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THE GREAT ÉPOQUE OF THE CONSUMPTION OF IMPORTED BROADCASTS

WEST EUROPEAN TELEVISION CHANNELS AND POLISH AUDIENCES DURING THE SYSTEM TRANSITION

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Abstract: This article discusses how Polish audiences “domesticated” West European television content that was made available through satellite dishes and semi-legal cable television channels at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Based on the analysis of viewers’ memoirs and content of magazines dedicated to satellite television, the article explores the way Poles considered channels available thanks to Astra satellite broadcast as an attractive entertainment juxtaposed with dull content offered by TVP, the national broadcaster. As this article shows, they primarily “domesticated” German late night erotic shows symbolized by *Tutti Frutti* and music videos from MTV Europe. In order to understand why satellite and cable television systems became popular in Poland during the system transition, it is necessary to take under consideration the reasons of Polish audiences’ interest in such broadcasts. It is also vital to analyze the role of cultural intermediaries such as private entrepreneurs who were offering satellite television receivers and access to cable television.

Keywords: Satellite television, Cable television, Astra, Poland, Europe, Music video, Erotic content

The bombastic term of “the great époque of the consumption of imported broadcasts” for the new “époque” of television was used in *Polish Newsreel* (Polska Kronika Filmowa, PKF) in 1993. It conveyed a phenomenon of mass interest of Polish audiences in Western TV channels broadcasted by Eutelsat and Astra satellites and retransmitted by local cable television operators.¹ This PKF edition was entitled *The Magic of the Cable* (‘Czar kabla’)², what reveals that for Polish audiences the imported content was something that had come from the imagined and, in many aspects still magical,³ West.

¹ Research for this article was supported with research grant 2013/08/S/HS2/00267 from the National Science Centre, Poland.

² *The Magic of the Cable* (Czar kabla), *Polish Newsreel* ((Polska Kronika Filmowa), 93/08, 1993.

³ For the discussion on the „Imagined West” in Eastern Europe see: Gyorgy Péteri, ed., *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton University Press, 2005.

In the mid-1980s Eutelsat satellites started broadcasting pan-European television transmission of several channels.⁴ The launch of the highly successful Astra1A DBS (Direct-broadcast satellite) in December 1988 became a high-profile event. It was considered as the beginning of a new pan-European television system, which would have an impact on the rise of common cultural identity of Europeans.⁵ Astra satellite operated by the SES (Société Européenne des Satellites), a consortium located in Luxemburg, aimed to cover the whole European Economic Community region with its footprint. One of the side effects of such broadcasting policy was that the satellite TV signal could also be received in a small part of Central-Eastern Europe, in the GDR, in the Western part of Poland and in Czechoslovakia. In 1988 Poland was still a socialist state, so the possibility of reception of Astra signal caused an immediate rise of the market for privately-owned satellite dishes and small-scale bootleg cable television networks used to receive Western TV channels. At that time Poles also had an access to Western movies on videotapes due to the development of a pirate video market.

With this article I will show how Polish audiences of that time "domesticated" West European television content. I argue that the audiences of pan-European television broadcasts in Poland domesticated their media content primarily as a highly attractive entertainment and as an imagery of colourful high-living standard of "the World" (Świat), a term used as a synonym of the imagined West.

The scholarship of media history in Eastern Europe is primarily focused on the role of media change and access to pluralistic media sources as a factor of the development of new political communication interdependent with the rise of "civil societies."⁶ Here, based upon viewers' memoirs, contemporary press sources and audience research, instead of making an analysis of political economy of the media change I will rather explore the role of viewers in giving meanings to the television content. Current scholarship prevail a macro-scale perspective and consider television industries as primary actors responsible for the constructing of meanings of satellite television in Europe.⁷ I will go beyond the considerations of macro-scale media political economy, in which the emphasis is placed on television's contribution to the post-Cold War democratization in the Central-Eastern Europe. I will rather focus on the ethnographic analysis of media audiences' practices and on the role of cultural intermediaries which influenced the practices of acquisition and using new media technologies. While referring to memoirs of satellite dish owners, television and lifestyle magazines, and audience research, I will show how the broader cultural context of the system transition in 1989 influenced the Polish audiences' contact with new media. The availability of the Western TV satellite signal in the second half of the 1980s successfully challenged the state monopoly for media and relocated Poland into the "new cultural geography".⁸

My study will shed light on the process of "domestication" of media technology. The concept of domestication introduced by British media historians refers to a process in which particular technology changes its status from novelty to an aspect of everyday life which is taken for granted.⁹ The process of "domestication" of a particular media technology includes both "The construction of a set of practices" and "construction of meaning" of a new technology.¹⁰

⁴ For the general history of transnational broadcasting in Europe, see: Jean K., "The Quiet Invention of a New Medium: Twenty Years of Transnational Television in Europe." In Jean K. Chalaby, ed., *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a New Media Order*, I.B. Tauris, 2005.

⁵ For the history of Astra enterprise, see: Chris Forester, ed., *High Above. The untold story of Astra, Europe's leading satellite company*, Springer, 2010. The cultural impact of satellite television in the UK was discussed in: Charlotte Brunsdon, *Soap Operas to satellite dishes*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

⁶ For instance, see: Laura Lengel, ed. *Culture @nd technology in the new Europe: Civic discourse in transformation in post-Communist Europe*, Ablex, 2000; Peter Gross, Karol Jakubowicz (eds.) *Media Transformations in the Post-Communist World: Eastern Europe's Tortured*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012; Peter Gross, *Entangled Evolutions: Media and Democratization in Eastern Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002; David L. Paletz, Karol Jakubowicz, Pavao Novosel, *Glasnost and after: media and change in Central and Eastern Europe*, Hampton Press, 1995.

⁷ See: Jean K Chalaby, "The Quiet Invention of a New Medium: Twenty Years of Transnational Television in Europe," In Jean K. Chalaby, ed., *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a New Media Order*, I.B. Tauris, 2005; Kay Richardson, Ulrike K. Meinhof, *Worlds in Common? Television discourse in a changing Europe*, Routledge, 1999; Helen Kelly-Holmes, *European Television Discourse in Transition*, Multilingual Matters, 1999.

⁸ David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces Of Identity. Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, Routledge, 1995.

⁹ Cf. Berker, T., Hartmann, M., Punie, Y., i Ward, K. (red.) (2006). *Domestication of Media and Technology*. Maidenhead, Silverstone Roger and Hirsch Eric (red.), *Consuming Technologies. Media and information in domestic spaces*, Routledge 1994.

¹⁰ Knut Sørensen, "Domestication: the enactment of technology," [in:] Berker, T. et al. (red.), *Domestication of Media and Technology*. Maidenhead. p 48.

David Morley and Roger Silverstone in one of the early works on "media domestication" claimed that "television's meanings, that is the meaning of both texts and technologies, have to be understood as emergent properties of contextualized audience practices".¹¹ First, I will show how cultural intermediaries "contextualized" Western TV "domestication" by Polish audiences. Both mass media, domestic television and press, as well as private companies which offered satellite dishes and cable television access are considered here as cultural intermediaries since they significantly influenced cultural meanings of foreign television content. Further, I will discuss which television content has been watched by Poles. Finally, I will show that the issue of knowledge foreign languages or the lack of thereof was an important element of the process of the domestication. This study includes a content analysis of the Polish television guides and lifestyle magazines, personal interviews and memoirs from an internet forum dedicated to the satellite television.

1. Western TV and Local Cultural Intermediaries

First, it is important to ask how Poles were able to learn what exactly was offered by a satellite broadcasting, how to acquire a satellite dish or have a connection to a pirate cable TV. In Western Europe media industries provided marketing and advertisement which included detailed information for potential audiences on what they need to watch a satellite TV. In Poland, where the availability of a satellite TV signal was not a result of intentional policy of media industries, different cultural intermediaries influenced audiences' interest.

In the years 1987-1988 Polish lifestyle and media-related magazines started publishing regular articles in which Western satellite television was discussed as a breakthrough in the history of television and as a source of highly attractive and colourful content. Such articles also informed on the rise of local, privately-owned companies, which offered satellite receivers. For instance, one of such articles entitled "The satellite television has just been launched" provided information on the open-air public show of satellite reception organized in the centre of Warsaw by Svensat, the first Polish manufacturer of satellite dishes.¹²



Figure 1. Presentation of satellite television reception organized in Warsaw city center by Svensat company in 1987. Source: *The Screen (Ekran)*, June 18, 1987, 14.

¹¹ David Morley and Roger Silverstone, "Domestic communication – technologies and meanings", *Media Culture and Society*, 12, 1990, pp. 31-55, p. 32.

¹² "Telewizja satelitarna już ruszyła," ["The satellite television has just been launched"] *Ekran*, 18 June 1987, 14-15.

In 1986 Polish authorities introduced permission for the ownership of a satellite television. However, it was relatively easy to get it and plausibly many satellite dish owners simply ignored this regulation because of the bureaucracy involved in getting this permission and a general lack of state control over privately owned satellite dishes. A representative of State Radio Inspection (Państwowa Inspekcja Radiowa – PIR) claimed that in early 1989 there was 920 privately-owned and registered dishes and 240 receivers were owned by state institutions such as culture centres.¹³

In 1988 the national broadcaster - TVP (Telewizja Polska) started broadcasting highly acclaimed *Closer to the World* ('Bliżej Świata'), a program dedicated to satellite television.¹⁴ Jerzy Klechta, an elderly gentleman who hosted this program, would talk about what really is satellite television and show music videos and fragments of entertainment programs from satellite broadcasts. The title sequence of *Closer to the World*¹⁵ included "chrome logos" of the main satellite programs available in Europe and a fragment of a music show with black dancers in exotic Caribbean setting. Available footage also shows a typical convention of TVP programs at that time. While Western television was not showed, a group of cultural critics talked in a studio about the cultural impact of satellite television. This convention, referred by Poles as "talking heads" (*gadające głowy*) became one of symbols of the dullness of domestic television at that time. On the one hand, TVP broadcasts in the 1980s included a substantial amount of political propaganda. On the other hand, TVP broadcasted mostly relatively old movies and TV series.

The Center for the Research on Public Opinion (Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej), a research unit of TVP carefully monitored audience interest in TVP broadcasts. Disregard of the audience for the lack of new content, "talking heads," and low technical quality was constantly considered as a significant problem for TVP officials.¹⁶

Poles had access to satellite dishes through small private companies which offered the necessary hardware and technical service, such as aforementioned Svensat. *Advertisements*¹⁷ of such companies were published in several high profile weekly and lifestyle magazines as well as showed in TVP.

A privately owned satellite dish was enormously expensive at that time, it might have cost more than \$1000, while in 1988 Poles were earning approximately an equivalent of \$40-50 monthly. Primarily private entrepreneurs bought dishes, the only social group that had a substantial disposable income. However, a cable TV installed in apartment buildings by small-scale private companies who charged a low monthly fee was much more affordable. Some snobbish bars in main cities and resorts also started broadcasting satellite television, mostly programs with music videos, for its clientele.

The first and most spectacular experiment with cable TV that took place in Warsaw's district of Ursynów in 1988. At the same time, in 1988-1989, according to information provided by well informed sources, *The Screen* ('Ekran') magazine editors, there was a few dozens of such small scale cable TVs, which retransmitted signals of the most appealing channels available via Eutelsat and Astra broadcasts.¹⁸ From 1989, along with the introduction of a market economy, privately owned cable television companies began to offer relatively affordable access to a large number of channels. For instance, Polish Cable Television (Polska Telewizja Kablowa - PTK), a company established in 1989, offered its services in the main cities of Poland. This highly successful enterprise, further rebranded as UPC Polska, after the acquisition by United Philips Cable Broadband that currently holds the largest share of the cable television market. However, aside from PTK, cable television access until the mid-1990s was mostly provided by small-scale bootleg services locally for instance, in a single housing district.

¹³ "Tysiące anten," [Thousands of satellite dishes], *TV SAT Magazyn*, Issue 1, 1989, 5.

¹⁴ High audience feedback on the *Closer to the World* was discussed in audience research report in TVP internal bulletin 'Widownia i ocena programu Bliżej Świata,' [The audience and appraisal of „Closer to the World” program], *Aktualności Radiowo-Telewizyjne* [Currents in Radio and Television], 1988, Issue 12, pp. 5-7.

¹⁵ *Closer to the World*, Title Sequence ('Bliżej świata- czołówka programu')

¹⁶ What they say to us? Interview with Albin Kania, the director of the The Center for the Research on Public Opinion (Co nam mówią, Rozmowa z Albinem Kanią, dyrektorem Ośrodka Badania Opinii Publicznej), *Prasa Polska*, Vol. 2, 1984, pp. 33-25

¹⁷ *Satellite television commercial* ('Reklama telewizji satelitarnej'), (1989/1990)

¹⁸ Franciszek Skwierawski, "Telewizja satelitarna dla Kowalskiego," [Satellite television for Everyman] *Ekran* 13 April 1989, pp. 2-3, p. 2.

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From 1988, *Hi-fi Audio Video* magazine dedicated to consumer electronics started publishing detailed technical guides for satellite dish owners. Polish magazines from that time would often publish related advertisements as magazine covers.

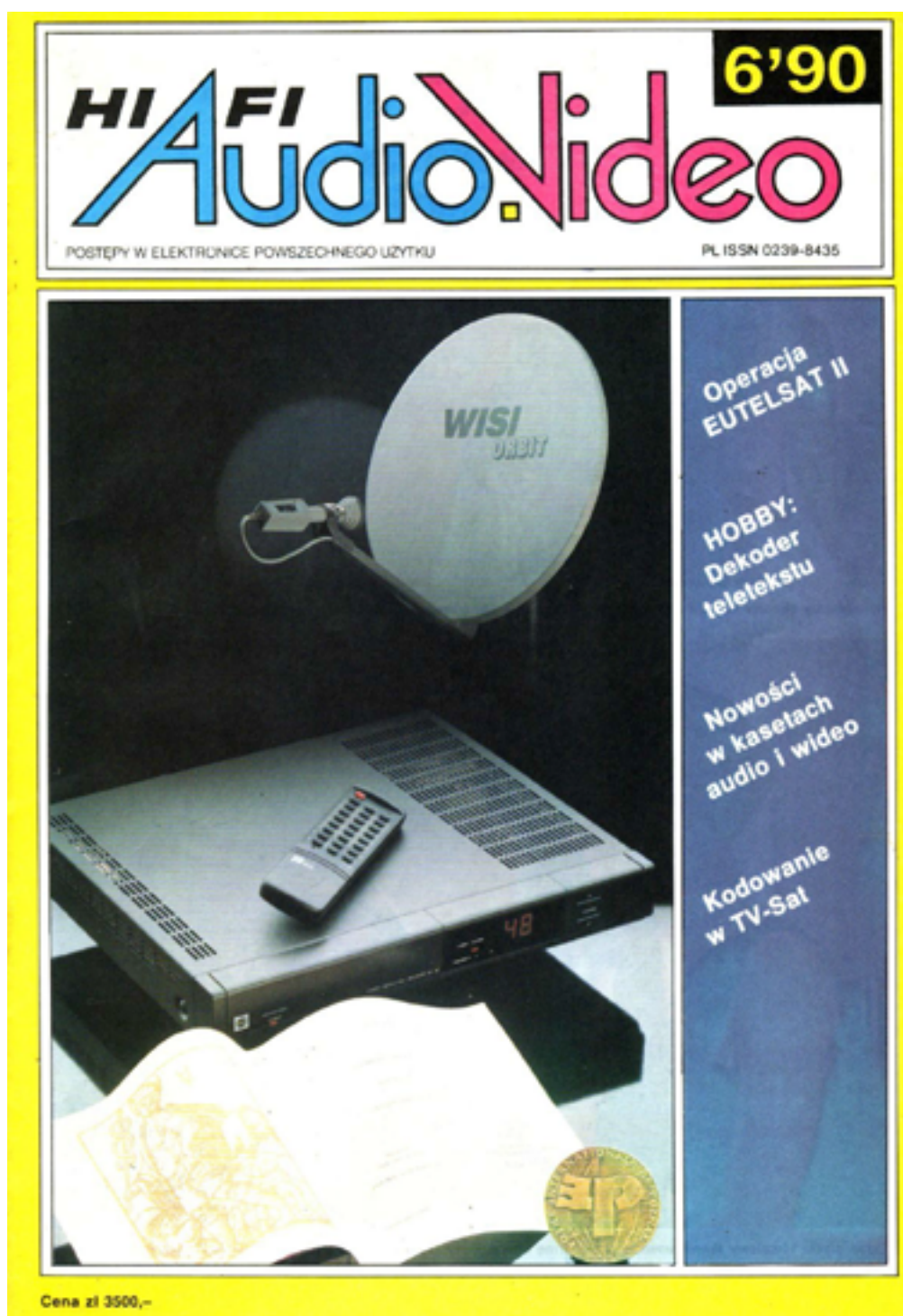


Figure 2. *Hi-fi Audio Video* cover from June 1990 with an advert of a private importer of satellite dishes and receivers.

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The first magazine dedicated exclusively to the satellite television was *TV SAT Magazyn* launched in March 1989. This magazine published the program schedule for the most watched TV channels, technical guides and information on movie stars and artists whose music videos were shown on MTV. This magazine was aimed at male audiences. It not only emphasized the availability of erotic content in satellite broadcasts, but also published in every issue a cover showing semi-naked woman.



Figure. 3. Cover of the first issue of *TV SAT Magazyn* from 15 March, 1989.

After 1989 when some Western TV channels (for instance *FilmNet*) started scrambling their signal in Western Europe, one could simply buy a subscription for such channels through the official distribution system. In Eastern Europe however, the only way to watch premium channels was to use descramblers made by the garage industry and bought at bazaars or in a shady electronics store.

One of the memoirs of a dedicated fan of satellite television from Satkurier.pl website forum, which has existed since 2006. Shows how the aforementioned cultural intermediaries influenced his interests:

My first contact with television other than TVP took place in the 1980s when I was watching "Blżej Świata". Because of this program I learned about particular foreign television channels. I also remember the dissemination of satellite television. In summer of 1989 I was in Międzyzdroje [a fashionable seaside resort] and I remember the huge interest in MTV showing in a bar. Then I became interested in having a satellite receiver of my own. Further, from about 1991 cable was available in my housing estate and I was able to watch standard channels: RTL, PRO7, Eurosport.¹⁹

The data from public opinion polls show the steady increase of the availability of satellite and cable TV in Poland. Households with the ownership of satellite dishes: 1990 – 3%, 1992 – 3%, 1994 – 9%, 1996 – 12%. Households with access to Cable TV: 1992 – 7%, 1996 – 20%.²⁰ Further development of satellite television and cable TVs was related to Polish satellite operators, which offered bundled packets of several Polish and foreign channels, mostly in Polish language versions.

2. What Exactly Did Poles Watch?

The aforementioned *Polish Newsreel* program *The Magic of the Cable* was dedicated to the fascination of Polish audiences with new Western TV channels. They were available with relatively affordable semi-legal cable TV, which retransmitted European satellite channels. A quote from a male, (the intended owners of cable TV), in *The Magic of the Cable*, gives us a hint on the practices of "domestication" of Western TV in early post-socialist Poland. "I would expect some attractive, entertaining, and pretty programs. No boredom. God forbid!", "I have it because I can watch sport and men's programs. Let's say, it's Friday night and while my wife is occupied with some household duties, I can watch *Tutti Frutti*". *Tutti Frutti*²¹ was a high profile Sat 1 German channel late night erotic show considered as a symbol of late night erotic content available on German Astra channels.

Polish audiences appropriated selective content from Western TV and considered it as highly attractive entertainment compared with TVP program. If we look at the marketing of Astra, operated as strictly a commercial enterprise by the SES company, it is clear that this system was commercialized primarily as an entertainment platform without any references to forging European cultural identity. An *Astra promotional video*²² from 1989 claims that this satellite system would offer "a whole new choice of entertainment." In a 12-minute video, slogans of "action," "adventure," "leisure," "pleasure" and "fun" are being used repeatedly.

Eli Noam mentioned that during the discussion on the potential reception of pan European DBS, according to one opinion, the only potential audience of the satellite broadcasts was youth interested in music videos and businessmen

¹⁹ Post added by „mikele” on Nov. 21, 2009, Thread „Twój początek i zainteresowanie TV Sat, [Beginnings of your interest in satellite television], Satkurier website, <http://forum.satkurier.pl/viewtopic.php?f=33&t=1580>.

²⁰ "Dobra trwałego użytku w gospodarstwach domowych," [Consumer durables in Polish households], CBOS, 2004, 10, <http://www.cbos.pl>. For detailed data on the dissemination of satellite and cable TV in Europe of the early 1990s, see: *Statistical Yearbook. Cinema, television, Video and New Media in Europe*, Council of Europe, 1994-1995.

²¹ *Tutti Frutti TV4 – 25 Jahre RTL*.

²² *Astra 1A Promotional Video 1989*, Youtube footage.

interested in up-to-date economic news.²³ However, in further studies on pan-European television there are no discussions on the role of aforementioned content as a significant factor in the domestication of satellite television.

The first research on cable TV audience in Ursynów, which was offered with six foreign channels, gives us some insight in audience tastes. Here is the percentage of respondents who claimed that they frequently watch a particular channel: Super Channel – 84%, Sat 1 – 79%, Sky Channel – 50%, Teleclub – 47%, 3SAT – 41%.²⁴ These channels offered relatively similar content that included movies, TV series, cartoons, quiz shows and music videos. What is also interesting, researchers concluded that television content offered by these channels was frequently "not watched in a literal sense" but rather used as an element of ambience while doing some other things in the household.²⁵ Also several articles from *TV SAT Magazyn* and *Ekran* from that time suggest that Poles were particularly fascinated not only by the specific content, but also with a completely new "multi-channel experience".²⁶ Polish lifestyle magazine *Pan* ('The Gentleman'), an imitation of *Playboy* magazine, pointed out this new audience experience.

Windows in Warsaw Ursynów district are not flashing in the same tempo anymore. There is no same voice of the same [TVP] announcer in corridors and staircases. There is a selection of six channels. One can become dizzy with it. There is no way to hide it – the great world ["wielki świat" – a synonym of "the West"] is already here".²⁷

In the mid-1980s the most fashionable form of entertainment in Poland was to watch video movies. A few years later foreign channels took the place of video, which at that time started to be considered more as a working-class leisure activity. As *Ekran* editor wrote "Today it is unfashionable to claim that you watched "Rambo" or "Police Academy". SKY, 3 SAT or Music Box sound much better these days"²⁸

As in *Closer to the World* title, the term "world" was used not only in the media discourse but also in viewers' memoirs. One satellite dish owner remembered his feelings on the contacts with Western television:

It was 1992. Satellite receiver... set up to receive Astra broadcasts. There was nothing in Polish but it was an incredible feeling that you have the world in your home... Those colourful music videos, even commercials were something incredible at that time.²⁹

In 1991 *TV SAT Magazyn* conducted an audience survey in which readers claimed that their favourite channels were RTL Plus, Eurosport, MTV, Sky One, and Sat 1. As the most favourite single program, Polish audiences definitely chose *Tutti Frutti*.³⁰ Such tastes are consistent with memoirs of those who had access to foreign channels in the early 1990s. It is important to note that satellite channels were scarcely used to watch movies. Of course, the language barrier was important here, but the main reason for the lack of interest in movies was the fact that satellite channels broadcasted relatively old movies, and Poles at that time had excellent access to newest movies with the huge pirate videotape market.³¹

A *TV SAT Magazyn* editor claimed that television channels were broadcasting movies from the 1970s and he had interests in other content such as Bundesliga matches shown on RTL Plus, music videos on MTV, and *Men's Magazine* (*Männermagazin*) on the RTL channel. As he wrote, it was one of his favourite programs which showed only

²³ Eli Noam, *Television in Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1991, 300.

²⁴ Wojciech Siesicki, "Odbiór telewizji satelitarnej," [Satellite television reception], *Aktualności Radiowo-telewizyjne*, Issue 1, 1989, 10. Unfortunately, before the rise of commercial audience market research in the first half of the 1990s such research was made only on a very small scale.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶ Richardson and Meinhof, op. cit., 71.

²⁷ Adam Halber, "Zakłócenia w odbiorze" [Disruption of reception], *Pan*, August 1988, 44-45, here 44.

²⁸ Skwierawski, op. cit. 2.

²⁹ Post by „Abonent1979” added on 9 July 2011, Thread „Twój początek i zainteresowanie TV Sat, [Beginnings of your interest in satellite television], Satkurier website, <http://forum.satkurier.pl/viewtopic.php?f=33&t=1580>.

³⁰ "Co i kiedy oglądamy," [What and when we watch] *TV SAT Magazyn*, January 1991, 3.

³¹ Patryk Wasiak, "The Video boom in the state-socialist Poland," *Zeitschrift Für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*. 1 2012.

"Cars – Women – Cars –Women", which, as he stated, were favourite contents of all red-blooded men.³²

Music videos and erotic content were the most frequently mentioned foreign television output watched by Polish audiences. It is also important to note that satellite television provided relatively easy access for adolescents to erotic content. An interviewee explained how he used the opportunity of watching MTV at night to look for erotic content.

My father had his own private enterprise and a substantial disposable income at that time. In 1990 he bought a satellite receiver. I was frequently recording MTV programs such as *Headbangers Ball* [Late night program dedicated to heavy metal fans]. Of course, such late night recordings gave me an opportunity to "hunt " for some porn available on German channels.³³

As data quoted above show, only a few per cent of Polish households had a satellite dish or access to cable TV. The most significant barriers however, which limited the dissemination of access to foreign television were the high cost of satellite dishes and the language barrier. My other interviewee claimed that he had no interest in cultural meanings offered by the satellite dish at that time.

My colleague had a satellite dish bought in 1993. This satellite dish was really something. However, to be honest, there was not much to watch there, mostly commercials, dumb quiz shows and teleshopping rather than anything of value. It was more a swank, that you have a satellite dish at your balcony. There was no practical use of it, except if you wanted to learn foreign languages.³⁴

One of the most important factors which influenced domestication of foreign television was the language barrier. Before the year 1989 Poles were able to learn only Russian as a part of their compulsory education curriculum. Knowledge of English or German was very limited, mostly to intelligentsia milieus. As a reader in a letter to *TV SAT Magazyn* explained, he and his wife actually rejected satellite television:

We were highly impressed by the technical excellence of foreign channels. Such wonderful colours were there... After few days we realized that the basic obstacle for us is the language... Language barrier forced us to return to watching the most interesting programs in TVP.³⁵

Watching foreign television broadcasts also had symbolic meanings. West European satellite broadcasts symbolized for Poles the Imaginary West. Shortly after 1989 the question on the necessity of "accessing Europe", that it is the European Community, became extensively discussed in the public sphere. It was clear that with a vast economic difference the eventual access to the European Community would be a long and painstaking process. But at that time one could have an instant access to Europe at home by watching Astra channels. This notion of satellite television as a symbol of Europe, particularly European lifestyle and a high-level of living was a constant part of advertisements from that time. For instance, one advert from 1991 shows the European Community flag waving next to a satellite dish. The message was clear, the access to Europe was possible for anyone who would purchase a satellite dish and start watching Astra programs.

³² "Notatnik telemana," [Viewer's diary] *TV SAT Magazyn*, September 1989, 4.

³³ E-mail interview with M. F. (born 1976), March 1, 2014.

³⁴ Interview with R. K.. (born 1970), 20 October 2013.

³⁵ Anonymous, "Moja przygoda z TV SAT," [My experience with TV SAT] *TV SAT Magazyn*, September 1992, 6.

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Figure 4. TechniSat advert, TV SAT Magazyn, May 1991, 2.

3. Conclusion

For Poles during the period of system transition, satellite and cable television provided a substitute of programs and an access to the "Imaginary West." The title *Closer to the World* excellently represented the desire of Poles to learn about the world behind the Iron Curtain. "The great époque of the consumption of imported broadcasts" lasted from about 1988 to the mid-1990s. At that time more and more pan-European channels became scrambled and it was not feasible and profitable to distribute bootleg descramblers for coded channels. It was also the time of the rise of Polish privately owned television channels such as Polsat (est. 1992) and TVN (est. 1997), which provided Polish audiences with large amounts of entertainment content, especially with a large selection of relatively new movies. At that time Polish satellite operators such as Cyfra + (est. 1998, an enterprise of Canal Plus company) offered several foreign channels with a Polish lector or subtitles in a subscription based system. The second half of the 1990s was also a time of regionalization. For instance MTV started regionalization in 1997 when MTV audiences could watch MTV German or MTV Russian in local language versions instead of MTV Europe. MTV Poland started its broadcasting in 2000. Instead of a step into forging a European identity it was rather a short time period after which Poles returned to watching television formatted for local audiences. For instance, MTV Poland included a large selection of Polish music videos.

The deregulation of the television market in Europe and the launch of the Astra satellite in the 1980s, along with the end of the Cold War, promised an era of a common media experience that would be shared among all audiences in the united post-Cold War Europe. It is necessary to ask the question on how the pan-European televisions were considered by audiences in Central Eastern Europe, for which foreign channels provided an imagery of "The World". This study showed that it was still "the other world". It was the imagined West seen for the first time not during actual travel to the Western Europe, unavailable for most Poles because of political and economic reasons, but on a screen in a living room.

Biography:

Patryk Wasiak has a PhD in cultural studies from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland. He is a lecturer at the Institute for Cultural Studies at the University of Wrocław, Poland. He is currently working on a book about consumer culture, home technologies, and the "Imaginary West" in post-socialist Poland. His research interests include the cultural history of the Cold War, history of consumer electronics, home computers, and image processing technologies.