The World as a Whole

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Against the Husserlian schema of levels, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* sets out to conceive understanding, feeling, and action as elements of a structural whole, and sets out to conceive this structural whole in its relationship with the environment as a world, the world. There is a diplopia in Heidegger's holistic accounts of the world. On the one hand, Being-in-the-world, where "in" has to be understood as "inhabit," signified that indwelling is an encompassing of the whole world. In *Being and Time* this dwelling is characterized as care, and is effected in using and manipulating implements in the practicable field. The world is the distribution, the layout as such, teleological finality, order, ordinance, cosmos. It is the system or network of instrumental connections. The practicable field, a layout of relays, is later characterized as openness. This openness is suspended in the abysses of nothingness, death. In this account, our existence figures as ecstasis, projection, freedom. Yet the things, which open the paths and highways of the world, are also described as rafts and refuges which we originally cling to in fleeing the uncanny sense of nothingness that the sense of openness opens upon.

On the other hand, the world is *given* in mood, where it figures as that to which we are subjected, that which weighs upon us from the start as a burden. It weighs on our affectivity in an immediacy, such that it obturates any view of the whence and the whither. Heidegger moves from boredom to anxiety, from the mood in which the environment oppresses us by its very desolation, where nothing lures, nothing promises, where all paths sink into equivalence, to the mood in which
nothingness itself shows through this generalized insignificance. Anxiety is the state of uncanniness, *Unheimlichkeit*, drifting in the alien, the absolutely alien abyss of nothingness and death. In this nothingness the world appears in its contingency and as a totality.

The discordance between the world comprehensively grasped with the implement at hand and the world appearing as a totality pressing down immediately upon us with all its weight in mood is the topic of the reflections in this essay. Will we find that the world comes apart in this discord?

*The Form of the World*

*Being and Time* elaborates an anti-substantive ontology not only of our existence but also of the mundane things. Things are described not as substances but as relays of force, grasped on the move, as we reach for them and manipulate them. They are means and intermediaries. They are made to appear so by the Heideggerian analysis which emphasizes their forms rather than their materiality—whether their composition or their sensuous opacity and the inertia of their resistance. But their forms are not shapes, boundaries, contours; they are dynamic axes, concretizations of orientation. The contours we catch sight of are dynamically related to the other things, orientated into or against them. Their features are not properties but modes of appropriateness. What one sees, when one opens drawers in the kitchen, is the long and sharp edge of the paring knife, which can cut free the paint-stuck window.

To encounter something by using and manipulating things, to encounter something as an implement or path or resistance, is to grasp something specifically as serviceable and reliable or as detrimental and resistant. To go to the cellar and find a hammer is to spot something that can serve to pound in the nail or crack the walnuts. To see a plane surface as a window and not as a painting is to see that one can observe the street below through it. To recognize a vertical plane as a door is to see that one can open it and exit through it; to see a horizontal plane as a corridor is to see it as capable of sustaining our movement across it. To see something is to see what it is for; we see not shapes but possibilities. Every perception of anything in the practicable field is teleological, and the essence of each thing is its telos.

Things take form in a context, in an instrumental system, a system of finalities. The layout itself, the instrumental field, the world, is a field of possibilities. We opened this door, and saw at once the sink—the refrigerator—a table—the stove. We opened doors and saw at a glance that this is the kitchen, this the bathroom, this the bedroom.