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36.

CLOSENESS (*NÄHE*)

CLOSENESS IS A function of how AVAILABLE an entity is for DASEIN. The closeness of an entity is not a matter of its measurable distance from Dasein. Rather, closeness relates to how far Dasein is aware of an entity, or how attentive it is to that entity. Accordingly, the notion of “bringing something close by” does not describe the physical act of reducing the distance between myself and an entity, but rather refers to the way in which Dasein is able to bring something close by, by turning its attention toward that entity or by taking that entity up into its activity.

The notion of bringing something close is captured by Heidegger’s term “DIS-STANCE” (*Ent-fernung*). Heidegger argues that “dis-stancing’ amounts to making the farness vanish – that is making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close [*Näherung*]” (SZ 105). To illustrate this Heidegger uses the example of a pair of glasses:

When, for instance, a man wears a pair of spectacles which are so close to him distantly that they are “sitting on his nose,” they are environmentally more remote from him than the picture on the opposite wall. Such equipment has so little closeness that often it is proximally quite impossible to find. (SZ 107)

Although the glasses are physically close to me, I am not aware of them or attentive to them. Indeed, as many glasses-wearers will be aware, you can be searching around all over the place for your glasses before realizing that you are already wearing them. What determines the closeness of an entity is not its distance from us, but our “circumspective concern” (SZ 107). When I am concerned with something it is said to be close, but when I am not concerned with it, it is far away. Accordingly, dis-stancing, as bringing something close, refers not only to the way in which I can turn my attention toward physical entities in my immediate vicinity. Dis-stancing can also be “a purely cognitive matter” (SZ 105), for example “bringing something to mind” can be understood as an instance of dis-stancing.

Heidegger argues that “*In Dasein there lies an essential tendency towards closeness*” (SZ 105). Accordingly, dis-stance is said to be an “EXISTENTIAL” (SZ 105). Dis-stancing tells us something fundamental about Dasein’s spatiality. Heidegger suggests that expressions like it’s “a good walk,’ a ‘stone’s throw’ or ‘as long as it takes to smoke a pipe’” (SZ 105), reveal more about our environment and the way we orient ourselves in the world than, for example, knowing that it is precisely 4.03 miles from my house to the nearest library. “Though we may know these distances exactly,” Heidegger argues, “this knowledge still remains blind; it does not have the function of discovering the environment circumspectively and bringing it close” (SZ 106).

It might seem, then, that de-severance gives us only a subjective view of the world, since “a good walk” for a seasoned hiker will differ radically from “a good walk” for someone who is only used to walking to the bus stop each day. However, Heidegger maintains that dis-stance reveals something fundamental about the world: “*The circumspective dis-stancing of Dasein’s everydayness reveals the being-in-itself of the ‘true world’ – of that entity which Dasein, as something existing, is*

already alongside” (SZ 106). Although dis-stances do not uncover the world in a cold, disinterested way, this does not mean that they uncover the world in a subjective or arbitrary way (SZ 106). Dis-stances reveal something fundamental about the world because they uncover the world as we encounter it and as it “matters” to us as Dasein (SZ 106). As dis-stant, Dasein “lets any entity be encountered close by as the entity which it is” (SZ 105).

Dasein “does” most of its dis-stancing through “seeing and hearing” (SZ 107). As we have seen, concerning ourselves with the picture on the opposite wall brings it close. Similarly, hearing my friend hailing me from across the street brings her close. Further evidence of the dis-stancial nature of seeing and hearing – as well as Dasein’s “*essential tendency* towards closeness” – can be found in the drive toward technology that enhances Dasein’s ability to see and hear things far away. Technology, Heidegger suggests, “push[es] us on towards the conquest of remoteness. With the ‘radio,’ for example, Dasein has so expanded its everyday environment that it has accomplished a dis-stancing of the ‘world’ – a dis-stancing which, in its meaning for Dasein, cannot yet be visualized” (SZ 105). With inventions such as the internet – arguably one of the most extreme examples of dis-stancing in our time – anything can be brought close at the touch of a button. Video calling and social media mean that no one is inaccessible, whilst global media outlets and the vast swathes of information available, mean no subject or topic is out of reach.

However, Dasein’s ability to dis-distance the world in this way is not necessarily unproblematic. Heidegger articulates a worry about unchecked dis-stancing in his discussion of *CURIOSITY*. Here he suggests that rampant dis-stancing may actually render Dasein’s engagement with the world less rich. When Dasein is curious it is not really engaged in the world. Rather, “Dasein seeks what is far away simply in order to bring it close to itself in the way it looks” (SZ 172). In so doing, Dasein fails to engage with entities in terms of the richness and complexity of their being.

A parallel can be seen between this mode of dis-stancing and Heidegger’s later work of the 1940s and 1950s. In the dis-stancing aided by advances in modern *TECHNOLOGY*, Dasein is able to conquer remoteness and make everything available. As a consequence, entities come to be understood purely in terms of their usability for Dasein. This is the essence of Heidegger’s notion of “*STANDING RESERVE*,” developed in “The Question Concerning Technology” (GA7:17/QCT 17). In this work Heidegger returns us to Dasein’s “*essential tendency towards closeness*,” examining more thoroughly the consequences it may have for Dasein’s way of being-in-the-world.

Charlotte Knowles

REFERENCES IN HEIDEGGER

SZ 102, 103, 105–07, 172, 359, 369; GA20:312, 313, 316

CO-EXISTENCE (MITDASEIN). SEE BEING-WITH.

CO-ORIGINARY, CO-ORIGINALITY (GLEICHURSPRÜNGLICHKEIT). SEE EQUIPRIMORDIALITY.