
The Ontology of Culture—Way-markers

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This essay works towards a rough explication of the ontic-ontological difference as it emerges in the early chapters of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. It then goes on to use that difference to open up a possible ontology of culture. If the cultural disciplines are both ontically oriented and cannot "see" the ontic-ontological difference—and Heidegger tells us this in so many words—what alternative version of culture becomes available to an ontologically-oriented investigation that is aware of the difference?

I. Two kinds of being

Among many other things, Division I of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* is a map of the kinds of beings that there are.¹ If we can, for the sake of this investigation, assume the map to be exhaustive, if not a complete fleshing-out of each kind of being, then we should be able to use it to say something about the *kind* of being that any *given* being is. And there is no reason why this should not include culture or, indeed, the related kinds of beings we sometimes call "cultures" and "cultural objects." I believe it necessary to begin to say such things about culture, cultures and cultural objects because, while there are countless extant definitions of culture, as well as manifold lay and professional theories and understandings of what culture is and cultures are,

¹ I refer throughout to Joan Stambaugh's translation of *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). This edition also marks the pagination of the original German edition. Hence references in brackets are to both paginations, signalled by "e" and "g" respectively.

I know of no strictly *ontological* investigation in this field. Here I am using “ontological” in Heidegger’s sense—a sense that will be more fully elaborated as we proceed.

At the start of *Being and Time*, and although things become more complex as that work proceeds, Heidegger makes a primordial distinction between two kinds of beings. He distinguishes between (α) beings that *are* Da-sein (or sometimes “like Da-sein”) and (β) beings that are *not* Da-sein (or sometimes “unlike Da-sein”). The first kind is made up of all beings that, in their being, are concerned about their being. Da-sein is any being that, in Heidegger’s fundamentally non-psychologicistic and non-cognitive sense, *understands* its being, in its very being, as what it is itself. In this respect, Da-sein does not have concrete attributes (as do beings of the second β -kind); instead, “[a]s a being, Da-sein always defines itself in terms of a possibility which it *is* and somehow understands in its being” (41e/43g). An example would be me, myself: “The being which this being is concerned about in its being is always my own” (40e/42g); but Da-sein can also be thought of as us, ourselves: “the beings that we ourselves are” (43e/46g). Hence the familiar singular-plural distinction does not apply when it comes to the ontological investigation of Da-sein, but neither do the ordinary (empirical, ontic) expressions “‘life’ and ‘human being’” (43e/46g), as we shall see.

Beings that are Da-sein are intrinsically concerned about their being.

Along the same lines, because all knowing and representing are formed, as it were, after the fact, on the *ground* of my being Da-sein, I do not have, as Da-sein, the status of a “subject” who merely knows or has representations of the brute reality of “objects”: “subject and object are not the same as Da-sein and world” (56e/60g). In fact, the comparison is so dangerously misleading that Heidegger’s marginal note reads: “Certainly not. So little that even rejecting this by putting them together is already fatal” (56e, note). The appellation “Da-sein” is not subjectivist, cognitive or representationalist, then, but ontological. In fact, among Heidegger’s reasons for the use of the term “Da-sein” is the project of warding off what we can call the “representationalist picture” of subject-object relations. To say that a being is Da-sein (literally, there-being) is simply to say that its ontological condition is that it is concerned with its own being. Or it is to say that “Da-sein is a being which is related understandingly in its being towards that being” (49e/53g). This is why it is not right to say

that Da-sein is co-terminous with “human being” or “life,” and still less with “a human being” or “a life”; it is closer to the point to say that Da-sein is any being of *the same ontological kind* as, for example, human being.

Beings that are not Da-sein are not intrinsically concerned about their being.

By contrast, beings that are not Da-sein (β) are such that they are not, in themselves, as part of their very being, concerned with that being. All the phenomena that we usually associate with “nature” would be of this kind: atoms, trees, stars, human bodies, and so on—though the Heideggerian jury may still be out on dolphins. And given that Heidegger’s own short list is “table, house, tree” (40e/42g), we must assume that even things produced by human hand *can* have this status (though, as we shall see, they *need* not). Professional access to this sort of being is routinely via the sciences or, more strictly, what Heidegger calls the “ontic” sciences because these disciplines are pre-phenomenological and hold that their respective objects-of-study have existent qualities that can be accessed cognitively as “properties” of them. In terms we have already encountered, ontic inquiries are those which assume a subject-object relation as given and which therefore establish human investigators as “subjects” inquiring into the properties of objectively present objects. For Heidegger, there is nothing wrong with such inquiries—he particularly mentions anthropology, psychology and biology—it is simply that their initial assumptions will necessarily be other than ontological. That is, these sciences will not be concerned with beings in their being (the ontological) but with beings as merely present objects-for-a-subject (the ontic):

In suggesting that anthropology, psychology, and biology all fail to give an unequivocal and ontologically adequate answer to the question of the *kind of being* of this being that we ourselves are, no judgment is being made about the positive work of these disciplines. But, on the other hand, we must continually be conscious of the fact that these ontological foundations can never be disclosed by subsequent hypotheses derived from empirical material. Rather, they are always already “there” even when that empirical material is only *collected*. The fact that positivistic investigation does not see these foundations and considers them to be self-evident is no proof of the fact that they do not lie at the basis and are problematic in a more radical sense than any thesis of positivistic science can ever be. (46-47e/50g)

As opposed to this “positivistic” method of analysis founded on “subjective” cognition of “objective” entities, Heidegger argues

that beings that *are* Da-sein can only be accessed by a fundamental phenomenological ontology (the “existential analytic”). This distinction arises from his noted ontic-ontological difference which we have relied on already but can now formulate as: the difference between being (as such and in general) and merely present beings. While beings that are not Da-sein can be accessed either ontically (via the sciences) or ontologically, only a fundamental phenomenological ontology is appropriate to the existential analysis of Da-sein by virtue of its not being a simple objective presence in the first place. And if Da-sein is not a simple objective presence to start with, fundamentally (as stars and trees *may* be), it therefore brings to the fore the central question of the determination of the very structure of being itself. (Hence the point of starting a general and structural investigation of being with Da-sein and not some other being.)

That-which-is-not-Da-sein (β) has a number of distinct ontological characteristics. Such beings are “categorical”; they belong to categories “larger” than themselves and may have sub-categories “below” or “within” them. By contrast that-which-is-Da-sein (α) is non-categorical, hence existential. Categoricals, moreover, have their being merely within space, what Heidegger calls “insideness.” They can be “next to” each other in space, but they cannot touch in the sense of “encounter” (52e/55g). Existentials, contrastively, are characterised by their being-in, their existential spatiality, their capacity to encounter such-and-such in the world. Categorical space, “insideness,” can be measured with instruments and statistically represented, while existential spatiality is a more complex phenomenon of Da-sein’s being related to its capacity to “de-distance” what it encounters in its *world* in several complex ways. Hence the primary existential of *being-in-the-world* pertains to Da-sein, as does the very notion of world itself. Categoricals, by contrast (and in contradistinction to any version of “realism”), are strictly “worldless” (52e/55g). In being-in-the-world, then, Da-sein is not worldless but worldly. And if that-which-is-not-Da-sein is, in itself, worldless, as it is *encountered* by Da-sein, it therefore “belongs” to the world and can then be said to be “innerworldly” with respect to Da-sein. So: “terminologically ‘worldly’ means a kind of being of Da-sein, never a kind of being of something objectively present ‘in’ the world. We

Existential spatiality cannot be represented statistically.

shall call this latter something belonging to the world, or innerworldly" (61e/65g).

Facticity
vs. *mere*
facticity.

The two kinds of beings we have encountered so far, then, are quite distinct. Beings that are not Da-sein have the distinctive kind of presence called "objective presence"—*Vorhandenheit*. They are *Vorhandene*: beings of mere factuality. Da-sein, on the other hand, has *facticity*, an active but non-cognitive and non-psychological principle of interestedness (or the possibility of interestedness) in its own being. But as against "objective presence" (*Vorhandenheit*), we cannot and must not say that Da-sein has mere "subjective presence," precisely because its ontological status, as we have seen, is other than and prior to the "representationalist picture" of mere subject-object relations. What are we to say instead of this? What is the correct term to contrast with the "objective presence" of beings that are not Da-sein?

We can see the importance of this question by drawing a summary table of the distinctions derived so far from the first two chapters of *Being and Time*:

beings:	(α) beings that are Da-sein (or like Da-sein)	(β) beings that are not Da-sein (or unlike Da-sein)
examples:	me, us, any being of the ontological sort that we are	table, house, tree
method of analysis:	phenomenological ontology (existential, analytic): the determination of the structure of being itself	the ontic(al) sciences (pre-phenomenological): the cognition of the merely existent qualities of things
ontological determinations:	existential being-in, "existential spatiality" not worldless, worldly	categorial being merely within space, insiderness worldless—>innerworldly
presence:	?	objective presence (<i>Vorhandenheit</i>)

II. Equipmentality

Strictly—and this will bring us soon enough to the question of culture's ontological status—we should say that just as beings

that are not Da-sein have the kind of presence that is objective presence, so Da-sein has sheer being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world, and all of the further existentials that it implies and requires, would be the strict opposite of *Vorhandenheit*. But Heidegger does not say this in so many words. What he does say instead is of primary relevance to our inquiry vis-à-vis culture.

At least as far as Division I of *Being and Time* is concerned, the primordial existential determination of Da-sein as being-in-the-world is its *taking care*. And primarily this means taking care of, handling and otherwise using tools or *equipment*—at least this is Heidegger’s first instance of taking care, sequentially in the text (63-68e/67-73g). This is so central to Heidegger’s analytic that he even includes “privative” instances or breaches of equipmental use among the first cases of taking care:

Modes of taking care belong to the everydayness of being-in-the-world, modes which let *the being taken care of* be encountered in such a way that the worldly quality of innerworldly beings appears. Beings nearest at hand can be met up with in taking care of things as unusable, as improperly adapted for their specific use. Tools turn out to be damaged, their material unsuitable. In any case, *a useful thing* of some sort is at hand here. (68e/70g; first italics mine.)

Accordingly, another kind—potentially a *third* kind—of being is effectively introduced into the picture, but one closely related to the primordial existential of Da-sein. This kind of being is “the being taken care of”; and, at least initially, this means the equipment that Da-sein has ready-to-hand, whether fully functional or, just as importantly, not.² This third kind of being Heidegger calls *Zuhandenheit*, readiness-to-hand, handiness, and beings of this sort are accordingly referred to as *Zuhandene*. So, while we have, effectively, a third ontological category, we can also see that, in another sense, *Zuhandene* also form a distinctive contrast with *Vorhandene*—objectively present beings.³

Zuhandenheit
a third kind of
being.

If, earlier, we might have been tempted to ask a question such as “Is culture Da-sein or not-Da-sein?” we now have a third al-

² This “not” shows that Heidegger’s stress on equipment is by no means an endorsement of functionalism or utilitarianism.

³ For an account of *Being and Time* that begins with, and assumes throughout, a threefold categorisation of being, see Robert Brandom, “Heidegger’s Categories in *Being and Time*,” *The Monist* vol. 66, no. 3, 1983: 387-409.

ternative. And, moreover, I believe this third alternative can bring us closer to the correct analysis of culture's ontological status. Can culture be the domain of being of *Zuhandene*? Is culture *Zuhandenheit*? In order to answer this question, we need to back-track to some of our earlier distinctions.

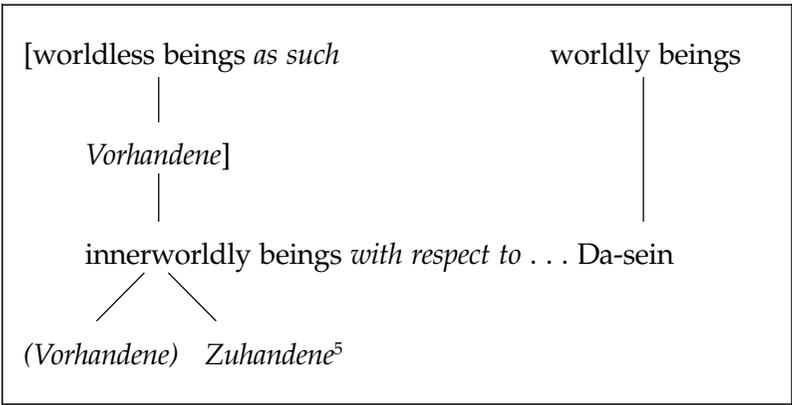
(α) *beings can encounter other beings, (β) beings cannot.*

In Chapter 2, Heidegger describes, as we have mentioned, the distinction between the mere *factuality* (*Tatsächlichkeit*) of the objectively present and the *facticity* (*Faktizität*) that is among the ontological determinations of Da-sein itself (52e/56g). The former refers only to beings that have objective presence (*Vorhandenheit*). Hence beings that are Da-sein, by contrast, are correctly referred to as having facticity rather than mere factuality. And this difference involves Da-sein's *encounters* with other beings—contrastively with mere objects' relations with one another (for example their being next to one another in space): "The concept of facticity implies that an 'innerworldly' being has being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the being of those beings which it *encounters* within its own world" (52e/56g; my italics).

For all this, and despite the intimate "worldly" encounters between Da-sein and other beings (such as its own equipment), the characteristic of handiness (*Zuhandenheit*) does not strictly apply to Da-sein itself, as such. Rather *Zuhandenheit* is a determination only of our third kind of being: wares, equipment, tools, useful things.

The ontology of *Zuhandene* is further discussed in Chapter 3, but always in relation to what might be called Da-sein's equipmental understanding of the world. If understanding is always understanding-as, it is primordially understanding-as-equipment. So, returning to the question posed at the end of the previous section, in the strict sense, where Da-sein is concerned, there is no utterly appropriate oppositional term for "objective presence" (and, absolutely, "subjective presence" will not do, as we have seen), unless it is the whole of *being-in-the-world* itself. We cannot simply write "*Zuhandenheit*," that is, in the cell of the table opposite "*Vorhandenheit*." This would be a basic error. However, we *have* established something like a deep (even a fundamental) affiliation between Da-sein and its equipment. Equipment consists of the nearest things to hand for Da-sein; it is the being other than itself with which it is primarily and most intimately

associated and which it first encounters in and as its own facticity. In Chapter 3, it becomes evident that *the very understanding* of itself that Da-sein has (and by virtue of which, we will remember, it was initially made distinct from mere *Vorhandene*) is not only non-psychological, non-cognitive, non-subjectivist and so on, it is fundamentally *equipmental*.⁴ Understanding according to the existential analytic is Da-sein's capacity for the use of equipment as its (ontologically) primordial mode of encountering (other) beings in its world. So one possible picture of the overall two-fold (or now, perhaps, threefold) ontological map would be as follows:



But this is by no means sufficient to make equipment “like” Da-sein. This is most clear in Chapter 3 where Heidegger lists three distinct but related kinds of being:

1. The being of the innerworldly beings initially encountered (handiness);
2. The being of beings (objective presence) that is found and

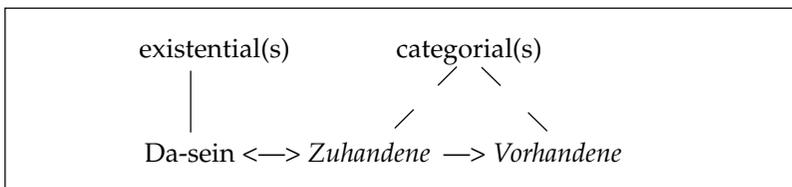
⁴ Here we might be tempted by the slogan “Not mental but equipmental.”

⁵ The round brackets around the second “*Vorhandene*” make the term distinct from its merely ontic analysis. Heidegger, in Chapter 3 and beyond, frequently refers to “objective presence” as “innerworldly.” This is only possible on an *ontological* analysis. The merely ontic analysis is shown in the diagram by square brackets. “Objective presence,” accordingly, has distinct meanings on each type of analysis. Ontically, *Vorhandene* are simply things-in-themselves. Ontologically: “Handiness is the ontological categorial definition of beings as they are ‘in themselves’” (67e/71g, italics deleted). Then “objective presence, as a possible kind of being of things at hand, is still bound up with handiness” (78e/83g).

determined by discovering them in their own right *in going through* beings initially encountered;

3. The being of the ontic condition of the possibility of discovering innerworldly beings in general, the worldliness of the world. (82e/88g; my italics in item 2.)

He then goes on to add: "This third kind of being is an *existential* determination of being-in-the-world, that is, of Da-sein. The other two concepts of being are *categories* and concern beings unlike Da-sein" (82e/88g). For all their intimacy, then, *Zuhandene*, just like *Vorhandene*, are ultimately categorial. Moreover, because of (a) equipment's centrality to Da-sein's own understanding and (b) its categorial status along with *Vorhandene*—and this is a radical departure from the standard subject-object account—the "access," as it were, of Da-sein to objectively present beings is *via* ("in going through") its equipment, via its "innerworldly beings initially encountered."⁶ So we now have a quite different difference from the more basic Da-sein/not-Da-sein contrast that opens *Being and Time*. This new difference pits Da-sein and "beings like Da-sein" (existentials) against "beings unlike Da-sein" (categorials). In this case, we get a slightly different arrangement of the ontological map:⁷



I take "categorial," as per the initial sketch-analysis above, to refer to the view that *Vorhandene* (and now also *Zuhandene*) may be categorised; that they may consist of sub-categories and belong to categories greater than themselves; and that this is the properly ontic (scientific) analysis of them. I take "existential" to refer to the inappropriateness of such an ontic analysis with respect to Da-sein which, accordingly, cannot be a merely existing property/quality/

⁶ The importance of this cannot be overstated. What Heidegger has managed here is unique: it means that Da-sein's understanding precedes and ultimately determines "objective reality" without, at the same time, stooping to relativism or idealism (let alone their constructionist hybrid).

⁷ The arrows in the second row refer to (firstly) Da-sein's intimacy with *Zuhandene* and (secondly) its "in going through" *Zuhandene* to "access" objectively present beings (*Vorhandene*).

attribute of anything (such as God, consciousness, a subject) and nor can it have merely existing properties/qualities/attributes (such as anthropological characteristics, universal traits or a “human nature”). Categorical beings are formally, functionally and mathematically specifiable. This is not true of Da-sein.⁸

Logically then:

- a. *Zuhandene* must be both innerworldly and categorical.
- b. *Vorhandene* must be both worldless/innerworldly and categorical.
- c. Da-sein must be both worldly and existential.

Zuhandene, then, would be the only *initially* proper objects of cultural inquiry, as Da-sein is the only initially proper object of philosophical ontology and *Vorhandene* the only initially proper objects of natural scientific inquiry. The question is: is equipment, then, properly subject to ontic or to ontological description—or else to both?

If we remain in the domain of ontic investigation, along with anthropology, sociology and so on, our proper object will be this or that cultural object and its characteristics. Here, collections will be made and classifications drawn up. Much useful data will be assembled and reported on regarding useful things—thence becoming a useful thing in its own right. At least potentially, every single useful object could be described, tabulated, counted and so on. This would not be nothing.⁹ But, at the same time, if Heidegger is right, it would always have to go on against an unproblematised and unexplicated background of (for all we would know, mistaken) assumptions about what culture *is* as

Study of culture ultimately ontological.

⁸ Instead Heidegger refers, throughout Division I, to its “modes.” His discussion of *katagoreisthai* as “addressing” things encountered is close to the start of the text (42e/44g) and is crucial to the existential analytic of Division I. It, and its connection to *noein* and *logos*, should, ideally, have further specification before it is simply connected, as here, to the forms of categorisation of common sense and the natural sciences.

⁹ And a recent series of personal and professional circumstances has led me to conclude that the particular discipline called “cultural studies” is now almost completely in the business of this kind of collection-work. See, for example, the “information for authors” supplements to the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* and the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. No discipline, so far as I know, including philosophy, has an interest in the being of culture as such.

such.¹⁰ This—the question of culture as such, as opposed to any ethnography or “cultural studies”—would have to be an ontological inquiry. Any such inquiry would ask about the very conditions of possibility of something (anything that is so) being a cultural object, being *Zuhandene*. And until this investigation is undertaken—and for all that there are many “theories of culture”—the whole “field” of culture drifts like a rudderless ship.

III. Summary theses

In the space of this short article, I cannot hope even to begin (let alone complete) the task I have just announced.¹¹ Instead, I want simply to offer some basic theses, derived from the above reading of the earliest chapters of *Being and Time*, for the guidance of the task. In Heideggerian terms, these are way-markers; they plot stations along a path yet to be travelled.

“Cultural
objects”
not objects.

1. Equipment, “innerworldly being initially encountered,” *Zuhandene*: this is the proper domain and “object” (as in “the-matic,” “problematic” or “object of study”) of specifically *cultural* analysis. This is how we should, henceforth, read the expression “cultural objects”—which might accordingly be better rendered as “cultural beings.” That is “cultural objects” are no more objects than are, say, eclipses—perhaps even less so. They are not so much hammers as “hammerings”; “not tools themselves, but the work” (65e/69g).

2. Culture-as-such is not simply a collection or assemblage of such cultural beings. It is not even any imaginably *complete* assemblage of such beings. Finding, positivistically, ontically, all the categorial characteristics of every single equipmental being ever: this could not let us into a fundamental analysis of culture as such.

3. Instead, culture-as-such consists in the fundamental on-

¹⁰ Neglecting the “is as such” of culture means that cultural studies, for example, does not deal with cultural beings in their handiness. Rather, it “just look[s] at things ‘theoretically’” (65e/69g). So it is not as if cultural studies, for all its empirical grounding, is “practical” and the ontology of culture “theoretical.” If anything, vice versa.

¹¹ I have a series of papers available on request that begin to scratch the surface of this crucial task. They begin from the premise that it may be possible to find a conception of culture elsewhere than in what we have called “the representationalist picture”; that is, elsewhere than the standard “subject-object” arrangement of the field of “knowledge” and “understanding.”

tological status of equipment (tools, wares, useful things). Any inquiry in this field would have to begin with the following determinations of the *facticity* of culture:

3.1 Equipment (*Zuhandene*) is in one respect simply categorial—it can be ontically described, collected, counted, “ethnographised,” and so forth. In this respect it can be treated as having some of the sheer empirical characteristics of merely objectively present beings (*Vorhandene*).

3.2 At the same time, and in another respect, equipment is an innerworldly (but never a worldless) being. In this respect it is unlike *Vorhandene* and requires, for its analysis, an ontological investigation of its position in Da-sein’s fundamental understanding of its own being-in-the-world. How is it that Da-sein *understands*, exactly, its equipmentality? And, in particular, how does equipment function, for Da-sein, “in going through” it to “the being *of* beings (objective presence)” (82e/88g)?

3.3 This intimate (indeed inviolable and always-already in-place) attachment between Da-sein and equipment suggests that culture-as-such might be reconfigured as Da-sein’s ownmost equipmental understanding of its in-the-worldliness. How can we defend the thesis that Da-sein is, was, and will be, always-already equipmental? Is it possible to conceive of a kind of being that understands its own being-in-the-world, *but without equipment*?

3.4 Everything in this investigation so far points to a possible (though by no means established) correspondence between the concept of equipment and the concept of technology.¹²

4. The analysis of “cultures,” “specific cultures” or “a culture in particular” can be given neither by the collection of particular equipments, nor by the investigation of Da-sein’s equipmentality (culture-as-such). Instead, we might hypothesise that what is called “a culture” is formed out of the “totality of references” of specific equipments (64-65e/69-70g). That is, no item of equipment remains, for Da-sein’s understanding, unrelated or irrelevant to others. Each references or points to the others. The hammer, for example, is pointless without nails (or something

¹² It may be possible for this to square with Heidegger’s account of the ancient and proper (but currently hidden) meaning of “technology” as *techné*. See Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” trans. W. Lovitt, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland, 1997), 3-35.

else to be hammered). The hammer and the nails are pointless without sawn timber (or something else to be nailed). All three are pointless without the “in-order-to” of, say, building a house. In this lies the possibility of thinking the being of culture in and as a specific totality (or “manifold” [65e/69g]) of reference. The work of building a house lies within the “referential context” (66e/70g) of the “whereof of which it consists” (66e/70g): the timber, the nails, the hammer. The work of hammering, likewise, in the “what-for of its usability” (66e/70g): building the house.

4.1 Heidegger’s position on totalities, contexts or manifolds of reference suggests support for Sacks’s idea that cultures display “order at all points.”¹³ Prior to Sacks, there are two standard accounts of cultural acquisition or “enculturation” (and they can extend to or derive from models of language acquisition). The standard empiricist account views cultural acquisition as a developmental aggregation of experienced particulars or “inputs.” The rationalist account treats it in terms of an innate disposition towards ordering (regardless of experienced particulars). Against both of these, Sacks’s “order at all points” conjecture has it that cultural orders (totalities of reference) are wholly displayed in any of their fragments. As Schegloff puts it in his introduction to the first volume of Sacks’s *Lectures*:

An alternative to the possibility that order manifests itself at an aggregate level and is statistical in character is what [Sacks] terms the ‘order at all points’ view. . . . This view, rather like the ‘holographic’ model of information distribution, understands order not to be present only at aggregate levels and therefore subject to a overall differential distribution, but to be present in detail on a case by case, environment by environment basis. A culture is not then to be found only by aggregating all of its venues; it is substantially present in each of its venues.¹⁴

5. The specification of the being of culture (its proper onto-

¹³ “Reference” and “context of reference” should not be confused with referential theories of, for example, meaning. The German terms *Verweisung* and *Verweisungszusammenhang* do not permit this reading. This is the point of Section 17 in Chapter 3 (71-77e/76-83g) which ends by telling us that “Reference . . . constitutes handiness itself.” The English term “referral” may be more to the point in expressing the “what-for” and “in-order-to” linkages between useful things within a totality.

¹⁴ See Schegloff’s introduction to Harvey Sacks’s *Lectures on Conversation*, Vol. 1, ed. G. Jefferson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), ix-lxii. This quotation, p. xlvi.

logical analysis) as equipmentality is, surprisingly enough perhaps, possible without yet invoking the ideas of “interaction” (5.1) or “society” (5.2).

5.1 Since equipment is what Da-sein first and primarily encounters as a being-with it in the world, culture (in this sense) *precedes* Dasein’s being-with-others (the *Mit-dasein*) in relative immediacy (“de-distancing”) (110-118e/117-125g). By this I mean that it has ontological primacy over what, ontically, is often described as “interaction” or “the relation to others” (for example, in social psychology and symbolic interactionism).¹⁵

5.2 Society-at-large lies even further from (is even less distanced by) Da-sein and consists in the “they” (*das Mann*) (118-122e/126-130g). This is the public domain where “idle talk” (none of these terms is meant disparagingly) levels out Da-sein’s understanding to a general picture of “what one does.” By definition, then, equipmentality precedes it, ontologically speaking. In this respect, it is a fundamental error to begin the analysis of culture from the premise that it is first and essentially “social.” Instead, we should say that the very possibility of the social (as the “they,” as the public or, indeed, as the others, the *Mit-dasein*) is grounded on the prior being that Da-sein is—including its fundamental equipmentality. Ontologically, culture and society are quite distinct (though they have their eventual connections in the “inauthentic” relation between Da-sein and the “they”) and it is a fatal error to begin with their co-imbrication, let alone with the subjection of culture to society.¹⁶ If culture is ontologically pre-

Culture and society ontologically distinct.

¹⁵ The ontological primacy of readiness-to-hand over the *Mit-dasein* is expressed by Heidegger as follows: “. . . the worldliness of the world thus constituted in which Da-sein always already essentially is, lets things at hand be encountered in the surrounding world in such a way that the *Mit-dasein* of others is encountered at the same time with them as circumspectly taken care of. The structure of the worldliness of the world is such that others are not initially objectively present as unattached subjects along with other things, but show themselves in their heedful being in the surrounding world in terms of the things at hand in that world” (116e/123g).

¹⁶ The terms “authentic” and “inauthentic” are non-evaluative in Heidegger’s ontological terminology. They should by no means be thought of as implying a morality and, still less, as equating with the use of similar terms by the Frankfurt School of social theorists. Hence: “inauthenticity can determine Da-sein even in its fullest concretion, when it is busy, excited, interested, and capable of pleasure” (40e/43g). The term “authentic” should be thought

social and ontically pre-sociological, this does not mean that it is egoism, solipsism, subjectivism or anything of the kind. On the contrary, one of the main points of the existential analytic of Da-sein is to show that it is not, in any sense, “an ego,” “a mind” or “a subject” in the first place. This must apply, then, to its fundamental existential determinations: including its equipmentality.

Da-sein and “man” not coextensive.

6. There is nothing in the equation of “cultural objects” with *Zuhandene*, and all that follows from it, to prevent living beings, including persons and bodies, from being cultural beings. Da-sein is not “man,” and “man” may be as much the handled as the handler, as much (perhaps) the technology as the technologist.

7. We should not forget that Da-sein and *Zuhandene* are always already bound together. Each depends on the other, as it were, reflexively. No account of one—including Heidegger’s account of time and death in Division II—is sufficient without the other. In this respect, cultural inquiry and philosophical inquiry cannot be so easily separated in terms of their “objects” of inquiry.¹⁷ Or, at least, both are crucially engaged in the analysis and understanding of “world.” Ontologically, however, this is as far from any anthropologic concern with “forms of life” or “whole ways of life” as it is possible to be.

8. Culture, analysed and specified ontologically, has a single main advantage over ontic and derivational “theories of culture” (for example, those that derive culture from ideas about nature, economy, climate, topography, society, state, genius, spirit, world picture and so on), over the “philosophy of culture” (156e/167g), and over all necessarily positivistic accounts of specific cultural “objects” (including ethnographies, participant observations, data

via “auto-” and/or “proprio-.” With Da-sein, it has to do with its *ownmost* being. In other respects (in)authenticity leads us to the important field of (ap)propriation (*Ereignis*) in the later Heidegger. Further, we could read *Being and Time* as an analysis of Da-sein’s “proprioception,” providing the physiological connotations could somehow be removed from that term.

¹⁷ Heidegger’s remarks about culture, both in *Being and Time* and elsewhere, are unfortunate in this respect. In a piece called “‘The Twisted Handiwork of Egypt’ and Heidegger’s Question Concerning Culture” (available on request), I have tried to rework some of these ideas by asking how Heidegger might have gone about his task if he first thought that culture might (just conceivably), along with art, science and technology, have more than merely ontic status.

collections, interviews and so on). Its advantage is that, unlike all these others, it works with a radical questioning of whether everything that *is* is an object for a subject. That is, it works against the dominant, orthodox (but, for this reason, barely even mentioned) general picture of culture as being representationalist through and through. As Heidegger makes clear: Da-sein is not a simple objective presence (such as a human body or a person) with a representational capacity (consciousness, for example, or the capacity for thought) tacked on afterwards. It is not as if one simply placed an active circuit into an inert grey box. If this is so, Da-sein's equipmental being-with cannot be founded on such representationalist premises. Until there is a fundamental ontology of culture, then, none of the professional equipmental practices that call themselves "the cultural sciences" or "the cultural disciplines" can even begin to work on definite foundations—if only because they do not yet know (and seem not to *want* to know) what culture *is*.