colin Campbell. It appears that minimalists strive for reaching certain emotional states, e.g. peace and well-being they imagine, in line with the theory of modern hedonism. A path to those emotional states consists of rationalization of all the temporary, impulse-based pleasures and control over emotions involved in consumption.

*Keywords:* rationalization, emotions, anti-consumption, consumerism, minimalism, blogosphere.

### **Introduction**

In this article we focus on consumption practices of Polish minimalists whose objective is to consume less. A starting point to an analysis of consumer practices of minimalists will consist of the western literature on ethical consumption in which the motives and meanings of alternative consumer practices were studied. The term of ethical consumption indicates that the moral dimension is what connects them. Not only one's needs and desires are taken into account in consumer practices, but also responsibility for the others. Such an attitude relates to the concept of life politics by Anthony Giddens. It is indeed often cited by the researchers. The practices and motives of Polish minimalists are clearly contrasting against this backdrop. The moral dimension is of no importance for minimalists. They are inclined to practice so called anti-consumption by their biographical experiences: they grew up in the late period of People's Poland, when the scarcity of goods pushed the people towards buying whatever was available and therefore they hadn't developed self-control in the aspect of consumer choices. As a result, current minimalists felt overwhelmed by the excess of things after the political transformation, which led them to rationalize the area of consumption. Anti-consumerism of Polish minimalists cannot be placed in the scope

of ethical consumption, it is an alternative consumption attitude shaped by the local post-socialist economic and political context. It can be said that minimalism is the next step in the process of rationalization of a contemporary man. Other theoretical concepts will prove useful to understand it, especially the theory of rationalization by Max Weber and the complimenting theory of modern hedonism by Colin Campbell. Before we proceed to analyze consumer practices of Polish minimalists, we will present the meaning and motives of ethical consumption in western countries to better understand the wider context of the formation of such practices and to compare it with the situation of Polish minimalists. Later we will discuss the theories by Weber and Campbell, i.e. the tools used to interpret the practices of minimalists. Next we are going to explain why we have used the blogs written by the minimalists to study their consumer practices.

### **The Ethical Turn in Consumer Culture**

Nowadays many fields are engaged in scholarship around the question of consumer ethics, as we witness the ethical turn in consumer culture (Lewis & Potter 2011). Since the early 2000s there has been a significant increase in the number and visibility of initiatives and movements campaigning around such issues as green and sustainable consumption, fair trade, corporate social responsibility, anti-consumerism (Lury 2011). As such, the notion of ethical consumption is very broad, containing at the same time radical anti-consumerist attitudes as well as various kinds of ethical choices of consumers, for example buying organic products. Moreover, on the one hand the notion refers to bottom-up initiatives of groups of activists, and on the other hand ethical consumption is stimulated by top-down green-washing and profit-seeking actions of corporations or ideas of sustainability propagated by experts and institutions (Littler 2011). Kim Humphery (2009) claims that the ethical dimension is a central paradox of everyday consumption practices in post-industrial societies: a huge propensity to buy coexists with distaste for overconsumption. People grumble about the excess of commodities and feel anger at 'intrusion' of the market into their lives (Humphery 2009). Thus the ethical choice concerns reevaluation of what it is to consume, how to consume and what to consume (Sassatelli 2007). Being ethical combines individual choice with responsibility to others, both humans and non-humans (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke & Malpass 2005). Therefore, ethical consumption it is "a reaffirmation of the moral dimension of ethical choice" (Lury 2011: 172). It is more a label covering divergent practices than sociological concept. The term 'ethical' does not imply any stable external moral framework, it rather refers to privatized moral universe (Lewis & Potter 2011). To understand the privatized ethical dimension of contemporary consumption scholars refer to the notions of the life politics of Anthony Giddens (1991).

Life politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualization in a post-traditional context, where globalizing influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realization influence global strategies (Giddens 1991: 214).

As a result of increasing globalization, there has been an increase in awareness of global environmental problems within the populations of western nations. Life politics is in force

also in the realm of consumption: individual consumer decisions are perceived by the consumers as having a meaning in a global scale, therefore those decisions have a moral dimension. Life politics is connected with creating a reflective identity: constant monitoring of one's own behavior, asking such questions as "who am I?" and "what is the meaning of my life and of my actual decisions?" However, since life politics is a matter of creating a reflective identity of an individual, ethical consumption can be accompanied by a plethora of motives connected with various identity projects of different individuals and groups. Let us take a closer look at those diversified motives.

Jo Littler (2011) made an attempt to make a conceptual distinction between 'anti-consumption' and 'anti-consumerism' so as to distinguish between different motives of ethical consumption. 'Anti-consumerism' means being against capitalist consumer culture and more specifically against 'turbo consumerism' that characterizes contemporary neoliberalism. 'Anti-consumption' refers to consuming less, nevertheless the economic system. This distinction can help in describing the differences between various forms of ethical consumption. Anarchist activists (Portwood-Stacer 2012) are primarily anti-consumerist, while 'voluntary simplicity' and minimalist movements concerned with consuming less objects can be classified as anti-consumption. Some actions can be for some people a tool to critique contemporary consumer culture and for others an opportunity to buy less stuff; Littler gives the example of *Buy Nothing Christmas*. Finally, green or fair trade campaigns of companies fall into neither category, they propagate consumer culture as well as increase in consumption of their particular commodities. Such initiatives of companies at the same time extend and exploit the terrain of ethical consumption by affording conditions for forms of consumer reflexivity (Moor & Littler 2008). Thus we can distinguish three categories within ethical consumption: anti-consumerism, anti-consumption and consumer reflexivity.

Maria Grazia Pecoraro and Outi Uusitalo (2013) propose another classification of ethical consumption, which is empirically based. They distinguish two discourses of ethical consumption. The first is the discourse of saving the world which is present in the public sphere, in the realm of institutions, work and communities. Here ethical consumption is represented as rational and effective action not affected by personal emotions and memories. This discourse is based on two main values: solidarity and comprehensiveness. Solidarity obliges consumers to act for common good, to share prosperity with distant others. Comprehensiveness connects everyday consumption practices with complex global order. The second discourse of living the good life is present in the private, domestic sphere of people who want to live a good life and keep their conscience clear. This discourse rests on two main values: reasonableness and simplicity. Reasonableness relates to the use of common sense, the avoidance of excess and taking into account personal situation and resources rather than being ethical regardless circumstances. Simplicity means simplification and reduction in consumption to gain spiritual experiences. This discourse conforms to the market economy propagating the idea of consumer sovereignty, the priority is given to his or her emotions and pleasure.

John Connolly and Andrea Prothero (2008) found that green consumers in Dublin were motivated simultaneously by concerns about sustainability of the planet and moral obligations to other people and species, as well as threats to the personal health of their own fami-

lies. Motivations to undertake private anti-consumption practices can be complex, combining moral obligations, creating one's own identity and fear of environmental risk of which people are aware in late modernity. Laura Portwood (2012) in her research of anarchists in USA and Canada made a distinction of a few interpenetrating motives of anti-consumption practices. Personal motivations for anti-consumption practices have to do with finding immediate personal benefit. Anarchists believe that capitalist entities will try to exploit and alienate them through consumerism, and this is why they withdraw from commercial consumption as much as possible. Moral motivations refer to "living consistently with one's values, and with feeling personally responsible for the concrete impacts one's consumption has on others" (Portwood 2012: 96). Activist motivations differ from the previously mentioned, because they are not only about doing something because it is morally right, but "in order to put pressure on a system or a larger entity to alter a pattern of immoral practice" (2012: 97). Identificatory motivations mean that practices of anti-consumption are important because they establish the practitioner as a certain kind of person. It is connected with constructing self-identity. Social motivations mean that one can use practices of anti-consumption to unite with those who share similar goals and to differentiate from others.

Matthew Adams and Jayne Raisborough (2008) point out that consuming Fair Trade is limited to the middle class. They explain it by the fact that the middle class has awareness of the existence of class inequalities, so consuming Fair Trade is a strategy for attempting to overcome embarrassment or ambivalence about class. However, in other studies (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Portwood-Stacer 2012), there were both people from middle class and working class involved in green consumption and anti-consumption practices. Therefore perhaps consuming Fair Trade requires a higher financial outlay than other types of ethical consumption. Giddens (1991) also remarks that life politics concerns all social classes in the modern world.

### **Rationalization and Pleasure of Feeling Emotions**

One can assume that Giddens's life politics connected with monitoring the decisions one makes is developed on the basis of Max Weber's rationalization, i.e.

progressing theoretical control over the reality by means of more and more precise, abstractive concepts, and methodical reaching of a specific, practical goal by more and more precise calculation of adequate means (Weber 1995: 140–141),

infusing all aspects of life in modernity.<sup>1</sup> According to Weber, rational calculation was shaped in the scope of protestant ethics. In Calvinism, an evidence of salvation, a sign of being chosen, was prosperity in earthly life. One's profession and the work performed were treated as a calling to be fulfilled for the glory of God. Industriousness, frugality, moderation and avoiding luxury were considered virtues. This attitude led to multiplying wealth and to the development of capitalism. At the same time it strengthened the rational actions

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<sup>1</sup> However, Giddens's reflectance is based not only on rationalization, but is also connected with global awareness and responsibility for what transpires in the global context.

of individuals (Weber 1994). Material benefits were not a goal in and of themselves. The point was to derive joy from the fact that earthly prosperity indicated being chosen by God for salvation. Colin Campbell (1987) reinterpreted Weber's theory in relation to the area of consumption. He points out that in Protestantism sensitivity and emotionality were the signs of the grace of God. Campbell notes that over the course of the centuries a change occurred: emotions lost their spiritual significance as the signs of grace. Experiencing emotions in the contemporary secularized world became the source of inner pleasure.

This refers to the theory of modern hedonism of Colin Campbell (1987), which has also been recalled in the context of ethical consumption (Soper 2008; Lewis & Potter 2011). Modern hedonism is a contradiction of traditional hedonism where pleasure consisted of a sensual experience gained through particular activities such as eating, sexual intercourse, or socialising. Modern hedonism relies on imagination and involves replacing actual stimuli with illusions and constructing pleasurable environments in the mind. Thus romanticism is a central force within consumer culture, people seek for beauty and endless novelty in commodity world. Kate Soper (2008) interprets alternative consumption referring to the romantic ethic of modern hedonism: consuming differently may be seen as pleasurable. It may involve imagining oneself as ethical person or green consumer. This process involves emotion and imagination as drivers of consumption, which is characteristic of modern hedonism. Weber's and Campbell's theories are complimentary. As Campbell stresses, seeking pleasure in experiencing emotions is a goal of the contemporary man's actions in the area of consumption and, as Weber describes it, he/she can at the same time aim for emotional pleasure by acting in a rational and methodical manner.

### **Discursive Practice of Blogging Anchors Consumption Practices of Minimalists**

There is little research on alternative consumption in the post-socialist countries from the former post-Soviet bloc (Dombos 2008; Majdecka 2012; Bilewicz & Potkańska 2013; Skowrońska 2013). In this article we will focus on Polish minimalists, whose objective is to consume less and live a simple life without the excess of material objects. We will try to understand the complex mechanism of their consumption practices: how rationalization of behaviour, work of imagination and feeling emotions are interconnected. We will focus on a discursive practice of blogging that anchors consumption practices of Polish minimalists. We understand practices as "embodied, materially mediated array of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding" (Schatzki 2001: 11). Martin Hand and Elizabeth Shove (2007) study the following elements of the practices: 1) the materials, which mediate practices; 2) the skills and competences which refer to the embodiment of practices; 3) the meanings which refer to the shared practical understanding. Marlyne Sahakian and Harold Wilhite (2013) have similar approach. They write about distributed agency in social practices which rest on three pillars: 1) the material world including technology and infrastructure; 2) the body including cognitive processes and physical dispositions and as such referring to skills and competences; 3) the social world including norms, values and institutions which is the dimension more broad than the meanings that people share and involves also the conditions of creation of these meanings. Ann Swidler (2001)

shows that for a new practice to be created and spread, it has to be visible in public space. Swidler gives an example of Gay/Lesbian Day Parade in San Francisco which is a practice that anchors constitutive rules of gay and lesbian community and its practices. Swidler claims that practices can be also discursive. Thus blogging is a practice that anchors constitutive rules of the community of minimalists and minimal consumption practices. First of all, the blogs contain their creators' life histories consisting of them dealing with objects. A reader can emotionally identify with such narrations, which allows for becoming a part of a community. Marta Olcoń-Kubicka (2009) shows that modern communities are based on the expression of one's own experience and on emotional empathy shared by the members of the community. We use the concept of the shared practical understanding when we try to grasp the meanings of anti-consumption in narratives of bloggers: their beliefs and thinking processes, their motives and emotions which they share with each other and produce together by reading each other's blogs. Secondly, the blogs offer specific instructions how to live in a minimalistic way, i.e. how to adhere to the norms of the community of minimalists. We use the concept of the skills and competences studying the instructions of everyday conduct of the minimal life on the blogs. We refer also to the materials, namely the stuff which they advice to consume or not consume.

### Minimalism in Poland—Study of the Blogosphere

In Poland the term “minimalism” is especially visible in the blogosphere. We can find its roots in 2008, when the first blogs on minimalism were created. Starting in 2011, the mainstream media began talking about Polish minimalists—in weekly *Przekrój* (Chomańska 2011), in Sunday supplement to the most popular daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Jabłońska 2012), or in a popular science magazine *Focus* (Kisielewska 2013). Over the years we observe a peculiar minimalism fad, even on essentially non-minimalistic blogs.

In this text we will study the blogs of people who call themselves minimalists and identify with the term. The subject matter of the study consists of 16 Polish blogs, which constitute all actively run minimalists' blogs we were able to find at the moment of beginning our works on this article (October 2014). Not all bloggers reveal their demographic data, but we can approximate them to be a group of adults (only one blogger presents dates of graduating from high school and university, setting his date of birth to be 1977–78. The others are assumedly in their thirties), professionally active, self-supporting, residents of big cities or surrounding areas. Most of the studied blogs are written by women (11 in 16).

For the minimalists it is crucial to define minimalism and themselves. The simplest definition by one of the bloggers, Anna Mularczyk-Mayer (aka Ajka) determines minimalism as

*an attitude towards life (...) connected with limitation of material needs, avoiding excessive attachment to objects. (...) Simplification of life and eliminating the needless—things, activities, passing acquaintances, superfluous commitments. (<http://www.prostyblog.com/2011/12/minimalizm-jako-sposob-na-kryzys.html>).*

As for role models and inspirations, the authorities from the West are mentioned most often—American Leo Babauta, author of *mnmlst.com* and *zenhabits.net* blogs, and Dominique Loreau, author of books such as *Art of Simplicity* (2008). Western models can be

used as a starting point, an impulse to get interested in minimalism. As Polish minimalistic blogosphere develops, a hint of distancing appears: while creating their own versions of minimalism developed on the basis of those inspirations, the bloggers stress that the advices of Babauta and Loreau are good for the beginners. And so e.g. Anna Mularczyk-Meyer (Ajka) wrote in 2010:

*My adventure with minimalism started with reading Leo's advices. This man really did a great work to organize his life and finances. He goes further and further in minimizing, sometimes his views are quite radical, but one can really learn a lot from him. (...) Lately I enjoy reading Dominique Loreau's book Art of Simplicity. (<http://www.prostyblog.com/2010/01/krotko-o-inspiracjach.html>)*

The motto of the entry—a manifesto entitled *Why minimalism*, is a quote from Loreau:

“It is a waste to own things we don't use.” (<http://www.prostyblog.com/2010/01/dlaczego-minimalizm.html>)

In contrast, three years later she admits:

*A book by Leo Babauta (...) I've decided to familiarize myself with it, even though I haven't been following Leo's blogs or books for a long time. Reading it only proved to me that I can no longer benefit from them. [It] is an accessibly written guide, certainly very useful for people fascinated with the idea of a simple, “mini” life. (...) Worth recommending to the beginners, those people who just understood that they are overwhelmed by the excess, that they are lost and that they have to deal with it.*

Blogs are considered to be personal documents. They are accessible, diverse and numerous, which allows following many issues. The connective and expressive functions seem to fit the minimalistic blogs best (Olcoń-Kubicka 2003). Polish minimalists are aware of their uniqueness in the consumer society, therefore creating an elite—commenting, inspiring, mentioning and not being anonymous to each other. “Friends” and recommendations are listed on the blogs. It gives a sense of being a part of a community, which supports, motivates, informs and inspires. Bloggers create their image via their values and detailed descriptions of the minimalistic lifestyle. The authors have a mission—they want to help the reader get liberated from the limitations imposed by modern consumer society and to reach a higher level of spiritual development. As we can see, blogging is the practice that anchors minimalistic lifestyle, without the blogs the imagined community of minimalists wouldn't be possible. Blogs of minimalists influence the readers by presenting the “social trajectory”—becoming a minimalist, and a life according to minimalism which can be understood with the category of “social worlds.”<sup>2</sup>

### Social Trajectories of Minimalists

On many blogs authors post descriptions of a process of “becoming” a minimalist presented as life trajectory. The process usually has following stages: excess and chaos in life—tipping point—decision to simplify life—embarking on minimalist journey.

In Poland minimalistic blogs are often created by 30-year-olds, i.e. the last generation who remembers the times of People's Poland. Their biographies are conditioned by social

<sup>2</sup> Here we use the category of “social trajectory” and “social worlds” used by Daniel Bertaux (1997) in biographical studies.

and economic history of Poland. Their childhood coincided with the crisis of the inefficient socialist economy. There was almost nothing to buy in shops, there were few-hour-long queues. The economy of constant deficiency forced the consumers to use various strategies: to “stock up,” barter, hoard everything, makeover (today: DIY). The emotions that accompanied shopping were strong and hot, however far from the excitement of today’s consumers. People bought whatever was available, struggling to satisfy their most basic needs. Simultaneously, as the influence of the Western popular culture grew and there were more “luxurious” things brought from the West, the society started to dream and long for consumer goods (Wedel 2007, Mazurek 2010, Cobel-Tokarska 2014). For example, people were strongly driven to adoption of technologies by the logic of the market, precisely the ‘advertising’ of western standard of living in American films screened on television (Zalewska 2015a). After the period of scarcity in the 80s, when the bloggers were children and observed the “hoarding” strategies of their parents, their adolescence and youth coincided with a sudden capitalism boom after the 1989. Inability to operate in this new world, no models of balanced consumption and newly discovered purchasing power (the authors grew up, found work) made them lost and tempted by excess consumption. This is how they describe their biographies in connection to the history:

Ajka:

*I grew up during the crisis. My Parents weren't doing so well (but who did at the time?). There was almost nothing in the shops, people had to “work it” and score everything. This is why as a rule no one threw anything away, everything could be useful someday. (...) Then came the New. Gradually the shops filled with beautiful, colorful objects. Ads, ads everywhere. (...) And I started earning money at that time. I discovered a new pleasure: buying new stuff. (...) Stuff piled around me. Why? Because such were my habits, I learned such customs at home and never wondered when I should say enough. I guess I thought that you can keep buying things until you have no more space to put it. Then you buy a new wardrobe, bigger flat, build a house (and a storage, I guess...). Because possessing and buying brings pleasure. (...) I often shopped impulsively, because I liked something or “I would definitely need that. (O tym, jak obrastałam <http://www.prostyblog.com/2010/01/o-tym-jak-obrastaam.html#more>)*

The author of this post inscribes her biography as a consumer into the most recent economic history of Poland. She presents a sinusoid: the lack (childhood and the crisis of the last decade of People’s Poland), the excess (the first earned money and the rise of the free market in the 90s). The last stage of this process will be acknowledging the excess and work on conscious development of new consumer habits she was unable to learn in her childhood. One can interpret this narration in reference to the both aspects of category of rationalization by Weber (1995) mentioned in Introduction. The last stage in the narration of the interlocutor was an attempt of “progressing theoretical control over the reality” through diagnosing the situation of excess and seizing the idea of minimalism. Work on creating new consumer habits is in turn „methodological reaching of a specific, practical goal,” i.e. the practical dimension of rationalization.

Tofalaria (or Urszula Wojciechowska):

*I was born in the times when children's clothing wasn't as common as it is today. And when there was any, it was usually in navy blue, red or in practical brown. (...) Mothers and Grandmothers were not lounging about. Whenever they scored a bolt of some beautiful floral fabric, they sowed dresses for themselves, cutting in a way to also make dresses for us. (...) When I went to work it suddenly turned out that I can afford to buy clothes in regular shops. That I can even buy a few pieces of clothing a month. I fell over myself with the possibility to make up for all the clothing scarcity in my youth. (...) The scarcity did not concern not having anything to wear, but the clothes being ugly, uncomfortable and few. And it was probably the moment when my closet*

*started getting cluttered and I wasn't any more content with my outfits... (...) I was also the victim of sales when I bought something because it was a lot cheaper, but I only liked it a little. (Historia z szafą w tle 3.3.2011. <http://tofalaria.blogspot.com/2011/03/historia-z-szafa-w-tle.html>)*

This author is also looking for sources of her uncontrollable consumption, exhibited in her early adult life, in her childhood in the times of People's Poland. Earning her own money and there being a big assortment of colorful clothing in the shops became factors that when occurring simultaneously resulted in an excess of clothes in her closet. For they unleashed especially strong emotions: „falling over oneself” with new possibilities and the desire to make up for the scarcities during childhood.

Amy (guest writer on Konrad's blog):

*My journey... was long :) As many today's 30-year-olds, my parents grew up in People's Poland, grandparents had to deal with the consequences of the war, so my gleeful life was preceded by two generations of hoarders :) The general feeling of the excess of things accompanied me since childhood. Apartments of my mother and grandmother were cluttered with souvenirs, trinkets, treasures... in other words, knick-knacks. (...) Of course, as I mentioned before, I was raised in a spirit of respect for things, so I did not throw away numerous bad gifts, mostly clothes, in the name of the commonly known slogan: "I might use it someday." (27.12.2014. Minimalizm — jak to ugryźć? <http://wystarczy-mniej.blogspot.com/2014/12/minimalizm-jak-to-ugryzc.html>)*

Amy also points to another aspect of socialization in times of People's Poland: her parents and grandparents were “hoarders,” who gathered things with no plan nor restraint and, what is worse, they were unable to part with them. Therefore they passed this approach to things to her.

Those histories relate to the common biographical experience: the times of the shortage economy (Kornai 1992) in their childhood and then the raise of the market during their youth. Therefore we can treat minimalists as the members of the same generation in light of Karl Mannheim's words (1952): they have a common location in historical time and a distinct consciousness of that historical position—mentality formed by the experiences of that time.

Bloggers point to their experiences as the beginnings and sources of the stage of excess consumption. They reconstruct the consumption patterns they learned at home, admit they entered the capitalism era unprepared. The first years of free shopping were not a period of rational strategies, but a failed attempt to navigate the new situation both according to and against the old patterns. According to—because a habit of hoarding proved to be very strong, as well as the practice of impulsive purchases. Against—because the full shop shelves tempted to make up for the period of involuntary frugality with intensive shopping. Unfulfilled consumer needs from childhood took over.

Encountering the idea of minimalism presented in a suggestive way (e.g. on a Western blog) and a reflection on their own life resulting thereof can be a turning point in this trajectory. Sometimes this crisis results from life circumstances such as, e.g. a move, during which one realizes the burden of their belongings:

Amy:

*The day of international move came. In practice it means that I would have to pay a lot for transporting all the things I didn't use. No way! (...) I had to deal with it once and for all. (...) Constant lodging means constant moving. Every move is tiring and makes one feel the consequences of having property. In my first apartment I had about 30 mugs. Now I have 3 :) (27.12.2014. Minimalizm—jak to ugryźć? <http://wystarczy-mniej.blogspot.com/2014/12/minimalizm-jak-to-ugryzc.html>)*

Sometimes the point of overload just appears when the possessions literally “crush us.” There comes the moment for the big cleanse, which becomes a beginning of bigger and deeper changes:

Natalia:

*And then the camel's back broke. I gathered all my things from around the house and saw how much I really own. My worst nightmare came true, because I was literally buried in things. Tons of books, old magazines, notes, clothes, shoes, pens and tons of things that were supposed to be “useful someday.” (...) I started the big cleanse. I channeled my irritation and anger into unforgiving judgment of the objects. No sentiments. (19.09.2014. Moja droga do minimalizmu — jak to się zaczęło <https://minimalnat.wordpress.com/2014/09/19/moja-droga-do-minimalizmu-jak-to-sie-zaczelo/>)*

In Natalia's experience her things “attack her,” she feels almost existentially threatened by the tons of her things. The author writes how she attempted to rationalize her consumer behaviors, not to get emotional and take the control back. She uses the term “rehab,” showing the immense power of habitual consumption. According to the author, changes in attitude towards objects resulted in positive changes in her whole life:

*I stopped satisfying my cravings. (...) I went through it like a rehab. Consumption rehab. (...) Now I'm able to pack in an hour, know what to wear in the morning and buy one item in a store. My life became simpler, but not in a bad way. I breathe freely, I feel like I've woken up from a long sleep. A sleep of a person who starts her pay day with a shopping list: “This month I have to buy.” I no longer “have to” buy anything, I feel no pressure or need. I've opened my eyes to myself and my needs. What do I need? Not much, as it turns out—I made peace with myself. I am who I am and I have nothing to prove to anybody. It makes me laugh how much an organized wardrobe changed. It started with the wardrobe and moved like a calm wave to all life aspects. (ibidem)*

The authors associate the “conversion” to minimalism with a general life crisis. Emotions determine a change of a lifestyle. They are a criteria of choices of auto-regulating individuals. Those can be positive (e.g. fascination with a “beautiful and simple life”), or negative (being angry with the previous life). The moment in which the authors liberate themselves from previously unrealized web of habits is important. Becoming a minimalist begins with taking up the tasks to make the attractive life come true. Therefore, to achieve stable emotional pleasure stemming from living in peace one has to rationalize not only the everyday habitual actions, but also occasionally occurring pleasures: positive emotions one could draw from uninhabited shopping and owning things, which can later transform into feelings of being overwhelmed by things or a noticeable need to continue shopping.

Minimalists copy each other and create their own community. They try to propagate their lifestyle on blogs and create a new anti-consumption trend. According to the mechanism described by Olcoń-Kubicka (2009), minimalists become a community by feeling and expressing similar emotions, in this case based on a common generation experiences.

### Minimalist's Social World

Bloggers describe their minimalistic lives and create instructions for the readers on the basis of their experiences. They present their thoughts and interactions with objects. What is visible becomes a practice (Swidler 2001). We shall now focus on the recurring patterns of minimalistic social practices described on the blogs, as well as the significance they have for the bloggers.

Minimalists diagnose a domination of the culture of excess in the modern world, wish to go back to the mythologized “long-ago,” when people lived simpler lives. They practice and postulate rationality and reflection on reality in everyday life, a more conscious relationship with objects. Instead of emotionally and irrationally getting attached to the objects, it is suggested to think if we really need them. This high focus on the objects is necessary in the initial phase of the “road to minimalism.” The goal is to stop thinking about the objects—well selected, functional and “minimized” things are not dominating or distracting the owner.

This is why the clue of every minimalistic blog is to give advice on everyday life. The processes of throwing things away (decluttering), organizing the space and changing consumption habits are thoroughly described. The next step is not to let the clutter come back. One should implement and maintain new consumption habits. Most of the advice concern the home and clothes, especially on women’s blogs. There are “formulas” (borrowed from Western blogs) which rule the process of “minimization,” e.g.: 100 things challenge (reducing possessions to 100 belongings); capsule wardrobe (selecting e.g. 15 clothes to wear for a month); no shopping year; one thing in, two out (after getting one new thing, throw two old ones away); “BUS” (things have to be beautiful, useful or sentimental); 31 in 31 (throwing out one thing a day for a month); 12 Pieces (buying only one thing a month); etc.

The home space is important. Minimalists anthropomorphise homes, call them sick—things or appliances need maintenance, there is too many of them, there is a mess, it’s impossible to find anything. Diagnosis is simple:

*If the things around you stopped being attractive or inspiring to you, toss them or they will become like an ugly scar. You’ll do anything to hide it and cover it with other [things]* (3.11.2013. <http://simplicite.pl/5-objawow-oznaczajacych-ze-twoj-dom-jest-chory/>).

When we diagnose a problem with excess, the bloggers show ways of effectively fighting the “disease.” A prerequisite here is throwing out, compared to losing weight (Arkadiusz Reclaw compares life before minimalism to being overweight). The process is divided into stages characterized by certain methods and tricks. Fight with the excess is a fight with oneself and one’s sentiments and weaknesses. Minimalists point to how strong our relations with things and habits are and how much effort the change requires.

*How to effectively approach getting rid of objects? I prefer the 3 STEP method: (...) Step 0: I place the objects on a floor/table; Step 1: I put aside the things I wore/used in the last 6 months; Step 2: I put aside the things I can definitely/easily/with no regrets throw away/give away/sell; Step 3: I decide what to do with the rest.* (22.08.2014 <http://simplicite.pl/minimalizm-praktyce-efektywnie-pozbywac-sie-przedmiotow/>)

This instruction can be used for all types of things. Authors stress the importance of consistence and ruthlessness. In addition to a disease fighting stylistic and curing one’s previous life, there is a stylistic of fighting a sneaky enemy:

*Get rid of the things “to toss,” “to give away/sell” ASAP. It means:*

- throw away immediately,
  - give away in less than 2 days,
  - make a deadline to sell the unneeded things and give them away or toss after said deadline.
- (22.08.2014 <http://simplicite.pl/minimalizm-praktyce-metoda-malych-kroczkow/#more-8233>)

There are different advice on various objects. Clothes take up the biggest space and bring out the strongest emotions. It is the most personal class of objects. At the same time clothes make for a big and diversified group that is in the closest relation to the body. Well picked out outfit creates our image. Overflow in a wardrobe makes it difficult to choose an outfit (literally making it hard to find). The authors write about being “crushed,” “lost” in “the clothes falling out of the closet,” “a chaos.” A closet is to be treated like the rest of the house—get rid of all the clothes that aren’t „perfect.” When the closet gets empty, the temptation to buy appears again. However, erratic shopping generates big costs and no discipline may lead us back to where we started. There are rules for shopping:

*Shop only with a plan. (...)*

*Know what you want to know what to look for. (...)*

*Analyze your wardrobe. Do you need anything? (...)*

*Set a strict budget.*

*Don't buy anything exceeding your budget or not from the list.*

*Buy only the things that fit you perfectly. (...)*

*A sale or a discount is not a sufficient reason to buy if all the above mentioned requirements aren't met. (...)*

*When in doubt—abort or wait. (...) You DON'T HAVE TO buy anything right away. (...)*

*In short: it's better to think and not to buy than to buy without thinking :) (Zakupy — kilka prostych zasad 23.01.2010 <http://www.prostyblog.com/2010/01/zakupy-kilka-prostych-zasad.html#more>).*

Some bloggers give a list of clothes one should have. The goal is to create a coherent, well-thought out wardrobe. Use of the clothes should be also subdued to discipline, e.g. with different variants of “capsule wardrobe.” Bloggers show that one can look good using minimum of clothes and that giving up the diversity simplifies life. Paradoxically, it is at the same time a chance to display one’s wardrobe, taste, proficiency in outfit creation, sometimes even add prestige (when the presented clothes are from good and expensive brands). From the comments, e.g. on *simplicite.pl* blog’s “Minimalist’s wardrobe” project, it is clear that the readers wish to minimize and organize their wardrobes just like the author, but at the same time the photos of the author’s outfits awake new consumer needs. Therefore the significance of such posts as anti-consumption advice is doubtful.

A stylistic of “challenge” is popular in calls for simplifying and minimizing. All advices on changing lifestyle are supported by personal examples. There are stories on how a blogger deals with his/her life and possessions. Authors talk about different aspects of their everyday life. The experience of minimalism is shown as a process. There is always something to do, the cleaning has to be repeated periodically and one should always “be vigilant,” “fight” the excess and temptations:

*Even though it seems as we have a lot of space, there are still some “skeletons” somewhere in the cupboards and drawers, such as forgotten odd teas or chargers for appliances that no longer exist. What bewilders me the most is my natural, congenial, embedded in the DNA aptitude to instinctively **stash** (...) (25.03.2013. *Czwarde wiosenne porzadki — u wiewiorki* <http://tofalaria.blogspot.com/2013/03/czwarde-wiosenne-porzadki-u-wiewiorki.html>)*

The stylistics of ‘disease,’ ‘fighting,’ ‘challenge’ are the metaphors that are deeply rooted in the language, they automatically call for action (Lakoff & Johnson 1980): you destroy an enemy and cure an illness. The reader identifies with metaphors from the blog if they correlate with his/her way of thinking, accepts the meanings as his own and activates his disposition to get rid of things. Authors of the blogs help with their methodical instructions, which develop the readers’ proper object evaluation and emotion controlling skills.

The basic competence the minimalists cultivate is a competence of self-aware analysis of their own actions and emotions: auto-analysis of their own social trajectory, giving instructions based on their experience, observation of their own habits and emotions. Minimalists try to control their practices by this manner and not to be guided by their habits and objects.

An important observation by the blogger concerns the emotional bond with objects and the consumer temptation which torments even the most advanced minimalists. They have, however, the advantage of being aware of these emotions, able to grasp them, describe, and—being rational—decide if they should get tempted. It is a competence the lack of which vicariously leads to excess in life: when shopping decisions are impulsive and one succumbs to the power of attachment to possessions:

*The temptation came quickly. Nice mugs, and mine is cracked. (...) It was funny to watch this parade of my own emotions, which emerged for the occasion. "Drooling" over a nice thing, hesitation, common sense, eventually laughing at myself. I bought nothing and still drink tons of tea (24.12. 2014. Pokusy, <http://tofalaria.blogspot.com/2014/12/pokusy.html>)*

To understand the practices of minimalists, we can use Max Weber's category of rationalization (Weber 1995): controlling the reality with concepts is visible in diagnoses of what minimalism is, what is its purpose, and in contemplations on mechanisms of "hoarding." Methodical reaching of a practical goal is present in all the instructions proving minimalists' self-discipline. Entering the social world of minimalists requires rationalizing majority of life aspects, i.e. objects, interpersonal contacts, free time. It is an all-encompassing self-control program. It mostly consists of observing one's emotions, which was very vividly described in a quotation above. Expressing emotions in linguistic categories is one of the ways of controlling and channeling the energy of emotion (Illouz 2007). Emotions should be rationalized for the actions not to be ruled by emotional impulses, but by a methodical life plan.

It is important that minimalistic blogs make the core of their discourse to be the rather obvious advice (don't keep unnecessary things, make responsible purchases, etc.). Common knowledge is presented as a coherent new program; consciously intellectually processed, put in formulas with English names, often repeated and therefore enforced. On one hand, the bloggers rehabilitate the part of reality one usually doesn't think about (cleaning, throwing away), and on the other make one reflect on seemingly obvious matters (e.g. asking the readers about their possessions: "How many bags do YOU own?"):

*What have we gotten rid of? Various stuff, such as old notes, handouts nobody looked at twice, many books and maps, keepsakes, stones, knick-knacks. (20.03.2013, Czy dwa jabłka to minimalizm? <http://tofalaria.blogspot.com/2013/03/czy-dwa-jabka-to-minimalizm.html>)*

Even though the stage of "minimizing" should be temporary, leading to the new, better life, the authors often get fixated on this stage and don't move past it. The "instructional" part described with passion and commitment becomes the heart of the blog and later there are no more subjects to cover and the posts become derivative and empty. Sometimes a blog is closed or the posts appear less often or it transpires that the readers only like the instructions and practical advice.

Generally, minimalism of Polish bloggers is a road to bettering their own lives. The perspective presented by the authors is strictly private. Independence and freedom are important: from the pressure of consumption, but also e.g. work, because if we buy less—we

spend less, so we don't have to work as much. It is also about getting the control back. Minimalism is shown as a rebellion against modern age. According to the bloggers, the norms and rules imposed by the consumer society, e.g. connected with outfits, personal care, interior design, holidaymaking etc., take the control away. Bloggers often say: "We go to work we hate, buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like pretending we are someone else." However, minimalists usually do not tend to acknowledge that their attitude may have consequences bigger than the quality of their life. From the arguments on personal gain, the ones on finances—also seen from individual perspective—are important. Excessive and careless consumption means spending excessive amounts of money. The slow movement created by Carl Honore is also rarely mentioned. Ecological arguments are equally rare. This "egocentrism" of minimalists is summarized in guest post on Ajka's blog by Olga, author of Ekomania blog (<http://ekostyl.blogspot.com/>): *Just like minimalists try to minimize their needs to simplify their lives (...), ecologists try to reduce their impact in the environment (so called ecological footprint) to make life on Earth better for everybody (Minimalizm a ekologia 22.02.2011. <http://www.prosty-blog.com/2011/02/minimalizm-ekologia.html>).* When it comes to the motifs of minimalistic consumptions, those include anti-consumption according to Littler (2011), i.e. striving to consume less without a broader reflection on the economic system and "living the good life," category by Pecoraro and Uusitalo (2013), i.e. referring to private values: reasonableness and simplicity of life. Not the abstract idea of solidarity rules behavior but seeking for desired emotional states, minimalist bloggers want to avoid excess to gain spiritual experiences. Referring to the classification by Portwood-Stacer (2012), personal motivations, identificatory motivations and social motivations are responsible for minimalistic consumption. Lack of moral motivations can be probably explained by the fact that it is rather a reaction to biographical experiences than an expression of a conscious life politics, awareness of global interrelations and a sense of responsibility for them, which, according to Adams and Raisborough (2008), is characteristic mostly to middle class of the developed western societies.

Due to scarce information on the today's material situation shared by minimalists on their blogs, it is hard to state whether they treat minimalism as a form of rational adaptation to a state of deprivation, thus transforming the necessity to limit consumption (due to low income) into a conscious choice (due to their values). However, we can suppose on the examples of those bloggers, who reveal some aspects of their privacy, that many of them are considerably well-off and for them minimalism is an entirely free and conscious choice.

For some bloggers minimalism is an answer to every question:

*But minimalism is not only minimizing possessions—it is just most visible. It is a way we consciously choose our activities, what we do, what is important and necessary for us, on what and whom we concentrate, focus our time and energy. A space cleared of things, matters and people unimportant to us is a sort of comfort, freedom and free space for important things and people. (...) let this life be good for you, give you joy in every realm, be pleasant and easy! (Minimalizm. Historia Oresta Tabaki... <http://orest.tabaka.eu/blog/minimalizm/>)*

Minimalists strive for certain emotional states, e.g. peace and well-being they imagine. We can assume that minimalism fits the mechanism of modern hedonism (Campbell 1987)—a pursuit of the imagined emotional state. However, in this case reaching it requires rational control. Rationalization of temporary desires and postponing pleasure is to serve

a well-being in a bigger picture. It is a philosophical concept in which self-discipline makes life peaceful and happy, consistent with study findings indicating that modern individuals act in search for emotional states (Marody 2014; Zalewska 2014; Zalewska 2015b). For minimalists a path to those emotional states is rationalization of all the temporary, impulse-based pleasures. It will not always mean avoiding them. Instead, every pleasure is rationally analyzed.

### **Conclusion: Rationalization of Pleasure and Emotions**

In this article blogging was treated as a discursive practice anchoring divergent practices of minimalistic consumption. Life narratives presented on blogs allow for creating a community of minimalists through emotional identification over common experiences of members of one generation, the childhood of whom coincided with late period of People's Poland, the youth—with the times just after the political transformation, and whose attitude towards consumer goods has changed. In People's Poland consumer goods were a luxury and they gave a high status to their owners. After the transformation, the things went from being objects of desire to everyday objects, the excess of which was starting to get irritating and annoying. Thus the bloggers' motives for minimalistic consumption are immersed in their biographical experiences and are distinctly private and personal. The point is to live a good, peaceful and happy life through liberating oneself from the excess of things. There are no references to anti-consumerism, solidarity with distant others, discourse of saving the world or moral motivations. In this aspect Polish minimalists differ from practitioners of ethical consumption in western countries, for whom personal motivations are intertwined with moral motivations. Moral motivations stem from the awareness of existence of global connection and a belief that individual decisions influence other people and animals embedded into the same network of interrelations. Giddens's life politics comes from this awareness. Perhaps, after almost 20 years of existing in those global networks, Polish minimalists have not yet developed such awareness or they don't perceive themselves as actors whose decisions could influence anything. The feeling of individual power and responsibility for global environmental problems is most common for representatives of middle class in developed western countries.

The purpose of instructions of everyday conduct presented on the blogs is to develop appropriate skills and competences: rational selection of things, rationalization of everyday activities, experienced emotions and moments of pleasure. For Polish minimalists imagined emotional state is a goal, and the full rationalization of interim pleasures is a means of reaching this goal. There is still a question of why do minimalists want to reach well-being through self-discipline? A personality of a modern man was stretched out on two dimensions of instant and delayed gratification, suppressed and spontaneous control of emotions. In the realm of work and public life, there were rules on suppressing emotion and delaying gratification (Campbell 1987). Private life and consumption were a way to vent and fulfill the imagined pleasures. In case of minimalists, emotions and rationality are intertwined. All the temporary pleasures and emotional impulses are subdued to rational control to reach a more moderate, yet stable positive emotional state. Rationalization serves

“enjoying life.” As Małgorzata Jacyno diagnoses contemporary times, modern man makes an effort and disciplines himself to fulfill “new obligations: being happy, full of life and dynamic, smiling, optimistic, healthy, young, pretty, making use of goods, pleasures and liberties” (2007: 35). We can say that minimalists aren’t unique in their rationalization of pleasure—it is symptomatic for the contemporary times. Taking into account the specific connection of emotions and rationalization of life, we can now understand the findings of the previous studies showing that the motives for the actions are a need to identify with a group or being perceived in some categories. Motives of modern man, as it was argued, relate to the imagined emotional states of the ego, which does not contradict the methodical and calculated rationalization of his everyday activities.

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### Blogs

- <http://drogadominimalizmu.pl/>: woman, Kasia, adult, employed, translator, „wife and mother,” since July 2013.
- <http://drogaminimalisty.blogspot.com/>: man, Henryk, employed, husband and father, since 2011.
- <http://www.exkonsumpcja.blogspot.com/>: woman, Karolina, adult, employed, working in a corporation, since July 2013.
- <http://mini.post.waw.pl/>: woman, adult, employed, big city, since June 2012.
- <https://minimalnat.wordpress.com/>: woman, Natalia, employed, working in a corporation, Cracow, since March 2010.
- <http://minimalplan.com/>: woman, „thirty-something years old,” journalist, since June 2012 (concentrated on fashion—clothes, colors; no advices nor descriptions of her life; book reviews, interviews, general reflections).
- <http://mypresentsimple.blogspot.com/>: woman, Marzena, adult, employed, working in a corporation, Warsaw/Gdynia, since January 2011.
- <http://nie-kupuje-tego.blogspot.com/>: woman, Marta Sapała, adult, freelancer, journalist, mother of a small child, since July 2012.
- <http://orest.tabaka.eu/>: man, Orest Tabaka, “Top Polish Minimalist,” Lublin/Warsaw/Cracow/Wroclaw, since April 2008.
- <http://pasjawspraca.com/>: man, Arkadiusz Reclaw, adult, “worked in corporations for many years,” Warsaw, since December 2012.
- <http://www.prostejestpiekne.pl/>: woman, Kasia, adult, „professional linguist, amateur photographer, graphic designer and goldsmith,” since September 2014.
- <http://tofalaria.blogspot.com/>: woman, Urszula Wojciechowska aka Tofalaria, Warsaw area, since October 2009.
- <http://www.prostyblog.com/>: woman, Anna Mularczyk-Meyer aka Ajka, adult, employed, translator, previously working in a corporation, now self-employed, Cracow, since January 2010.

<http://realny-minimalizm.blogspot.com/>: man, Remigiusz Roman Witczak, adult (graduated from high school in 1996), employed, Lublin in Lower Silesia, since September 2012.

<http://www.simplicite.pl/>: woman, Katarzyna Kędzierska, adult, employed, previously a lawyer in a corporation, now self-employed, Warsaw, since August 2013.

<http://wystarczy-mniej.blogspot.com/>: man, Konrad, adult, employed, husband and father of four children, makes his blog available to other authors, Warsaw, since February 2010.

None of the authors posts their date of birth, but tracking their personal information allows us to assume they are in their thirties.

*Biographical Note:*

Marta Cobel-Tokarska, Ph.D., works at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Department of Sociology of Culture, Maria Grzegorzewska University. She is interested in the issues of borderland of sociology of culture, anthropology, literature and recent history. Currently she is interested in the idea of Central Europe (its representation in literature, culture and accounts of travelers) and the social history of the Polish People's Republic.

E-mail: [mcobelto@gmail.com](mailto:mcobelto@gmail.com)

Joanna Zalewska, Ph.D., assistant professor, at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Department of Sociology of Culture, Maria Grzegorzewska University. She is interested in problems of cultural changes, social memory and life of old people. Author of the *Człowiek stary wobec zmiany kulturowej. Perspektywa teorii praktyk społecznych* (2015). Presently she is realizing a grant from (Polish) National Science Centre, "Consumer Revolution in Poland."

E-mail: [joanna.marta.zalewska@gmail.com](mailto:joanna.marta.zalewska@gmail.com)