Bettina Hollstein,
Hartmut Rosa,
Jörg Rüpke (eds.)

"Weltbeziehung"
The Study of our Relationship to the World

campus

“Weltbeziehung”

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Researching *Weltbeziehung*: Interdisciplinary approaches to self—world relations between humans, objects, and beyond[1]

Bettina Hollstein, Hartmut Rosa, Jörg Rüpke

The research programme "Attraction, Repulsion, Indifference—a comparative cultural analysis of world relations" follows on from the interdisciplinary, historically comparative cultural and social science research that has been pursued by the members and fellows of the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies *(Max-Weber-Kolleg)* over the course of the past twenty-five years. This collaborative research effort pursues the goal of opening up innovative perspectives with a specific approach first developed by Hartmut Rosa. It has its roots in interpretive sociology (Max Weber), theory of action, and a relational sociology that is shaped by concepts from Karl Marx's reflections on alienation, through phenomenological approaches like that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty thematizing corporeality and human bodies, to Bruno Latour's networks of things and humans.

Over the years, we have made an effort to overcome Eurocentric and presentist approaches as much as narrow functionalist or cognitivist views. This entails the challenging balance of employing and confronting philosophical analysis with universalist claims, with comparative studies of phenomena and their cultural contexts across epochs and continents. In this way, those involved in the programme and its various sub-projects—from groups studying medieval philosophy, early modern natural law and Kierkegaardian theology to larger research networks analyzing religious

1 The editors are grateful to Linda Finnigan and Henry Jansen for proofreading the texts and to Isabelle Lamperti for editing the manuscript. The publication is co-funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – SFB TRR 294 – 42463867 and GRK 2283/2 – 313147291 – and the University of Erfurt.

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individualizations, property orders, ancient and contemporary ritual or the nexus of religion and urbanity—want to go beyond cutting-edge research in their fields and disciplines in order to jointly make a contribution to the grand societal challenges of the present. In the 2020s, this includes understanding the role of material, ideal, social, and cultural conditions for successful coexistence in pluralistic societies, the creation of common languages for the narrative development of cultural heritage, and the understanding of essential value complexes in modernity guiding people facing the challenges of overboarding state-violence or climate change.

This book is part of this effort. It is a review of where we are and a reflection on where we want to go; it is an account of what the programme can achieve and an invitation to join this enterprise. In some detail, it demonstrates how the sociology of *Weltbeziehungen* permits new insights in different disciplines and how it can be made fruitful for various areas of application. Following this introduction, a first part examines some basic concepts that are of particular importance for modern societies and the way we relate to the world, such as property (Hartmut Rosa), attitudes and virtues (Kathi Beier and Dietmar Mieth), practices (Andreas Pettenkofer), and progress (Achim Kemmerling). In a second part, comparative perspectives come into play. Starting with a systematic question on the possibility of comparing worldviews (Hermann Deuser and Markus Kleinert), reflections on and examples of comparisons beyond Western modernity are presented, such as regarding the need for decolonising social science research, partly with reference to India (Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach and Beatrice Renzi), the concept and cultural meaning of "market" in China (Carsten Herrmann-Pillath, Qian Zhao), an alternative interpretation of Walter Benjamin from an East European perspective (Gábor Gángó), and the handling of death in ancient cities (Jörg Rüpke). Practical conclusions for and from the cultural and social sciences are drawn in the third part, for example with regard to practices of sharing and exchange (Christoph Henning), the policies related to the concept of "refugee" (Nancy Alhachem), and the design of research sites such as Institutes for Advanced Study (Bettina Hollstein). We will outline the individual chapters in more detail at the end of our introduction.

So, what do we mean by *Weltbeziehung*? Part of any comparative programme is a confrontation of the very terms employed in such an interpretive endeavour. In the English language, "relations" and "relationships" are extremely broad concepts, too broad to speak for themselves. "Self—world relations", as we have phrased it on several occasions before, seem

to presuppose a consolidated concept of the self that we have attempted to deconstruct in an earlier research programme on religious individualization and de-individualization. And "world" is a term laden in very different and frequently unsuitable manners. Thus, we propose to use the German concept of *Weltbeziehung* to point to the connectedness of self and world and the concept of self resulting from such relationships. At the same time, the term unequivocally calls for filling in the world-pole of the relation and relationships. Following classical phenomenology, we start from people but, in adding relationality, we do not overlook the agency of all that constitutes world and the mutuality of the relationships established. "Worlding" is as much what people do as what is done to people.

But let us start from the latter. People first find themselves physically placed in a spatial world that has meaning for them: before they have a worldview, they have a sense of the presence of a world. The way people feel related to this world, how they want to and can act in it and what they expect, fear, or hope from it depends, of course, simultaneously on their self-image, on their ideas of who they are and what their tasks, needs, possibilities, and goals are in the world. People are characterized by the fact that they are forced to take a position on the things and affairs of the world as positively or negatively significant. Subjects orient themselves in the world by means of a "map" that shows them what exists and how things relate to each other (Taylor 1989). At the same time, they locate themselves on this map and determine their direction of movement in biographical foresight and hindsight, to which they then react by attempting to "lead" their lives.

"Resonance" can be used as a specific analytical concept which describes a particular form of relationship between a subject and the "world." The world here might comprise other subjects, animals, plants, artefacts, but also "transcendent relations" with comprehensive entities such as space, time (and the temporalities of past or future), and what has been called "meta-persons" like gods and God or abstract concepts credited with enormous agency like cosmos or nature. Resonance then is defined by a two-way "loaded" connection where the subject feels touched, moved, or thrilled by some internal contact to an outer source, a connection which is not just causal or instrumental, but imbued with a deeper "meaning," even where this meaning remains unarticulated. At the same time, however, the subject is not just passively moved or touched, but answers with an active internal or external expression: he or she reaches out to respond to the "call" such that the relationship between subject and world takes on a responsive,

proto-dialogical character (Rosa 2019, 2020). In many societies, this form of contact is ritualistically established and culturally engrained: for example, it might manifest itself between believers and a priest or an image, amulet, or sacrificial victim; it is institutionalized in "sacred ground" or the "kairos," the right moment of a concert or a "date" (Rüpke 2021a, 2021b). Such "axes of resonance," often closely entangled with specific materialities, and "second-order resonances" building on memories of mind-shaking experiences can be identified even for periods and contexts where adequate experiential data are lacking. Thus, it is the shared ambition and conviction of our research programme that resonant relationships can be analytically distinguished from other, e.g., purely causal or instrumental forms of *Weltbeziehung*, in which the relationship remains mute or silent (but perhaps fully operational and thus simply "indifferent") or is even experienced as hostile, as "repulsive."

What kinds of new perspectives and insights can we gain through the analysis of *Weltbeziehungen*? Phenomenological research by scholars such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), Otto Bollnow (1963), Herrmann Schmitz (1964–80), Iris Marion Young (1993) or Thomas Fuchs (2000) has shown that people perceive their own position in time and space in drastically different ways. They invariably situate themselves in relation to fellow human beings, animals and plants, artefacts, events, as well as invisible beings and powers and the world at large. But the process of positioning and relating varies significantly between individuals and between cultural traditions and social formations, as our own data on ancient and modern contexts, and the wide range of European and Indian practices and experiences demonstrate. This does not hinder but invites the comparative approach indicated above. After all, one of the most important intellectual starting points of the research programme is the idea that *Weltbeziehungen* constitute a pivotal cluster of factors not only in trying to understand individual actions but in explaining distinct cultural and social formations.

Empirical and historical analyses conducted so far have already led to substantial insights into the ways "resonance" is experienced and enacted by different actors and how practices are institutionalized that raise the probability of resonant relationships or narrow the field in which they are sought. Dispositional resonance is fundamentally important here as a basic, common and habituative attitude of a subject towards the world, being prepared to engage in resonant relationships, to face the world with receptiveness and confidence and to accept the necessary vulnerability of itself.

This relational approach has proven fruitful for a more nuanced appreciation of the formation and effects of rituals beyond the state of the art as demonstrated by the research consortium of the international graduate school based at the University of Graz and at the Max-Weber-Kolleg.[2] The analysis of resonant *Weltbeziehungen* allows us to enter the realm of concrete practices beyond the level of worldviews. This enables the emancipation of the corporeality of experience and the meaning of material objects and artefacts from the level of cognitive and propositional interpretations. In this way, the cultural spheres of resonance constituted or stabilized by ritual and cultic practices can be examined anew by looking at the specifically generated resonance sensitivities and the axes of resonance established by them. Our findings also suggest that resonant relationships are not fully created once and for all time but can become indifferent or are even completely lost due to individual or cultural factors in the whole range of self, social, object, and transcendent relations.

Ritual practices not only establish relationships to parts of the world like places, things, people, and transcendent entities, as the heuristic usage of the concept of resonance seems to suggest. Evidently, such practices *constitute* segments of the world at the same time, towards which attitudes of indifference or repulsion are generated. If the assumption is correct that resonance is only possible against the background of overwhelmingly non-transformable, alien, and indifferent or even hostile world segments, then in such practices individual and cultural *Weltbeziehungen* are configured in their entirety. The institutionalization of resonance practices inevitably harbours the danger of their solidification and reification: by making "resonances" ritually (and personally) available and bringing them under control, as it were, they inevitably threaten to turn into "mute" routine *Weltbeziehungen* in which the ritual practices lose their resonance-creating power. Again, analytical interests are therefore directed as much at the production of accessibility as at the preservation of uncontrollability—and at historical processes of corresponding transformations.

That said, we need to nuance the very concept of resonance. Rosa's starting point was a definition of resonance as a kind of "peak experience" that can

2 More information concerning the International Graduate School "Resonant Self–World Relations in socio-religious practices" can be found here: https://www.uni-erfurt.de/en/max-weber-kolleg/forschung/forschungsgruppen-und-stellen/research-groups/igs-resonant-self-world-relations.

inform individual action as well as social structures. The mode of resonance qualifies *Weltbeziehung* in a specific way, according to which four characteristics must be fulfilled: namely *affection* (the subject is touched, moved or seized by a source experienced as independent); *self-efficacy* (the subject experiences itself as efficacious at the same time in the sense that it can reach or move the other side as well); *transformation* (in the experience of mutual reaching out and touching, both sides are transformed and emerge changed); and *uncontrollability* (the resonance relationship is uncontrollable as it can neither be forced nor excluded and is always open-ended).

Our volume develops within such a framework. The first part's review of fundamental *concepts* in the light of *Weltbeziehung* is opened by Hartmut Rosa's piece on property. (Private) property, he argues, is one of the most basic institutions of modern society. It produces a very specific form of relating to things, to other human beings and towards the self, and by doing this, it defines the modern *Weltbeziehung* in the objective, the subjective, and the social dimensions simultaneously. This property-induced form of *Weltbeziehung*, however, proves to be highly problematic under contemporary ecological, technological, and political conditions.

Kathi Beier and Dietmar Mieth, in turn, deal with virtues as a specific form of relationships with the "good." It is, they argue, the contribution of virtues to produce stable relationships of people with what is good and right that is fundamental for *Weltbeziehungen* that are resonant rather than indifferent or repulsive. Virtues form bridges between the personal and the social and demand institutional support, that is, space for training and exercising virtues that allow people to develop orientations which habituate such resonance. Virtues are, the authors conclude, making their demands not just on individuals but also on societies.

Andreas Pettenkofer discusses in his chapter "Three Types of Fatalistic Practice" how treating *Weltbeziehungen* as objects of social research helps go beyond some assumptions that current theories of society take for granted. His example are fatalistic modes of understanding (which are typically discounted, because our standard theories tend to assume that "modern" social practices are sustained by the idea of an open future). The chapter shows how the existence and the stability of several highly consequential forms of political activity become easier to explain if one recognizes that they are profoundly shaped by fatalistic ways of relating to the world.

In his chapter, "Reconstructing an Impartial and Pluralistic Notion of Progress in Contexts of Diversity", Achim Kemmerling analyses a key

concept of modernity, namely progress and its temporal dimension within political decision processes. He reconstructs progress as a necessary idea for decision making in contexts of diversity. The idea of pluralistic and impartial progress can work as a tool for allowing policymaking under conditions of human diversity. But it requires special analytical considerations: a temporal dimension, a normative dimension, and a symbolic dimension. Kemmerling pleads for a notion of progress that is slower and harder to achieve but ideally avoids the typical pitfalls of standard tools in accelerated decision-making. In doing so, this contribution adds to our understanding of how to address global challenges in their own time.

In the second set of chapters, we look beyond the Western present in explicit *comparison*. Hermann Deuser and Markus Kleinert start with addressing the principal question: "How Can Worldviews Be Compared?" They use a pragmatist approach and exemplify the difficulty of comparing worldviews by the topic of faith and knowledge, in the comparison of religious and secular worldviews. They show an American and a European reflection on the problem of referencing and comparing worldviews associated with the names of William James and Max Weber and point to the role of intellectual honesty as a disposition for constant self-reflection, for the thematization of one's own worldview.

"Theorizing Across Traditions: Social science as a polyphonic encounter", by Martin Fuchs, Antje Linkenbach, and Beatrice Renzi, demonstrates the need and the potential of a conscious interaction and entanglement of different strands of thinking across a post-colonial divide. Engaging with decolonization as intellectual project, and starting from a reflection on the implicit Eurocentric biases of important strands of sociological discourse, they strongly advocate the "attempt of de-centring and pluralizing sociological discourses and conceptualizations cross-culturally." Seen from the perspective of *Weltbeziehung* the theoretical concept formation in the social sciences must be a result of a cross-categorial dialogue between Western and non-Western historic-intellectual traditions.

Carsten Herrmann-Pillath and Qian Zhao compare the cultural meaning of the term "market" in China and the Western tradition of the term and institution. They point to a long tradition of understanding economy as part of good statecraft. Relations established by practices of exchange are part and parcel of the good relations between individuals, families, and the society at large, which is also the object of good administration and government. Against this background the concept of the "socialist market" is tra-

ditional rather than revolutionary and certainly contradicting mainstream understandings of liberalist conceptions of market economy. Yet "Western" must not be equated with a narrow range of anglophone economic thinking: Chinese ideas of property as a means to ensure the commonwealth and European, in particular Hegelian, traditions do converge if the latter's embeddedness in a larger ethical framework of society and the state is acknowledged.

Gábor Gángó's chapter entitled "Triumphant Utopia—Shabby Bourgeois World—Totalitarianism" crosses perspectives not between (South) Asia and Europe but between Eastern and Western Europe. It deals with different interpretations of Walter Benjamin's Marxism from the early 1970s in two countries of the Soviet Bloc, East Germany and Hungary. Similar to the debates in the GDR of the early 1970s, also Sándor Radnóti's road to Walter Benjamin was situated within the context of the polemic between the Frankfurt School and the review *alternative* regarding the appropriation of Benjamin's work. In contrast to the German scene, Radnóti sought a third way by presenting Benjamin as a theoretical support of the political orientation towards democratic socialism. In comparison with the reception in the GDR, the contribution reconstructs the intellectual constellation that made Radnóti's decision possible as well as the subsequent "Frankfurtization" of Benjamin's interpretation, which absorbed the later approaches of the Budapest School to Benjamin as well. Radnóti's advocation of collective culture as a vehicle of pluralist and resonant structures poses a challenge to the comparative theory of East European totalitarianism and its reverberations in current Critical Theory in the form of forced resonance.

Jörg Rüpke develops an analysis of cities of the ancient Mediterranean world. "Relating to Other Worlds" analyzes how religious practices shape *Weltbeziehungen* in urban contexts. The focus is on a relationship fundamental for all inhabitants, namely to the dead, and dead ancestors in particular. With a framework of relational analysis, the chapter demonstrates that religion offers a toolbox for establishing a complex web of relations, to spaces, to people, to a beyond that is conceptually combining distance and contiguity. Burial practices and funerary rites show the working of such relations within the framework of an urbanity that amply employs the continuous membership of dead family for claiming social positions and at the same time conceptually excludes them from urban space proper.

In the last part of the volume, more practical perspectives are developed: Christoph Henning shows in his chapter on "Values of Exchange, Values of

Sharing: The Ambivalence of Economic *Weltbeziehung*, explained for the example of Carsharing," how exchange relations, and sharing relations as their counterpart, shape *Weltbeziehung* in the economic world. He examines the different social imaginaries related to "good" or "bad" exchange and "good" or "bad" sharing. Using the example of car-sharing, he differentiates various types of ownership and related forms of *Weltbeziehung* resulting in different practical effects for the ecosystem. The comparison of these effects illustrates that sharing is not per se an alternative to property, but that some sharing practices limit the power of property, while others do not. In order to grasp the differences, it is central to differentiate property structures[3] involved in practices of sharing and their effects on the *Weltbeziehung* of the users.

The next chapter by Nancy Alhachem is entitled "The Transformation of the Refugee Category and the Dialectics of Solidarity in Europe." She reconstructs how the notion of "refugee," established about 70 years ago to protect Europeans who were fleeing Nazi-fascist regimes and the aftermath of the Second World War, developed to a concept that carries racist prejudices that became visible with the "refugee crises" following the summer of 2015 in Germany. As already mentioned, dispositional resonance is fundamentally important as a basic attitude of a subject towards the world, being prepared to engage in resonant relationships and to face the world with receptiveness and confidence. Alhachem shows for the field of refugee policy how these dispositions changed over time and how they shape lived everyday solidarity in practice.

The last contribution "Living World Relations—Institutes for Advanced Study as places for resonant relationships" by Bettina Hollstein uses the concepts of *Weltbeziehung* and "creativity of action" (Hans Joas) to analyse how resonant relationships can be created in the world of science through specific institutions, namely Institutes for Advanced Study (IAS). IAS were established to enhance inter alia independent research, interdisciplinarity, creativity, and innovation. They are characterized by collegiality, tranquility, and inter-relationality. Drawing on the example of the Max-Weber-Kolleg, Hollstein shows that resonant relationships allowing for creative interdisciplinary research can be observed and enabled, but not enforced.

3 Concerning this topic see also Rosa in this volume.

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I
Conceptual Perspectives

Property as the Modern Form of *Weltbeziehung*: Reflections on the structural change of possessive forms of relating to the world[1]

Hartmut Rosa

1. Introduction

Property is not simply one social institution among many that constitute the social formation of modernity. Rather, it forms one, if not *the*, basic institution on which not only the organisational structure of the economy and the world of work rest but also that of the welfare state and cultural institutions, family connections, education, and health care in equal measure. The acquisition and possession, securing and (re)distribution, transfer and conversion of property—be it material assets, financial assets, capital assets, or immaterial property titles—are at the centre of both the production and administrative operations of modernity. Both the sphere of consumption and that of production are organised and oriented in terms of property rights and forms of ownership. Precisely because this is so, the orientations, aspirations, and sensibilities associated with it are so deeply rooted, habitualised, and naturalised that not only the social sciences, especially sociology, but even society itself seems to be characterized by a peculiar "forgetfulness of property." This is evident at almost all levels of social life: when the Central and Eastern European states began to fundamentally change their economic form around 1989, to them, *the market* appeared to be the core of the (desired) capitalist economy. It became their top priority to set its dynamics in motion. The question of ownership distribution, however, seemed to them to be absolutely secondary: it was not important who owned the enterprises (workers' cooperatives, municipalities, small businesses, Western

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investors, large corporations), it was much more important to those in political power to set in motion the spiral-like productive dynamics of escalation that are central to capitalism.[2] To a certain extent, this even applies to China's economic transformation since Deng Xiaoping.[3] A very similar pattern of interpretation could be observed when the massive neoliberal privatisation of both the health and care sectors and the media sector took effect in Western countries at about the same time. The decisive factor was that the services should be provided efficiently and reliably; the question of ownership was secondary.[4] Similarly, the distribution disputes in capitalist societies routinely focus on income structures and thus on the remuneration for labour, while the increasingly unequal property and wealth relations are hardly ever the subject of debate or even consideration.[5] And even at the micro level of social life, it can be observed that property structures are strangely excluded or ignored compared to procedural questions of ownership and operation. One example of this is when couples are not at all clear about who owns what in the property relations established by them and between them (who actually owns what in a joint household?); however, these issues become highly relevant especially in the event of divorce.[6]

At the same time, however, there is an almost monomaniacal "obsession with property" under modern capitalist conditions when it comes to acquiring property titles at all possible levels of existence—to *buy* something, to *generate income*, to *obtain entitlement rights*. Regardless of that, however, it seems as if the basic background structure of modern society, its property form, is lost to view and forgotten wherever it is not directly contested and dynamically "liquidated"; where it forms structures that have coagulated, as it were, out of sight of the actors. This is as remarkable as it is deplorable because property is of enormous scope and significance for the self-understanding

2 This is the subject of sub-project B07 (Property concepts and property conflicts in the privatisation process), headed by Joachim von Puttkamer, of the Collaborative Research Centre "Structural change in property" at the universities of Jena and Erfurt. Cf. Peters 2023.

3 The sub-project C01 "Hybrid property order in state capitalism", led by Carsten Herrmann-Pillath, is conducting research on this, also at universities of Jena and Erfurt.

4 The results are being analysed in sub-project C05, led by Silke van Dyk, "Conflicts over the public sphere and the future of the commons: Property relations in the context of welfare state transformation."

5 Distribution and class conflicts are the subject of sub-project B05 ("Property, inequality and class formation in socio-ecological transformation conflicts"), led by Klaus Dörre.

6 This is a striking finding of sub-project B06 ("Property inequality in the private sphere") led by Kathrin Leuze and Sylka Scholz (Althaber et al. 2023).

of modern society and its dominant form of *Weltbeziehung*. The basic thesis of this article is that every social formation establishes a very specific way of "being-in-the-world" for the subjects, a very specific set of relations to the world *(Weltbeziehung)* that is formed out of characteristic ways of experiencing, acting in and connecting to the world. With the concept of *Weltbeziehung*, I am trying to describe a form of habitualised experience and orientation that is anchored in the body and largely exists below the level of cognitive operations, consisting of a specific field of sensibility (or focus of attention) and a correlating structure of will (or pattern of intentionality). *Weltbeziehung* thus means a specific form of (passive-receptive) experience of the world and (active-intentional) orientation to the world. These patterns are ultimately only fully revealed in an analysis of subjectivity such as that provided by phenomenology (Zahavi 2007, 73; 2002; on this now also Rosa 2023). The overall structure of such relationships then defines the basic relation to the world *(Weltbeziehung)* of an individual or a community.

At least for modern societies and dominant patterns of subjectivity in those societies, three specific dimensions of *Weltbeziehung* prove to be constitutive; namely *social relations*, *relations* to things or objects, and *self relations*. It is no coincidence that Jürgen Habermas and Karl Popper, for example, agree in dividing in an onto-epistemological way, as it were, what we encounter as world, into an objective, a social, and a subjective world (Habermas 1981, 149; Popper 1973).[7] The field of sensibility and the structure of the will of the subjects then differ accordingly, depending on which of these three aspects of the world they are confronted with. And here it becomes apparent that the institution of property is of cardinal importance for all three dimensions of *Weltbeziehung*. Property establishes a specific form of relationship to things or objects, a characteristic mode of *social* relation and a particular pattern of *self* -relation. In what follows, I would like to elaborate first on these three forms of *Weltbeziehungen*, in order to clarify in the next step how much and in how far these property-mediated patterns of relations are changing in late-modern contemporary society, and finally, in the last step, to provide some insights into what other forms of *Weltbeziehung* are conceivable as a result of an (ongoing) structural change of property.

7 Popper, however, does not speak of a "social world," but he does identify (alongside the subjective and physical worlds) a (socially) "objectified" world of human thought and action.

2. Property as a form of existence: social-, thing- and self-relation

In the first place, the institution of property obviously constitutes and configures a specific relationship to things. In making a thing my property by buying it, for example, I acquire largely unrestricted rights of disposal over it. Property thus characterises a form of placing the world at my disposal: *I can do what I want and when I want it* with my bicycle, my land, and my trousers. I can use them, convert them, lend them, sell them, destroy them, simply leave them lying around, etc., and at the same time, they are protected from *access by others*. I have them at my *free disposal*. Of course, we immediately see that this usually does not mean *unlimited* disposal: I am not allowed to blow my car up; I am not allowed to drive it anywhere I want. Nor am I allowed to build what and how I want on my land, etc., and even if I own a company, I don't have permission to do with it simply as I please. But, with these restrictions, we already are basically touching on the social relations and the social bond of property. Yet, as for the relation to objects, this does not change the fact that we make things available to us through the institution of property.[8]

In becoming "my thing" in this way, however, a second form of relation to objects is established at the same time, as Aristotle already knew, namely, a *relationship of care* (Aristotle, Politics, 1262b—1263a). Because this is *my* land, or *my* car, it is important to me that they remain intact, that they are not damaged, are preserved in their value and usability, or even for their own sake. For example, if someone knocks over our bike, we exclaim loudly, "Hey, that's my bike!". The things we have at our disposal as property tend to be "close to our hearts." However, it is important to notice that there are forms of (capitalist) property to which this does not apply at all, such as *shares*. The specific feature of capital ownership seems to be that precisely this conditional relation of care does *not* arise in this case.[9] I will return to this below.

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8 At this starting point, I will refrain from differentiating between possession and property, because it is, to begin with, irrelevant to the phenomenal perspective adopted here. Nevertheless, I agree with Emil Angehrn's observation that *possession* primarily defines a relation to a thing and thus also affects the relation to the self, while *property* primarily describes a social relation. I will return to this in a moment. Cf. Angehrn 1989, here especially 96 f.

9 Georg Simmel elaborated on this difference between abstract and concrete value in a phenomenologically differentiated way in his *Philosophie des Geldes* (Philosophy of money (1989). Karl Marx and, in a different way, Max Weber also substantiated it on the basis of economics.

The paradigmatic example of such a property-like relation to an object, which has been used again and again in the economic and philosophical discussion of property since the time of John Locke, Adam Smith, and David Ricardo, is one's own plot of land and the little house or flat one owns. "My home is my castle" means that my dwelling is at my disposal, that I take care of it and look after it, that I "appropriate" *(anverwandeln)* it to myself (certainly in Heidegger's sense of "dwelling" *(Wohnen)* as well) (Heidegger 2022), and that it is protected from access by others, including the state.

With this, however, it is now obvious to what extent property simultaneously configures a social relation, or, rather, a whole network of social relations. Subjects encounter each other as owners and thus as competitors for scarce goods to which they want to acquire rights of disposal and custody. In this context, property primarily establishes relations of exclusion: if something is mine, others—individually and collectively—have no access rights to it. It is literally "no longer their business." They can, however, encounter me as customers or clients or as buyers or sellers with whom I do business—this involves the negotiation and redistribution of property, such as when I sell my car or my land (or my block of shares). A certain social obligation then arises in a quasi-natural way from the fact that my use (or misuse or non-use) of property has consequences for others. This includes ecological ones, such as when I let my car rust in the garden, and oil and petrol seep into the groundwater. But this does not change the fact that property first and foremost establishes an exclusive relation of disposal and care.

It is through these property-mediated relations to things and others, however, that a specific form of subjective self-relation is constituted, too: the field of sensibility and the structure of the will of the subjects is directed towards themselves as *owners of specific sections of the world*. In other words, property creates a possessive self-relation, the basic structure of which Hegel already explained in his *Philosophy of Right*. He sharply analyses how the social relations and the self-relation of modern subjects are intertwined when he states:

"The person, distinguishing himself from himself, relates himself to *another* person, and indeed both exist for each other only as owners. Their identity, which exists *as such*, acquires existence through the property of the one becoming the property of the other with a common will and preservation of their right—in the *contract*." (Hegel 1986a, 98)

And in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he pointedly states: "Property is a possession that belongs to me as this person, in which my person as such comes into existence, into reality" (Hegel 1986b, 126).

Strictly speaking, the property form of the self-relation already results logically from the property form of the relation to the other: self-relation and relation to the (outer) world are always directly correlated and intertwined; every self-relation takes a diversion, so to speak, via a relation to the world outside. This means that modern subjects not only encounter each other but also themselves as owners: *I am the one who owns this house, this car, this job, as well as this coat, this record of music, this book, this jug.* We extend ourselves, as it were, into the world through the things we own. My self-confidence and my self-perception are shaped, for example, by the fact that I live in this flat if I am its owner—but also by the fact that this flat belongs to me if I am its owner and do not live there. Although the effects of (permanent) ownership and property on the self-relation are not the same, they both have a formative influence. We can state that, as a social process, subjectification to a significant degree takes place through the acquisition of property—for example, specific clothing, shoes, books, records, vehicles, digital devices, later perhaps land and residential property, etc. The question "Who am I?" cannot be answered in modern society without reference to property. Subjectivity arises from the interplay of relations of disposal and care that define us as subjects and translates into claims or rights and responsibilities.

As a young child learns to distinguish "mine" from "yours," his or her sense of self starts to take shape—and it acquires individual traits in the process of adolescence, when the young person begins to demarcate his or her own material, cultural, and spiritual "realm." Without a doubt, the decision to acquire a certain article of clothing, a particular trainer, book, vehicle, computer game, game controller, tattoo (or whatever else is perceived to be relevant property) proves to be highly relevant for the process of identity formation. *Appropriation* is the process by which a thing becomes property. In the theoretical tradition that runs from Hegel via T.H. Green to contemporary property ethics, we therefore find the conviction that without the right and the practice of freely disposing of certain parts of the world, no subject capable of action can develop because it is the possibilities of experiencing care, planning, and self-efficacy associated with property which provide the chance for "appropriation" *(Anverwandlung)*, i.e., for the transformative shaping of the self and the world (cf., for example, Wesche 2014; Brocker 1992).

"Let the individual own nothing but himself, and he will not have a self to own," Henry Jones stated pointedly already in 1910 (Jones 1910, 94).

The "possessive individualism" so harshly criticised by C.B. Macpherson (Macpherson 1962), according to which the modern individual constitutes his or her self-relation as self-*ownership*, is in this sense not only the dominant ideology of political liberalism but the embodied and habitualised *Weltbeziehung* of modernity. For example, the modern individual possesses school degrees ("I *have* A-levels"), offices ("I *hold* the office of second-in-command in the voluntary fire brigade"), professional titles ("I *have* a profession as a doctor") and family titles ("I *have* a husband and three children"), and it is through these relations that his or her self-relation is constituted.

In sum, these three dimensions of modern world-relations, constituted in the form of property, result in a *possessive overall world relation (Weltbeziehung)* that differs from historically or culturally alternative forms of *Weltbeziehung*, not least in that the modern subject even seems to *possess* his or her thoughts and feelings, moods and inclinations, illnesses and abilities. We tend to say: *I have these thoughts, these feelings, these inclinations, these strengths and weaknesses, or even a disease*. And it is difficult to imagine an alternative here. It could well turn out, however, that such qualities were culturally and historically conceived over far longer periods as *participatory states* rather than *possessive ones*. Phenomenologists from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to Herman Schmitz, for example, have repeatedly pointed out that the notion of "feelings" as located inside a person may be a cardinal modern error: they can be more coherently conceptualised as something "extended and shared" between self and world (Schmitz 2019, 2). In this alternative way of thinking, individuals are afflicted, affected, or involved in feelings, moods, or illnesses rather than "having" them. Experts on Japanese and Chinese speech and thought from Heidegger via Rolf Elberfeld (2012) to Francois Jullien (2022) have, moreover, repeatedly discussed the tendency of Asian thought towards participatory *involvement* in a dynamic world, and many varieties of Renaissance thought also portray self and world as mutually interwoven — *dynamically interpenetrated* — in such a way that fixative, attributive relations of possession are hardly conceptualisable (Taylor 2009).

3. The incipient structural change in property in the 21st century

We do not necessarily have to turn, however, to non-European cultural traditions if we want to try to think of alternative forms of *Weltbeziehung*. In fact, according to the thesis put forward in this contribution, a revolution concerning the possessive world relation *(Weltbeziehung)* constituted in this way is currently emerging. The causes behind this can be found in technical, economic, political, and psychological changes that are happening at the same time and affect all three dimensions of relation — relationships to objects, social relations, and the self relation — equally. Property, it could be said, is no longer what it once was, and therefore its structural function and its cultural meaning are changing (Schuppert 2023).

What exactly does this postulate of a structural change in property mean? The thesis is that the habitualized modern forms of property have become questionable and are in flux under the pressure of current technological developments, economic wealth accumulation in the private sector and debt accumulation on the state side, as well as from geostrategic changes in both extensional and intensional as well as temporal and spatial respects. In an *extensional* sense, property structures are changing insofar as things that were not property before are suddenly subject to being owned — such as planets that turn out to be sources of raw materials; the wind, insofar as it is a source of energy; motherhood, insofar as it can be marketed; DNA sequences that can be patented — or, conversely, things lose or at least change their property form. This latter applies to cultural knowledge, for example, when it is no longer collected in expensive encyclopaedias that can be purchased privately, such as the *Brockhaus* or the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, but can be found in collective, publicly accessible sources such as Wikipedia, which refuses to attribute and market entries as intellectual property because they are of a collective nature.

In general, there is a tendency for the most highly valued cultural goods—the music of Beethoven or Bach, the works of Goethe or Shakespeare, etc.—to become public and freely accessible. That is, they are no longer to be appropriated in the form of private property by buying the books or the recordings, whereas, however, the necessary *infrastructure* (digital devices and streaming services) are expensive.

But this is also obviously changing the intensional meaning of property with respect to social practices as well as for the processes of subjectification. First, it can be noted that, with regard to cultural goods but to some

extent even to the material bearers of the *Weltbeziehung* and our processing of the world, a tendency towards a significant change from *property rights* to *rights of use* can be observed: Subjects no longer buy the things by which they subjectify themselves culturally but acquire temporary rights of use for them. This applies, for example, to music as well as films or books which are accessed and used through streaming services; but analoguous practices are beginning to establish themselves in other areas as well so that this tendency can now also be observed for clothing and vehicles (from the scooter left on the street corner to the leased or shared automobile and to the evening dress)—not to mention the digital end devices that remain the property of the provider and are regularly exchanged by him.

This has profound consequences for all three dimensions of *Weltbeziehung*—and thus for the late modern way of *being in the world* as a whole: with regard to relations to objects, it means that the relation of care disappears almost completely. The care and provision of "devices" and "products" is the task and responsibility of the manufacturers and providers—while the right of disposal for customers is clearly restricted: only temporary rights of use are acquired which can expire at any time if the service is terminated or payment obligations are not met. But there are no rights of transmission, marketing, alteration, destruction, etc. In fact, in late-modern capitalist societies, the producers of branded products are systematically dependent on the *absence* of close relationships between users and "things" that lead to consumers being so attached to their appliances, vehicles, or clothes that they do not want to get rid of them and replace them with new ones because they formed intense relations of care with them. Instead, customers are now supposed to keep replacing material things at ever shorter intervals, from smartphones to refrigerators to bicycles, while remaining "loyal" to the brands and service infrastructures.

In terms of *social* relations, cultural and knowledge goods in particular are no longer rival or scarce: they can be multiplied and disseminated without restriction and free of charge (this applies to almost all digital products such as audio recordings, books, films, computer games, software), even though their initial development is of course resource-intensive. This means, however, that such things no longer create competitive social relations, unless, of course, rivalry is artificially created through pecuniary or other access restrictions. Exclusive social relations thus shift from the products that carry the cultural meanings to the material and digital infrastructures as *prerequisites* for their use (not everyone can afford Apple products, Amazon

Prime, or Netflix). If property is understood as the connection between the relations of disposal and care, then it seems obvious that we are dealing with a significant change here.

It is true, of course, that this shift concerns only a small part of material reality and thus of the *Weltbeziehung* mediated by objects in late modern societies. Housing, food, clothing, furnishings, etc. are still predominantly acquired, provided for, and used in the form of private property. But there can be no doubt that the transformations occur in an area which is of great importance for the self-relation mediated by objects. The open research question here is: What consequences does it have for subjects, especially young people, when they no longer own the books, the music, the films, and the games (and perhaps even the clothing) through which they develop their self-relation and define their identity but only (temporarily, as long as they care to and their parents pay the providers and streaming services) *read, listen, watch, play (and wear)* them? What does it mean if they no longer have these things materially present in the cupboard or on the shelf? Phenomenologically speaking, it is obvious that the physical relationship to them is already changing: If we leave aside the clothes, they are no longer materially appropriated but enter the home as an immaterial data stream. This can mean that the processes of appropriation, i.e., the processes by which a subject forms, develops, and defines itself through cultural participation, are also changing—but the significance and extent of such transformations are far from clear yet.

In any case, the tendency analysed so far clearly implies a massive dynamisation in the relation to objects and thus also in the ensuing self-relations. Without doubt, the hope and idea of acquiring and establishing a "home of one's own" is of central importance, at least for the bourgeois world relation *(Weltbeziehung)*. Fencing off a plot of land and building a house—this driving motive, which is tremendously strong in modern capitalist society and provides an orientation far beyond the bourgeois life story, was not designed at first for individual ownership but for permanent, intergenerational family structures. The idea and the desire to leave something to the children one day—a flat, a house, a business—was and still is a motive that provides the possessive world relation with its driving energy. It is through home ownership that the bourgeois self expands into the world and literally finds itself interwoven with its structures: It is in the the workshop, the small garden, the kitchen, the living room, etc., where the propensities and features of the world are (or were) literally assimilated (*einverleibt*) and where