

Roman times the hearth was the abode of household gods, though he does not make much of it. Borgmann's account goes beyond Heidegger in emphasizing social and bodily engagement to a degree to which Heidegger seems insensitive. He also steps beyond Heidegger by highlighting the way things focus practices. Practices call for skills and the development of character; the diversity of different characters is joined to each other through participating in a world of practices. In our terms developed earlier, the hearth is the correlational coexistent thing which establishes the world of the household and, correlatively, calls forth its members and calls on their deeper capacities.

Today the hearth, if it exists at all, is no longer the central location in the house although the mantel still remains a place of honor. What has replaced the thing is the "device." The device (the central heating system) provides a commodity, one element of the original thing (warmth alone) and disburdens people of all the elements that compose the world and engaging character of the thing. This world of the thing, its ties to the natural and cultural world and our engagement with that many-dimensional world on bodily, cerebral, and social levels, is taken over by the *machinery* (the central heating plant itself) of the device.

The machinery makes no demands on our skill, strength, or attention, and it is less demanding the less it makes its presence felt. In the progress of technology, the machinery of the device has therefore a tendency to become concealed or to shrink. Of all the physical properties of a device, those alone are crucial and prominent which constitute the commodity that the device procures.

To make the commodity even more technologically available, the machinery varies radically in the history of technology (wood or coal or oil or electricity or gas). Owing to this radical variability and to this concealment, the machinery becomes necessarily *unfamiliar*. I probably do not know by what means the water is heated in a building. But the device is not just machinery or even most importantly machinery. The device makes available a commodity—warmth. Warmth is what the central heating system is for. Just the opposite of

the machinery, the commodity tends to *expand* (become ubiquitous in the house), to remain relatively *fixed* as the means change (from coal to electricity) and to *be familiar*. It follows that—unlike with things—there is a wide division between what a device provides, the commodity, and how it provides this commodity, the machinery. Hence, and this is Borgmann's central insight we saw illustrated earlier with second homes, devices *split* means and ends into mere means and mere ends.

Even though these claims that a thing makes on people are not always experienced as burdensome (as we see from the above account), this very world of the thing and the engagement it calls for can be felt at times as a burden or hassle. The technological device and its refinement *disburdens* people of all these problems by expanding the commodity, so that the world of the thing no longer determines when, in what way, and where it is available. Thus, it disburdens them of the claims that call for engagement. In short, the technological device disburdens people of the thing's world and its claims upon them. The device is considered the more refined the more it lifts these burdens from them. The ideal device is one where, from an experiential standpoint, a commodity can be enjoyed unencumbered by means. A reliable self-regulating central heating system whose maintenance and energy bill are taken care of by a management agency can be taken as a paradigmatic example.

The peculiar way technology dominates things is not limited, of course, to the central heating system. Considering how household technologies have changed, Witold Rybczynski in *Home: A Short History of An Idea* writes:

The evolution of domestic technology ... demonstrates that the history of physical amenities can be divided into two major phases: all the years leading up to 1890, and the three following decades. If this sounds outlandish, it is worth reminding ourselves that all "modern" devices that contribute to our domestic comfort—central heating, indoor plumbing, running hot and cold water, electric light and power and elevators—were unavailable before 1890, and were well known by 1920. We live, like it or not, on the fair side of a great