

Philosophy of the City

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Reconsidering Dwelling: Notes Toward a Media Pragmatics

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Abstract: This article analyzes the philosophical concept of dwelling from the perspective of a media pragmatics. Media pragmatics is presented here as a method that discloses the circular relation between rule-bound practices and the material and technological substrates that support them. This method is put into practice through a comparative philosophical interpretation of two “canonical” models of dwelling: the Greek *oikos* and the bourgeois home. Because dwelling, as Heidegger argued, is an interface mediating between the “lifeworld” and the “world” while also organizing relations within the lifeworld, it serves here as a privileged object for articulating this method.

Keywords: dwelling, Heidegger, Habermas, pragmatism, media theory, postmetaphysical thinking

1 Introduction: What kind of philosophy for the city?

You purchase a home. By doing so, you enter a juridically structured property relation. You are now privy to certain privileges and subject to some contracted obligations. You may dispose of your property as you see fit, within limits. In acquiring property, you assume the care of a small node in a network of interlocking infrastructures. You must pay your mortgage and you must contract and transact with private and public entities to ensure the integrity of the infrastructures that connect your property to electricity grids, sewer systems, and communications networks. This relationship is mutually constitutive. Although you may mold the home, you will be molded by the home in turn, by its placement in relation to urban infrastructures and services, by its disposition of space and light, by the quality of the water that flows through your city’s pipes, by the discipline that it, and the regimes of finance and governance to which it is linked, submits you to.

2 How does philosophy respond to this prosaic scenario?

Martin Heidegger, for one, approached the everyday artifact of human habitation through the concept of dwelling.¹ For Heidegger, dwelling refers to Being as it unfolds in the construction of edifices and in the cultivation of things. To dwell is to reside in what Heidegger calls the fourfold: the nurturing of the earth, the mapping of our spatial position against the vault of the sky, the act of hoping through attunement to the

¹ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking.”

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divine, and the unfolding of our existential nature in light of the certainty of our mortality. Dwelling, for Heidegger, is “bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things.”²

From our perspective, Heidegger’s notion of dwelling, however poetic, seems rather quaint. Our homes, our apartments, our houses, whether owned or rented, whatever their form or size, are not only spaces that frame habits and are imbued with meaning, they are just as much nodes connected to urban infrastructures, communication networks, administrative codes, laws, financial processes, and capitalist markets. Dwelling may seem like an appropriate concept for describing a philosopher’s cabin in the forest, but at least since antiquity, at least since the time of the fully developed Greek *polis*, the space of private residence has usually been an object fully entangled in technological, cultural, social, and political contexts. Nonetheless, Heidegger’s notion of dwelling offers a starting point, however limited, for the act of thinking about dwelling in its fuller imbrications.

If we translate Heidegger’s reflections into a different language, dwelling can be thought as an architectural, technical, cultural, social, economic, and even political unit that organizes the practices of individuals while situating these practices in a meaningful space. With these terms – architecture, culture, technology, society, economy, politics – I am in a sense alluding to concepts that already stand in a relation to well-defined academic disciplines: art history, anthropology, sociology, political science, the natural sciences, and so on. How exactly does philosophy relate to this deflated scientific terrain? How does philosophy think about dwelling in a way that stands beyond the capacities of those disciplines? Why approach the artifact of the modern human dwelling and its largely urban context through philosophy, when one could, for instance, use the methods, tools, and concepts of economics to gain plenty of information about housing prices as they relate to average family income by neighborhood? And by extension, how does philosophy engage with the city? What does philosophy bring to the table, in terms of methods, concepts, and insights, that disciplines like urban studies, sociology, or economics cannot?

In the following essay, I propose a philosophical method for interrogating the artifact of dwelling, a method extendable to the analysis of other cultural and technical artifacts. Furthermore, I put this method into practice via a comparative analysis of two “canonical” historical models of dwelling: the Greek *oikos*, on the one hand, and what I will call here the bourgeois home.

However, as my initial queries suggest, any attempt to deal with an artifact like dwelling from the perspective of philosophy in the present demands a preliminary reflection on what philosophy has been in the past, what it is today, and what it is still capable of doing. The very idea of a philosophy of the city already signals a shift in the traditional framework and object of philosophy, a shift that demands careful scrutiny. By thinking about dwelling, Heidegger presaged this shift, and therefore I think it is important to clarify what it entails before moving to a philosophical interrogation of dwelling.

If one follows Jürgen Habermas’s historical periodization of Western philosophy, as I do here, then this tradition has passed through the following stages.³

1. In the wake of Parmenides, metaphysics as it was understood by Aristotle and Plato concerned itself with the question of the being of beings, with the nature of reality, that is, with ontology.
2. Now, according to Habermas, important motives for the transition from ontology to mentalism (the philosophy of consciousness) resulted out of skepticism about the priority of Being over thought and from the nature of reflection on the questions of method. Since Descartes, self-consciousness, or the relationship of the knowing subject to itself, was supposed to offer access to an inner, certain sphere of the representations we have of objects.⁴ This mode of metaphysical thinking, however, was problematized by historical developments that came to it from the outside. For instance, the cognitive priority of thinking was contested by the procedural empirical methods and requirements of justification specific to the natural sciences. With the emergence of procedural methods of inquiry, a split in areas of competency developed. The objectifying approach of the natural sciences came to be complemented by the

² Ibid., 149.

³ Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 12.

⁴ Ibid., 31.

hermeneutic approach of the social and human sciences. In the first case, knowledge consists of the sum of coherently interlocking fallible propositions derived from empirical observation. In the second, the cultural and social realms are disclosed via an interpretative procedure that connects to the intuitive knowledge of participants. In either case: “The fallibilism of scientific theories is incompatible with the type of knowledge *prima philosophia* believed itself capable of attaining.”⁵

Under the rubric of Being, Heidegger responds to this historical situation by bringing “generative subjectivity” down from the metaphysical realm into the dimensions of historicity and individuation. For Heidegger, *Dasein* finds itself already situated within the facticity of historical surroundings. As such, we can understand Heidegger’s interest in dwelling as relating to his attempt to think about the way certain preexisting material objects and structures frame, mediate, and orient the practices, possibilities, and destiny of individuals in the world. As Ursula Heinse puts it, dwelling exemplifies a mode of habitation in which the relation to objects is constitutive of the process of living itself: in dwelling, the essence of the human and of objects is made to manifest.⁶

3. For Habermas, however, Heidegger falters by prejudicing the world-constituting force of grammatically prestructured worldviews.⁷ By contrast, Habermas argues that a pragmatic conception of experience is able to account for the interplay between shifting horizons of meaning and the dimension in which these horizons prove their validity in a way that remained beyond Heidegger’s grasp. Subjects find themselves in semantically structured lifeworlds; nonetheless, these lifeworlds are developed through pragmatically performed, intersubjective practices. With the linguistic turn the objectivity of an experience is no longer assessed in terms of how judgments are constructed based on sense data, or in terms of some overriding cultural frame or linguistic structure that determines meanings once and for all, but through an interpretation of the totality of intersubjective practices that are woven together into a form of life. With this method, a “circular process comes into play between the lifeworld as the resource from which communicative action draws, and the lifeworld as the product of this action; in this process, no gap is left by the disappearance of the transcendental subject.”⁸

In the following, I assume that Habermas’s genealogy and the conclusions derived from it are correct. The inquiry presented here therefore situates itself in the paradigm of postmetaphysical thinking. Nonetheless, I disagree with Habermas on one important count. Habermas’s discourse pragmatics focuses too much on language at the expense of the object world and at the expense of the nonlinguistic cultural and technical artifacts and media that organize human practices and frame meanings. Looked at from this perspective, Heidegger’s attention to dwelling constitutes an attempt to think about the way structures beyond language frame the practices that come together into a meaningful form of life.

By contrast with discourse pragmatics, what has come to be known as German media theory presents a methodological paradigm premised on analyzing the material structures and technical programs that govern the processes of selection, storage, and transmission that support a given practice.⁹ Media theory alerts us to the fact that symbolic practices often rest on material and technical substrates whose programs and structures organize the range and choice of action made possible by practitioners as well as the purpose to which practices can be directed. In addition, media theory highlights the fact that symbolic practices often rest on technological infrastructures whose protocols of selection, storage, and transmission may prejudice what is representable, perceivable, and capable of being expressed. These material substrates can be analyzed, following media theory, through a media archeology.

To be sure, I make use of media theory very selectively. For one, it seems to me that media theorists tend to transfer the Heideggerian method to another level, and to reproduce its problems and limitations there.

⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁶ Heise, *Sense of Place*, 35.

⁷ Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 42.

⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁹ For a short summary of the development of German media theory, see Geoghegan, “After Kittler.”

Media theorists tend to prejudice, from a structuralist perspective, the force of the preprogrammed technical operations on which intersubjective practices rest. Whether it is their intention or not, their analyses often strip pragmatic agents of their agency and their pragmatism, reducing them to operators whose linguistic and nonlinguistic performances simply mimic or reproduce the programmed technical operations of which their actions are then judged as little more than an effect.

Nonetheless, media theory does equip those of us interested in furthering the interpretative–reconstructive task of philosophy with some useful tools. Hence, the approach I present here puts a discourse–pragmatic framework in recursive relation with media theory. Articulating this framework calls for some basic definitions and explanations.

From a media pragmatic point of view, the philosophical interpreter focuses not on mental representations and their relationship to objects but on the interpretation and reconstruction of the rule-governed actions and intersubjective practices agents engage in. These pragmatically performed, rule-guided practices form the symbolic context of the lifeworld. Rule-guided practices, however, are assumed here to rest on material substrates that are often of a technical nature; that is, that are programed to carry out analog or digital operations of inscription, storage, and transmission. Habermas writes “Of course this ontic relation between a practice and the material substrate that supports it is different from the semantic relation speakers establish to something in the objective world by making assertions.”¹⁰ Different perhaps, but I claim that practices and the operations of the technical substrates that support them stand in material continuity. And this is where I bring the media theoretical perspective into play, suggesting that the semantic–pragmatic practices and the material–technical substrates that support them stand in a recursive relation to each other.

The method I now put into practice, then, reconstructs the circular process connecting performatively achieved rule-guided practices to their material and technical substrates. One of the advances of this approach is its avoidance of determinism: we can assume that structural, technical, or material limits (not determinants) frame and give form to a range of practices, becoming almost like a second nature – until internal or external factors force a reconfiguration of either said practices and/or the material substrates that support them, thus opening new avenues for agency and practice, on the one hand, or for new technological and epistemic paradigms, on the other.

This method demands, of course, that the philosophical interpreter draw from the work of humanists, social scientists, and natural scientists – that is, from the gamut of the sciences. Under the paradigm of postmetaphysical thinking, philosophy can maintain its status within scientific inquiry by providing a means for the reconstructive appropriation of scientific knowledge.¹¹ This is philosophy’s remaining privilege and advantage: its multilingual character, its tenacity in framing problems from a universal perspective, and its capacity to range across disciplines and to maintain clarity and coherence at a metalevel as part of its reconstructive–interpretative approach. This factor gives philosophy a unique advantage when it comes to working through moral and normative problems. And as I will presently show, dwelling cannot be conceived without engaging in questions of a moral and normative nature that are imbricated in both epistemological and ontological problems.

3 Dwelling in antiquity

I begin by offering a concrete exposition of the previously outlined method. This can be done with clarity by making use of the canonical model of the fully developed Greek *polis*. What makes this model useful in the present context, apart from its familiarity, is the comparative simplicity of the political distribution of social roles and practices that was the hallmark of the *polis*, a simplicity (in comparison to our contemporary

¹⁰ Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 15.

¹¹ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, xxxiv.

complex societies) that has made it a sort of soundboard for thinkers working to define and refine their concepts. I will primarily rely in the following on Hannah Arendt's well-known description of the Greek *polis*.¹²

According to Arendt, for the ancient Greeks labor referred to the tending of the body's biological needs and to the activity of reproduction. Human freedom, meanwhile, emerged only in a dimension that transcended the tasks of reproduction. The public, the realm of freedom, is characterized by the unfolding of speech and action. Speech and action disclose an agent to a community of actors and speakers. In turn, the public web of interactions and relations produces an objective world made up of shared interests and concerns. Only in the public, in the arena where words and actions are submitted to the glaring light of multiple perspectives, does an action take objective form, granting participants a shared reality and lifting individuals out of a state of solipsism. The constructed artifice of the city, meanwhile, presents a stage for the formation of a shared, objective reality out of a relation to a public and to durable objects. The existence of a manufactured object-realm is therefore the *sine qua non* for carving out a space of meaning and objectivity out of the flux of natural processes.

It is important to underscore here the ambiguous position of work in the *polis*. Work refers in this context to the production of objects according to models that link technical means to a given instrumental end. This instrumental end, however, is beholden to the superordinate ethical *telos* of carving out an artificial realm of human permanence sealed off from the meaningless cycles of nature. Work constructs a *nomos*, a meaningful distribution of social parts (space) and rituals (time). It creates a stage for public life (the *agora*), encasing biological necessity to its proper domestic receptacle (the *oikos*).

According to Arendt's reconstruction, the model of the Greek city state was strictly defined by a hierarchical arrangement and spatial distribution of social parts and corresponding practices. Practices oriented to the care and sustenance of the body were relegated to the private realm, the *oikos*, and were the concern of women and slaves. Practices oriented to the agonistic disputation over the common good through speech and action, meanwhile, were the privilege of the *paterfamilias*, the dictator of the *oikos* who did not have to devote himself to labor. Nor did he have to concern himself with work. Work was the concern of the artisan, who was neither a landowner nor a slave, and whose craftsmanship was oriented to producing a stable object-realm, one that sealed off the historical realm of men from an indifferent nature, distributing human practices in their proper place.

What, then, do we make of the relation between the dwelling (*oikos*) and the city (*polis*) in the context of the model of the Greek city state?

The first thing to note is that the *polis* rested on a strict value-hierarchical distribution of social roles and associated practices that was translated into a clear organization of the space of the city. We can interpret the partitions in the *polis* as constituting an ever-receding set of boundaries, going from the city to the body politic and from the body politic to the individual body. The boundaries of the city separated the human realm from the nonhuman realm and civilization from barbarism; the city itself was cut through by the line dividing the realm of necessity (*oikos*) from the realm of freedom (*agora*). The differentiation between necessity and freedom that set the city off from its outside and divided the body politic into two cut right through the individual human body, separating its biological substratum from those faculties (speech, action) that constitute the human as a political creature.

In the Greek *polis*, the spatial organization of the city, the spatial distribution of parts, was intricately connected to the ethical status of practices. Where practices stood in the *polis* depended on the following question: Were these practices driven by biological necessity, or did they reflect the higher life of the *vita activa*?

Even the manufacturing of objects was bound to this division. What should a table look like? What materials should it be made of? What steps and processes are involved in producing a solid table? These are the questions that concern the artisan during the process of production. However, these formal and technical questions were subordinated in the *polis* to the most important consideration: What role will the table

¹² Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

play in its private or public context? Decisions about the look of the table, the size of the table, the required strength and solidity of the table, the choice of materials for the table, and hence the techniques for producing the table, all flowed from the answer to the question about the status of the practices the object was destined to support.

We can derive from the previous that rule-guided practices rest on a set of propositions. Following language pragmatics, these propositions contain a representational and communicational component. That is, in them, the vertical view of the objective world is interconnected with the horizontal relations among members in a lifeworld. For instance, in the context of the *polis*, the technical rules for producing a sturdy table were presumably based on accumulated artisanal knowledge about the qualities of materials coupled with acquired technical skill. However, the selection of materials and the application of methods were only secondarily oriented by the purely utilitarian end of producing a sturdy table, and primarily guided by the communitarian function of the table, its disposition to either high or low practices. The formal proposition about the correct look of the table was therefore determined by ethical propositions based on a distinction between freedom and necessity, high and low, public and private, and culture and nature.

In the context of the *polis*, ontological propositions were starkly transposed into a strict organization of the space of the city. In the *polis*, the parallel differentiations between civilization and nature, freedom and necessity, public and private, and high and low were reflected in the very spatial form of the city. In the Greek self-understanding, to be fully human entailed developing one's capacities as a political agent capable of speech and action. This ontological account of the human informed an ethical ordering of the body politic and was transposed into a clear spatial organization and demarcation of the *polis*.

Looked at from the perspective of a media pragmatics, the model of the *polis* can be characterized as resting on a relatively static material substratum. The model of the *polis* corresponds to a historical moment prior to the development of technological artifacts or media characterized by autonomous programs. Moreover, the model of the *polis* exists prior to the development of an institutionalization system of positive law, on the one hand, and prior to the development of juridically institutionalized markets for labor, capital, and exchange.

In his social theory, Habermas distinguishes between the lifeworld and – following Niklas Luhmann – what he refers to as differentiated social systems for coordinating action (such as the modern economy and the state administration).¹³ These systems free action from the processes of deliberation. They transfer, as it were, the coordination of certain types of action from the media of language to media like money. As such, these systems coordinate action in a functionalist manner. At its most basic, the modern market system, under the functional premise of competition over profits, coordinates exchange relations through the media of money, which transmits information about the economic value of commodities to producers and consumers. The “differentiation” of social systems therefore presupposes a set of historical developments, such as the shift from the principle of *nomos* that supported Greek political self-understanding to bourgeois formal law, which is based on the model of private contractual relations. Describing this historical transformation is of course beyond the scope of the present study. However, I think a comparison between the model of the *oikos* and the “bourgeois home” should illustrate the enormous changes these transformations entailed for the concept and practice of dwelling.

Before moving on to a discussion of the bourgeois home, however, I want to reflect on what the model of the *oikos* reveals about dwelling as such and to compare these findings with Heidegger's. Recall that for Heidegger, to dwell is to engage in certain types of practices, of which he lists the following: nurturing the earth, mapping the sky, praying, and unfolding our existential nature. Dwelling, he writes, is bringing the presencing of this fourfold into things. From the perspective of a media pragmatics, Heidegger is referencing both certain types of practices and, implicitly, the material substrates on which these practices rest. The things in the dwelling, the dwelling itself, organize the presencing of the fourfold. What is the fourfold? Perhaps we can unfold this term, building on the model of the *oikos*, as follows: dwelling is a material artifact whose form and function reflect, in a given historical context, an ontological account of the human

¹³ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. Two.

that translates into an allocation of practices as high and low and public and private. In the Greek *polis*, nurturing the Earth was relegated to the *oikos* while the unfolding of the political being's existential nature took place in the *agora*. The community's mapping against the sky, meanwhile, was literally projected onto the very space of the *polis*, in its *nomos*.

4 Bourgeois dwelling

I now turn to another “canonical” model of dwelling, the bourgeois home. In my description and interpretation of the rule-guided practices and material substrata that came together to form the historical type of dwelling that we find in the capitalist city in its early formation, in the 17th- and 18th-century Europe, I follow Habermas's classic account of the bourgeois public sphere.¹⁴

As Habermas explains it, with the emergence of the modern nation state and market system, the realms of labor and work were expelled from the household. Though they remained categorized as private affairs, labor and work were repurposed as wage-earning activities formally linked to commodity markets structured juridically in the form of property rights and lubricated by the media of money. The head of the family was now also the owner of property: *he* could overlap both home and market, as a private family man in the former and as a private owner of commodities in the latter. The public was no longer the privileged space of a *dominus* reigning over an *oikos*. The public now composed of an agglomeration of private commodity owners comes together to hold the state authority accountable to the public (i.e., private citizens') interest.

According to Habermas, in an increasingly differentiated society in which labor, state administration, the working out of moral and political issues, art criticism, and public discourse became specialized and institutionalized in markets, law, the state apparatus, and the press and literary criticism, the bourgeois home developed into a refuge for the conjugal family, for a group of individuals presumably bound not primarily by ties of kinship, nor by ties of economic dependency, but by ties of love. Given its character as a space where humans could theoretically relate to each other solely via emotional ties, the bourgeois dwelling was also conducive to the development of subjective interiority. In an architecturally hermetic space, subjective interiority was cultivated via sentimental letters (“imprints of the soul”), diaries, and the “realist” psychological novel. Habermas notes that in contrast to the aristocratic or peasant households of the feudal era, the bourgeois home was characterized by a degree of privatization observable in changes in domestic architecture: namely, the proliferation of special rooms for individual family members and the reduction in the number and size of communal rooms or rooms oriented to public gatherings.¹⁵

The bourgeois dwelling was sealed off from a public realm where agents were defined as salaried workers, artisans, property owners, publicists, politicians, or state administrators, and it bounded an inside where reading and writing individuals defined as fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons “unfolded” their interiority.¹⁶ The architectural locus of bourgeois interiority was the bedroom, a private space where the body, liberated from labor, work, or public self-presentation, communed with other souls via epistolary and literary practices whose telos was the expressive articulation of complex emotive states.

What is evident, at first sight, is that from the Greek *polis* to the capitalist city as it developed in early modern Europe, an enormous transformation has taken place. The position of dwelling in the Greek *polis*, if we follow Arendt's account, was in the Greek self-understanding held in relatively low regard. The *oikos* was the pre-political realm, the realm of necessity, of wants and needs, of slavish tasks. Moreover, in the Greek self-understanding it seems that the exercise of freedom and the process of the formation of a distinct individuality could only take place in the political realm, in the urban public sphere. For the Greeks, individuation emerged out of a network of public interactions that also made it possible to define a common

¹⁴ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44–5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

world. But this was a notion of the individual that was very much other-directed, a hyperindividuality premised not on the cultivation of a many-layered interiority but on a constant measurement and comparison against one's equals and an individuality premised on excellence in competition and on the cultivation of public virtues. Recall, for instance, the virtues for which Pericles was held in high regard by Isocrates: self-restraint (*sôphrôn*), justice (*dikaïos*), and wisdom (*sophos*).¹⁷ Recall, also, the catalog of virtues and emotions presented by Aristotle: anger, friendship/hatred, fear, shame, kindness, pity/indignation, envy, and emulation.¹⁸

When we turn to the bourgeois context, it is as if everything has been turned inside out. In the context of the *polis*, the private and the public marked the threshold between biological necessity and freedom, between ephemerality and permanence, and between prepolitical force and political persuasion. In the bourgeois context, dwelling is now understood as a refuge for the conjugal family and a many-layered individuality. A profound transformation of the status of practices has taken place between European antiquity and early modernity. To be sure, the bourgeois head of the household now stood ambiguously between the private and public as the head of the household and as an owner of property, as a family man, and as a man of business, as a private person, and as someone with an interest in the decisions taken by the public administration. Yet the members of the conjugal family, presumably bound by ties of love, were able to define their individuality not primarily as a function of the reproductive household practices they engaged in but as distinct selves characterized by deep interiority and unique forms of self-expression. By contrast, the public was the realm where those with a stake in the decisions of the public administration could present arguments and form opinions about the norms that best ensured the maximum freedom of private persons.

At this point, I want to suggest that we can think of the ontological accounts that define the vertical set of relations between lifeworld and world as framed in part by the material and technical substratum on which our practices rest, and that this substratum therefore indexes an epistemological paradigm.

To develop this idea, I will trace the formative interconnection existing between bourgeois cultural traditions, the differentiation of systems for coordinating action, and concrete technological media and infrastructures. To do this, I draw partially on the canonical sociological theory developed by Max Weber in his studies of religion and the development of capitalism. More specifically, I draw on Habermas's critical reconstruction of Weber's theory.¹⁹ I adopt this framework heuristically, as a guide for articulating a historical conjecture of practices, the rules underlying them, and the operations of systems and technologies mediating action.

Weber assumes that capitalist modernization is characterized by, on the one hand, the adoption of purposive-rational action orientations, the differentiation of systems for functionally coordinating economic exchange (the market), and the development of a legal system and state administration that can stabilize market relations, implement law, and codify purposive-rational modes of action in public administration.

It is well-known that Weber identified the emergence of a Protestant vocational culture as a key to the development of utilitarian action orientations. In Calvinism and the Protestant sects, Weber presumed to discover teachings that singled out a methodical action orientation as a path to salvation. According to Weber, ascetic Protestantism places the individual's relationship to God above his relations to other men, morally neutralizing the social realm and making participation in the worldly realm possible in a purposive-rational mode, since success in one's vocation was supposed to signify one's state of grace.

I do not assume here that this theory is correct as it stands. However, Weber's account offers a partial if distorted explanation of the dynamics that made the development of purposeful-action orientations possible in the European context. If this is correct, then it is possible to propose that at the level of cultural tradition, the set of ontological and normative propositions that came together in the form of the Protestant

¹⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 134–6.

¹⁸ Jameson, *Allegory*, 60.

¹⁹ See in particular section II of Habermas, *Communicative Action*, Vol. One.

ethic of vocation account for *one* of the formative factors of the type of action orientations that correspond to bourgeois identity. No doubt, accounting for the layers that composed bourgeois identity would demand an interrogation of Enlightenment and Romantic paradigms of the self, reason, expression, and so on. That being said, it is safe to assume that the set of truth propositions that accrue to an ontological account of the self, in the bourgeois context, was derived from accounts of salvation, from a universalization of moral questions, and from the development of a utilitarian disposition in one's relation to things and to social counterparts outside of the home.

With his theory of the Protestant ethic of vocation, Weber accounts for one factor that made the development of capitalism possible. But as Weber also pointed out, the differentiation of the market system depends as well on its juridical institutionalization. We can understand the institutionalization of the market as a gradual historical process, the description of which is beyond the space available in the present context. However, for the purposes of the argument, I will rely on the basic elements of the system of positive law as described by Habermas.²⁰

Since Hobbes, the prototype for law has been the model of private rights derived from the bourgeois model of the freedom to enter into contracts and own property.²¹ The system of positive law gradually conceptualized from Hobbes to Kant comes to be based on a system of rights that defines realms of autonomy characterized by specific types of actions, some belonging to personal autonomy and others belonging to public autonomy (to participation in public opinion formation and in the production of legislation). Looked at from the perspective of a media pragmatics, I want to propose that the media of positive law encodes, in the form of a system of rights, an ontological account or anthropology of the human. In short, the addressee of positive law is an embodied subject capable of speech and action, who owns capital (things, tangible or intangible) or sells their labor, who can enter into contracts, and who exchanges property.

One more element should be identified before bringing this argument back around to an interpretation of the bourgeois dwelling in the context of the capitalist city. As Habermas highlights in his description of the bourgeois home as a site for the articulation of interiority, this cultivation took place via the literary media of letters, diaries, and novels. Habermas famously argues that in the early bourgeois context the public sphere was constituted by a notion of publicity that transmitted the general public interest via unrestricted discussion undertaken through such mechanisms as the legal press or representative government. In other words, both the private and the public spheres were *mediated* by practices resting on the technology of the printing press.

I can now articulate a preliminary description of the ontological account corresponding to the normative framing of bourgeois society. We are dealing here with subjects who can be described in the following ways: as agents of free will morally accountable to God; as agents of reason and free choice accountable to the law and capable of self-legislation (and practical moral reasoning); as self-interested agents capable of utilitarian calculation in the marketplace; and as expressive agents capable of developing emotional bonds and characterized by a many-layered interiority (produced via the mediation of letters).

Given this account, the bourgeois home was conceived as the refuge for the increasingly privileged dimension of everyday life and for the cultivation within it of a privatized interiority that was the flipside of a multitiered public identity. Meanwhile the public faculties of speech and political action and the activities of work (or economic reproduction and the production of things) were differentiated out of the home and increasingly relegated to functional system coordination – to their regimentation by specialized media (money, law, written press, and literature) and to their articulation via specialized discourses (legal, scientific, and art critical).

As an owner of property, a husband, a juridical agent, and a moral agent, the bourgeois subject could no longer in principle impose his force in the domestic sphere. Rather, his freedom and that of his family depended on the utilitarian maintenance, expansion, and bequeathing of the family patrimony (capital),

²⁰ See in particular section 3.2.2, Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*.

²¹ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 28.

and on engagement in moral discursive practices out of which the general interest, mediated through the press, could be transferred into law. On the flip side, it was through the mediation of the press and literary and artistic practices that private subjects communed with each other beyond the threshold of the public via diaries and letters and via the semipublic object of the novel or the increasingly semiprivate institution of the theater.²²

As for nonhuman nature and things, recall that in the *polis* nonhuman nature is relegated to the outside of the city state, the practices for sustaining the human biological substratum are relegated to the *oikos*, and the models and methods for manufacturing objects are subordinated to the *nomos*, to the role played by objects in their support of practices allocated a high (public) or low (private) status.

In the bourgeois context, things and nonhuman nature fell under the heading of being capital or commodities, on the one hand, and objects of artistic representation and contemplation, on the other. The models against which things were judged and the methods for producing things, no longer beholden to the standard models of the artisan or the value-hierarchies of the *polis*, became charged by the three-way tension between their utility as objects of production (as capital), as objects of consumption (as commodities), and as objects reflecting the level of cultivation of their owners and mediating between a sublime nature and a deep interiority.

In the bourgeois context, things and nonhuman nature are stretched and manipulated along the various positions taken up by bourgeois subjects as they overlap and switch between their private and public identities and increasingly differentiated practices. The models against which things are produced begin to lose their standing as standard forms reflecting a hierarchy of values and a standard set of artisanal practices. Things become increasingly generalized as mass produced objects or singularized as unique artifacts and indexes of idiosyncratic tastes and lifestyles, even as they remain beholden to the scales of beauty and distinction worked out by professional art critics. Moreover, this decoupling between standard models and distinctions between high and low is connected to the emergence of a historicist consciousness regarding the multiplicity of architectural and stylistic models from the past. The things in the bourgeois home, then, also become mediators between the present and the now problematic cultural forms of the past.

Before closing out this essay, I want to highlight a crucial shift in dwelling that has taken place between the contexts of the *polis* and the capitalist city. Recall that in the *polis*, the vertical–ontological reference to the world was literally mapped onto the space of the city, giving form to horizontal–lifeworld relations. The *nomos* of the *polis* unfolded from the distinction between necessity and freedom that was so central to Aristotle’s characterization of the human being. In the capitalist city, meanwhile, the vertical–ontological account of the human being as a subject of rights, an owner of property, a psychological individual, and a moral legislator, and of nonhuman nature and manufactured things as property or as objects of contemplation, unfolds into a horizontal–normative framework (codified in the juridical system of rights) that makes necessity a matter of private competition and freedom a matter of transmitting opinions into law and of carving out a private realm insulated from market competition and public sphere disputation.

Finally, it is worth noting that the expulsion and differentiation of reproduction and production from the home and the system–functional organization of these tasks went on to remake the very spatial organization of the city. The city no longer reflects a *nomos* of high (freedom) and low (reproduction) parts; rather, it encases the newly privileged realm of the family in the dwelling and expels the tasks of necessity outward to the city, remaking the space of the city in line with the functional imperatives of the market: points of production, distribution of networks, and points of consumption.

From the perspective of a media pragmatics, perhaps we can argue that the material substrate on which bourgeois practices relied remained relatively stable. However, I would like to note two factors of importance. The development of the printing press and the multiplication of modes of transmitting and receiving written texts, contracts, laws, novels, tracts, ideas, and so on would seem to be a *technological* precondition

²² According to Balme, the modern theater audience “is ideally a highly concentrated decoder of signs and auto-reflective observer of self-experience.” Balme, *The Theatrical Public Sphere*, 27.

for the differentiation and institutionalization of the market and state administration, for the deepening of the bourgeois type of psychological interiority, and for the differentiation of identities. On the other hand, the decoupling of the manufacture of things from the standard artisanal models and the distinctions of high and low would seem to be a presupposition for industrialization and mechanization. We see here, then, that the practices that give form to a lifeworld and the propositions on which they are based stand in a recursive relation to the technological substrates that support these practices.

What happens to dwelling in this context? Does dwelling remain tied to the practices of nurturing the earth, mapping the sky, praying, and defining our destiny? This model now seems problematic – which, of course, was part of Heidegger's point. For in the bourgeois home, the nurturing of the earth becomes expelled from the home and is transformed into the practice of framing the earth as resource and raw material; the mapping of the sky falls back onto the individual and takes place through the subjective contemplation of the artistically charged object in the home or in the museum; praying becomes a private matter; and defining one's destiny stands ambiguously between the cultivation of family life and the utilitarian expansion of one's capital stock, a practice that undergirds the bourgeois subject's freedom from (and subordination to systemic) necessity and thus becomes *his* driving passion.

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