

Posthuman domesticity and ethnography: researching the smart home ▲

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Paper short abstract:

Trends in home automation and the increasing use of digital technologies have led to the emergence of networked, intelligent, or smart homes. With this paper, we want to make a contribution to some methodological questions: smart home technologies ethnographic research, or ethical and gender issues.

Paper long abstract:

Trends in home automation and the increasing use of digital technologies for diverse purposes have led to the emergence of what is referred to as connected, networked, augmented, intelligent, or smart home. The increasing technologization and digitalization transforms the home by challenging dichotomies, such as human/non-human, female/male, private/public, contributing to the emergence of new forms of posthuman domesticity, in which technologies assume responsibilities and agencies formerly reserved for humans. This opens the concept of 'smart home' to post-humanist investigations. The paper is based on a recently started EU project on smart homes and the transformation of power dynamics through domestic space digitalization. In our subproject, we focus on the transformation of human/non-human and gendered power dynamics within different forms of household (families, couples, collaborative housing projects or co-livings).

With this paper, we want to make a substantial contribution to the following methodological questions: A. How do ethnographic approaches need to be modified to be employable for research on the use of smart home technologies? Do we need to rely more on the digital ethnography or participatory research approaches such as time use diaries and time estimates, visual methods to capture the negotiation processes of work in the household from different perspectives and constellations? B. What ethical issues need to be considered, when home is a sphere of the intimacy, the familiar, and a place of retreat from the sphere of the public? C. How gender can be systematically considered in the ethnographic approach without falling into the trap of reification?