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A Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Technology and Vision: Towards an Existential – Ontological understanding of social being.

PhD Dissertation: Sociology

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Abstract:

A Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology of technology and vision: towards an existential – ontological understanding of social being.

This thesis turns to Martin Heidegger to develop an interpretive framework to answer the question that has increasingly been thrust to the fore of 21st century society: what is the nature of the relationship between technology and society? And related to this central question is the matter of how society and social being is altered by technology and its modalities of vision? The basic argument that has been advanced to address this question revolves around the fact that in as much as we use technology as a means to serve practical ends, it displaces certain tasks and functions, which would otherwise be necessary, and thus truncates or reduces the scope of social practices in our everyday social routines. However, it does not simply end there as we illustrate that social practices encompass, to varying degrees, a different range and scope of social relationships which are instantiated in their wake. Considered together we found that these relations constitute a nexus of social connections, which we take up as the quality of sociality. The implications for our argument that sociabilities and sociality converge to produce an understanding of social being means that any technological encroachments which displace our social practices and social connectives alters our understanding of social being and thus how we understand ourselves, the world and others. We take up this theme of the displacement of our social being, sociality and sociabilities by considering two outcomes that modern technology seems to open up: equipmentality and curiosity. Firstly, as regards equipmentality we have noted that it connect us to our sociality and sociabilities and thus inures our understanding of social being, however, by contrast Heidegger finds in (idle) curiosity a second outcome that dooms us to the dystopian fate of nihilism. There is thus no fait accompli as regards modern technology’s nihilistic tendencies. This does not mean that we can be complacent about our future. But it does mean, on a positive note, that we human beings do have a responsibility to recognize technology’s efficacious ontological dimension for disclosing our being and the world. By contrast, on the negative task, our responsibility does extend to resisting modern technology’s nihilistic ontological wasteland, which does not admit objects, things or for that matter human beings, but only the flattened insubstantial being of resources as standing reserve for the technological system, bereft of sociality, humanity and an understanding of social be-ing.
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Chapter One

The Organization, Structure and Logic of the Thesis.

Title: A Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Technology and Vision: Towards an Existential – Ontological understanding of social being.

1.1 Introduction: Background and Motivation

The initial thinking of this doctoral study drew its inspiration from the democratic transformation of South Africa and its ‘nation-building’ project from the vantage point of understanding this ‘new’ nationhood being born. In light of this I conceived of a research program that could distil the shape of and recuperate the emergent imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) of a national, continental and global scope, in public media. This was to be achieved through a discourse analysis of those television genres that occupied the largest sectors of public interest for their meaningful content for said imaginations. The more I pursued this the more I had the nagging feeling that I had left a prior question unasked and thus left somewhat adrift in this silence.

There were certain silences that were left a begging: firstly, in seeking out the different levels of generality in the national, continental and global I had overlooked quotidian everyday practices, and comportment to objects that inure social being and our sociality; and secondly, in pursuing said thematics of media content I had overlooked the relations entered into vis-à-vis technological objects and their modalities of vision, and how these relate to social being. And finally I had overlooked a grounded concept of what it meant
to be this social being we call human, and Heidegger calls Dasein, and how our relations to other human beings, objects and ourselves are anchored existentially and ontologically.

The point of theoretical interest that arose in respect to the latter silences was a matter of how to reconcile the social practices, perceptions and meanings that people are engaged in as matter of course, in their everyday lives, within a technological milieu as a way to consider questions of social transformation from the ground up. The strong argument of this thesis is that in taking as our starting point Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology of modern technology and perception as vision we open up a different way to think about the conditions of possibility that instantiates our sociality and the various sociabilities that are manifested and that coalesce in social being.

In short we open up in Heideggerian vein an existential – ontological understanding of, what we prefer to call as will become increasingly evident, our social being. What we bring to the fore and make explicit by way of this thesis is the unraveling or ‘deconstruction’ of the taken-for-granted in the notions embedded in “human nature”, being “social” and “social being”. For it is here, after all, that we encounter the meanings entailed in the technological shaping of social life, in a modality of being that though variously described comes down at bottom to an alienation or estrangement from our sociality, and thus our humanity as beings who are structured by care and concern for their collective existence.
1.2 Theoretical focus:

To put the central questions directly:

- what is the constitutive structure of our human way of social be-ing, and how is it related to our sociality;
- how does this sociality translate into sociabilities, that is, our comportments and encounters with the world of things, that is technology, and how does this relate to social being?
- what are the modalities of vision that accompany the different modes of being (ways to be) and encounter beings (forms) and how does this relate to our technological modality of being and social being?

The overarching aim is:

- to explore the existential – ontological constitution and meaning of social being, by way of a phenomenology of technology and equipmentality, and perception-vision and its intentional comportment, and their articulation, for understanding the social modalities of social be-ing, sociality and sociability instantiated in dealing and coping with the quotidian order of everyday life as it is or stands to be interpolated by the way of revealing of modern technology and its nihilism.
1.2.1 The problematic

This thesis is fundamentally concerned with social being and how it is or has or potentially can be altered and displaced by what we have set up as the technological condition and the visual condition that beset us. In technology we argue, in Heideggerian vein, that it is not merely an instrumental modality, nor only a human activity, though it’s fundamental characteristics may be so understood. We take up Heidegger’s ontological thesis and make the argument accordingly that technology is a way of revealing being, the world and nature, in that which comes to be, in its modality of making and producing things. However, this ontological feature of technology, its disclosure of being which we take up specific to social being, is disrupted and blocked off by the imperative of modern technology. This ontological imperative which hails us as an ‘enframing’ transforms being and social being into mere resources or in the form of a standing reserve, which is only at hand to serve technological ends. In other words that social being can be transformed into a modality of technological being, and thus our humanity and sociality evacuated from our horizon of intelligibility, is its sociological outcome. This is the hermeneutic dimension of our social being which is that the latter no longer comes to serve as the basis for understanding and giving meaning to our existence, as such. While technology offers both a basis to connect us to our social being in its ontology of revealing, it simultaneously in its modern equivalent exposes us to the gravest of dangers, namely, nihilism.

The same holds for vision but to different effect: in that we set up its problematic as one in which our involvement in society comes under the visual imperative of objectification
and detachment from our social being, in the way philosophy, social theory and its naturalization in commonsense thinking, as they come to understand it. What we are faced with here is generally referred to as the subject – object relation in which a distanciation and juxtaposition is seen to be extant, and thus our social being as one of involvement in- the-world is disrupted in its objectification and representationalism taking on the spatial construct of being in the world as containment in something. We do not hold that this is simply a negative state of affairs, as this would imply that we reject science and theory tout court, which we do not, but rather what we draw attention to is that sociology, as the science of society, as case in point, is caught up in a paradox.

This paradox takes the form in which sociological theory as indeed does all theory sets up a recontextualisation of its object of study within a disciplinary matrix; as such the objectification and detachment that comes with this theoretical sociability enables us to generate explanations and knowledge about the structure and properties of society, this is its virtue. However, in doing so from a theoretical stance we extricate ourselves from society and thus lose our grounding in social being as those who are embedded in-society and as such offers us a vantage point outside society; whereas what we seek in this thesis is to approach the matter of our sociality and sociabilities from the vantage point of what Heidegger calls being-in-the-world and being-amidst-things. In so doing we intend to arrive at an understanding that offers us insight into what an involvement in-society actually opens up, by way of its disclosure of social being and our existential constitution. This way of revealing social being as a sociality and a sociability that takes it point of
departure from our involvement in-the-world is what is meant by an existential – ontological understanding of social being.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Clearly in so far as we are embedded in the imperatives of modern technology and vision, in terms of their ways of revealing social being as technological being, the standing reserve, as in the former, and one of objective detachment, the latter we need a vantage point that does not reinforce the latter, and as such sociological theory paradoxically in its objectification of social being does not offer us a way out of the conditions we seek to obviate. Thus we deemed it necessary to opt for an approach that offers us insight into the mode of intelligibility of social being that imures us in our sociality and sociability, and one that simultaneously returns us to the very structures that constitute the conditions of possibility of what it means to be social and human. In short we need to anchor sociology in a concept of the social as social being, and a concept of what it means to be human, as prior to the theoretical vantage point of our disciplinary paradigm. To this end we found in Heidegger’s version of hermeneutic phenomenology the approach that grounds us existentially and socially, such that we were able to establish in his ‘fundamental ontology’ that which constitutes our social being in our human constitution.

The hermeneutic phenomenology opened up an essential grounding and two paths which we secured as ‘Archimedean levers’ to dislodge us from the imperatives of modern technology, the standing reserve and the imperative of vision, the detached observer.
Firstly, we established the existential – ontological grounding in an understanding of social being as the field of social disclosure in Heidegger’s concept of Dasein, or the existential complex involved in our way of being human. This is in effect the ontological anchorage we have brought to bear on the theoretical orientation that has become the exclusive domain of our disciplinary paradigm across its spectrum from the more overt versions of macro sociology to its micro sociological versions in Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology where despite all the apparent differences and protestations to the contrary, we have an objectification of social being as its outcome. All bearing on our theoretical understanding of society in its various modalities of sociality and sociability, but none as far as we can gather offering a concept of social being centering our existential involvement-in society, without decentering the latter in a cognitive centering of the social subject in reflexivity. In so doing, cognitive centering displaces against its intentions, particularly in some cases, as in Ethnomethodology with its focus on the quotidian, and in other cases such as Husserlian inspired Phenomenological versions of Sociology (Heap and Roth, 1973) and Sartrean versions of Existential Sociology (Ritzer,1983) where consciousness in the latter two, and cognition in the former have been centered and abstracted or reified in the individual, thus losing its focus in terms of what it means to be in-society,

Secondly, in taking up the matter of vision as perception we have shown how the latter extends Heidegger’s claim that in art there is contained as far as it holds onto its ontological dimension as a way of revealing, a vantage point with which to counter the imperative of modern technology and thus keep in sight and at hand technology’s way of
revealing, and thus its connectedness to the truth of social being and being in general. We show this in the capacity of perception and vision for releasing its objects to be perceived insofar as a hermeneutic is made manifest in the perceptual structure in terms of its sociability as intentional comportment and thus how entities are unveiled and uncovered and thus released such that they can be phenomenologically encountered, in themselves and their intelligibility made manifest. This we have come to understand is the distinct nature of vision or indeed all senses in their respective modalities and is what lays at the heart of art in so far as it is recuperated in the ontology of perception as vision and its way of revealing or connectedness to the truth of social being.

And finally in technology, by taking up the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, we are returned to its ontological dimension, that is, a way of revealing being and social being, in our existential involvement-in being-amidst-equipment. In this regard we show how our social being is constituted through the mode of sociality instantiated in our comportment with and sociabilities that emerge in relation to our circumspective absorption with equipment and its concomitant modalities of vision. We were not only in a position to surface its existential structure, but also to show how the stances we take in our mode of contemplation as theory and curiosity are derived from our primary and original engagements, as involved social beings, that is being-in-the-world. That the modes of sociality that are manifest in presence-at-hand, that is, in the mode of vision and its subject – object distanciation and their sociabilities, as modes of concern are similarly not the primordial and original engagement with the world, and how we come to know it. The latter being the claims of Western Philosophy and Social Theory; but as Heidegger
shows and what we have reined in to our ends for anchoring a concept of social being, but rather that these arise as a consequence of the breakdown in the usability of equipment, that is social being as involvement-in-equipment and its equipmental nexus. What we have shown in this breakdown is the intimate connection between the modalities of social being and modalities of vision and how they are inextricably linked in the existential – ontological constitution of being, in general, beings and equipment and social being in all its dimensions and thus the site of interpolation where modern technology and its way of revealing stands to alter and displace for its insubstantiality.

Thus, in conclusion, we have shown that in our existential – ontological constitution lies the basis not only for understanding social being and its dimensionality in sociality and sociabilities, but that equally importantly it has returned us to a modality of interpreting our social condition from the vantage point of our involvement –in-society, as a prior task and corrective and ultimately as a way of grounding our theoretical and paradigmatic recontextualisation of the social and society. We have argued that while necessary, important and legitimate as these theoretical endeavors are they remain incomplete and adrift in the paradox that we have sociology without a grounded concept of social being. It is our hope that in opening up a hermeneutic phenomenological interrogative into technology and vision we have established something akin to an ontological grounding for sociology in an existential – ontological understanding of social being.

We have shown both the theoretical efficacy of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology in his existential – ontological understanding of being by way of its demonstration in-
analysis, rather than as a function of methodological exegesis. And similarly we have shown how the conceptual anchors of social being, sociality and sociability resonate when we ground our analysis in our primary engagement with the world as is being-amidst-equipment in the mode of a non-thematic circumspective absorption in an equipmental-world. And finally, whist we accept that the validity of the conceptual anchors may not have emerged in their full scope and clarity given what is only a nascent development, and thus raise more questions than answers, we do hold, that what is of concern for sociology is to treat the complexity of the social such that, the totality of our human condition opened up by the concept of Dasein and being, may dislodge our conflation of what it means to be existentially involved with the one dimension of our theoretical modality of being (a reductionism). In making a case for anchoring social being in an existential – ontological understanding, we draw attention to its logic of complementarity and its anteriority not its exclusivity, for then we will have an insight of what it means to be in-society, but as immersed in it we will not be able to set it up as object of theoretical and scientific knowledge.

And conversely, in setting up the subject – object epistemological dualism of our visual predisposition, we do not have a sense of what it means for a hermeneutic that makes sense of our social-being-in-the-world. We, in short, have called for a turn to social being, in its dimensionality as sociality and sociability, and in all its modalities of being-in-the-world alluded to, but not taken up, and those that did not enter our purview, and offer this thesis as a terminus ad quo not as terminus ad quem.
1.3.1 Conceptual anchors and disciplinary aporias, tensions, concerns

Our point of departure is that in sociology and sociological theory society has been accepted as given and left largely unproblematised though of recent there have been moves a foot though to different ends from ourselves in Baumann’s “A Sociological Theory of Postmodernity”, cited in, Calhoun et al (2002), and Latour’s (2005) intensive interrogation in “Reassembling the Social” in his “Actor-Network Theory”. However, Heidegger has saw fit to show both the connectedness of our way of being human with that of society, and thus, as far as we are concerned, an understanding of social being and being in general. And we also argued the disconnect between social being, that is, Dasein and society risks in general and amounts to in the main an uncritical acceptance of social constructions and formations as essentialised phenomena which Heidegger contends is an inauthentic state of social being. However, this does not mean that in being critical of society’s normative structure and its constructions leads necessarily to an authentic modality of Dasein or a human way of being, but rather it lies in accepting society’s social possibilities in the understanding that these are not essentialised, that in being human existence precedes essence and what we are is as a result of that which we have taken a position on in terms of the practices we engage in and our self-interpretations thereof.

Since Heidegger has an ambivalent relation to society we have been guarded against making explicit any connection between Heidegger and a sociological project as such. Thus, not to do too much violence to his existential – ontological understanding of being
and in trying to stay as close as is theoretically possible to his project we have seen fit to take on the notion of ‘social being’. However, to enable a way of speaking with some level of specificity we broke down social being to speak to its modality of presencing a way of being as its sociality and the practices and functionalities and relations that come into being as a consequence, that is, its articulations, as sociabilities.

We accept that this may be and perhaps even is a non-reflexive way of going about the task at hand, though recognize that in engaging a social or theoretical domain some concepts have of necessity to remain implicit in their conceptual workings. With this in mind the concepts social being, sociality and sociability serve this tacit function of a background conceptual framework which paradoxically assumes prominence in their referentiality as the connectives in binding technology and vision to the problematic and its possible resolution. The rationale for leaving this conceptual core largely untouched and thus under theorized is too avoid their foreclosure in the epistemological limits, definitions set so that they may surface with added meaning and complexity as a function of their discursive work in-the-analysis-in-situ.

Thus without an extensive treatment but with some regard for how these concepts have been treated in Sociology we allude to Baumann (2003) who makes the point that sociality is preferred because it treats of society as a process. We find in Simmel, cited in, Ritzer, (1983) use of sociability a relation to forms of social interaction. While in Marx in his notion “ zoon politikon” (cited, in Ritzer, 1983) he uses sociability in the way in which we prefer to use sociality, as an integral part of human make-up though consummated in
society. By contrast we prefer to tie these concepts to Heidegger’s existential structure of being-in-the-world and thus as social being though similarly we do not essentialise it as such. Though the concept sociality and sociability differ significantly in the way we use it there are certain resemblances but in the main they do not take up these concepts sociality and sociability within the dimensionality of social being.

Aside from the ambivalence Heidegger shows for society’s normative programme and its relation to understanding being, and thus our move to take social being as our underlying concept there is the equally important matter of Heidegger’s conception of the derivative nature of the theoretical modality of being stemming, he argues, from a breakdown or permanent interruption to our primary commerce with the practical domain of the usability of equipment, to effect that which is deemed functional and necessary for social being. Considered as such it is clear that it shares a kinship with Comte who saw “social pathology” as inuring society in the institutional responses that deal with some or other social crisis, and sociological theory itself and sociology as discipline emerged in such disruptions and transformation or breakdowns of the scale and scope of the social tumult of political, economic and scientific revolutions inaugurating the modern age. .

However, Heidegger goes further by claiming and showing that theory and science are not the primary basis through which we come to know the world, each other and ourselves. But rather it is when the modality of readiness-to-hand and its equipmental nexus that is the practical domain that we are involved-in is disrupted that we shift to the modalities of being of theory and curiosity. Thus much like the Ethnomethodologists
have held it is in the quotidian order of everydayness that we come to know, though unlike Ethnomethodology which holds onto a notion of social subjects as cognitively centered and reflexive which they share with the phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger does not share in this conception. By contrast Heidegger has moved out of the orbit of Husserl’s concern for consciousness and a transcendental ego for a being-in-the-world in which intentionality is not the primary function of a cognitively centered, consciously aware individual (Dreyfus, 1991; Lima, 2003). Heidegger takes the view that our primary engagement is with equipment, which is located in the sociability of non-thematic circumspective absorption in-the-world. Furthermore, in which social being and equipment disappear into the equipmental nexus, and our sociality as readiness-to-hand and our social be-ing as existential involvement in-the-world. In sum Husserl and Heidegger are distinguished by the former’s cognitive centering for the latter’s existential centering. Thus it is in forging a discursive space to talk of ‘social being’ as being-in-society that we have turned to Heidegger and taken one step backwards from sociological theorizing.

More than this it is Heidegger’s treatment of the primary involvement in-the-world and its quotidian order of everydayness that has motivated us to seek a way of grounding sociology quite paradoxically in social being where it does not seem to dwell. Sociology as science and sociological theory as paradigmatic have increasingly distanced us from the social so much so that we barely recognize ourselves as the preeminent and consummately social of beings in the disciplinary matrix. Thus, it is in the spirit of a turn to social being and that which gives us humans our Dasein-like character that we have
sought to anchor an interpretation of sociality in its modalities of sociability, the practices and functionalities that inure us in our social milieus. One that we hope is commensurate with the existential structure of care and concern for our way of being human and is couched in an ontological understanding of technology and vision such that we arrive at the disclosure of being in general and social being in particular.

1.3.2 Ontology of Social Being: social being as hermeneutic

Having offered a justification for not setting up definitional limits for the concepts social being, sociality and sociability we set out the general Heideggerian grounding for our understanding of social being and its equivalence with being. Though, we do argue that in opting for social being and given its centrality we give added specificity to the provenance of his concept of being. However, in the same sensibility as before we do not seek discursive foreclosure, but we do intend in what follows to shore up the ontological basis of our conception of social being in Heidegger.

What we note as our terminus ad quo is that Heidegger distils from our sociality of being the existential structure which he deems originary, in that it sets the very ontological conditions of possibility of our understanding of being and social being. The distinguishing feature he isolates is that we do not choose the social world in which we find ourselves, but rather that we are so to speak thrown into the social and cultural worlds we find ourselves in without choice and without ‘rhyme or reason’. We thus find ourselves in-the-world in which we need to carve out an existence and make it our own,
over the entire duration of our lives, which he holds is in turn defined by how we relate to
this temporality, which is the finitude of human existence. This notion of being thrust into
the world is what Heidegger refers to as our “throwness” and is an important aspect of
our human condition, which in a certain sense forces us to take some kind of stand on this
scenario, and thus where we come to comport our own existence to what is socially
proffered. Conjointly this ‘throwness’ and the stance we have to take on our existence
and our self-interpretations of this, and its unfinished nature is what Heidegger calls
Dasein to indicate its objective nature, that it is not privative and subjective, even though
it is individuated in being-towards-self it is still publicly accessible.

This existential condition of being thrown into the world is revealed to be constitutive of
the basic existential structure, which defines the very condition of possibility of our social
being and predisposes us to an understanding of being, in general and thus to a social
comportment that is the sociability manifest in how we deal with being-amidst-things,
and how these relations bear on our sociality. But in order to understand the being of
beings Heidegger (1962) argues that this can only be realized through that being for
which its existence is an issue or concern to itself, and for which due care needs to be
exercised. What he is saying here and explored in the thesis under the rubric of social
being is that this understanding of what it means to exist in its most general sense, is an
endowment of the human condition or Dasein, and as such represents the sine qua non for
understanding the being of all beings and being in general.
Though most importantly what makes it social is that this understanding of being is not an a priori, but is acquired in the process of socialization and the inculcation of a shared normative order. In this sense Dasein or our human way of being is acquired early in our life-cycle and constitutes the fundamental condition for the understanding of being, in general, and as such represents an ontological threshold. And since this capacity for understanding being in general arises in the very condition of social existence, which is shared human (co)existence in particular leads us to his existential – ontological understanding of being, and our grounding of social being.

In considering the nature of social being from the vantage point of the ‘social subject’ Heidegger comes to make his existential determinations which are based on his own version of phenomenology, which by contrast to Husserl does not set itself up primarily as a self- referential transcendental subject with its consciousness, but instead refuses this cognitive centering and opts instead for setting the horizon of intelligibility of being as distilled through the process of socialization or imbibing what he call the common-sense views of “Das Man” that is everyone and anyone, or as we in common refrain would say that one has to do or say what is expected of one, if one wants to be one of them. It is in this sense of the socialized self as constituting the basis for an understanding and agreement of shared practices (a normative order) and thus an understanding of being in general and the being of beings that we anchor the concept social being and its sociality and thus have the basis of a horizon of intelligibility or social hermeneutic.
Though, like Heidegger we accept that this common-sense view is not necessarily deterministic, nor an expression of authentic social being, as that which defines a being-towards-self, even though society is its only source. What serves as the existentialist basis for separating an authentic self from an inauthentic or undifferentiated self is that the latter two accepts our way of being human in some or other essentialist terms unlike our authentic selves which Heidegger holds accepts Dasein in its constitution as unsettled, foundationless and even homeless, the latter a relational outcome (Thaver, 2006) Where we lose our authenticity is that we tend in the main to throw ourselves into the sociabiliies of various social roles in order to flee from this unsettling truth about what it means to be human or Dasein, and that is that we become whatever we are at whatever moment based on whatever our stances are at that point and the self-interpretations we have, but that these are neither fixed nor destined. It is this unsettling and unsettled condition of our social being that we flee from, and in so doing fall into what society has to offer insofar as it is believed that the socialities and sociabilities instantiated could not have been anything else but what it has come to be. Thus we have a spurious ontology which is fixed and essentialised rather than a genuine ontology which is open and multivariate.

By contrast the concept of social being we work with is that which accepts the foundationless-ness and homelessness of our way of being human, and thus it sees in being-in-the-world, being-with-others and being-amidst-things a multiplicity of possibilities but no essentialities that may divide us from each other, and that as those whose sociality is one of being-the-world-with-others-amidst-things our sociality is thus
consummated in that referential whole or social being as gestalt. The logic is simple, in our authentic selves our existential structures are such that in our temporal natures we show concern and care for being-in-the-world, being-amidst-things, being-with-others and being-towards-self, and because we are existentially unsettled, foundationless and homeless we are not fixed to a nation, religion, clan or anything else for that matter except to being, in general, and social being in particular, with its commensurate sociality and sociabilities. Thus our originary transcendence as being-in-the-world grounds our social being and sociality and our ontic transcendence or intentional comportment grounds our sociabilities. Taken together we have an existential – ontological grounding of what it means to be a social being.

This is the ontological condition of social being that informs our concept and is the basis of our social hermeneutic and how we come to interpret and give meaning to being-in-the-world and being-amidst-things. It is of such a nature that in our interrogatives of social being in relation to technology and vision we were able to uncover different ways of revealing being and how this positions us in the contemporary age in contradistinction to the ‘enframing’, which is the way of revealing of modern technology.

And moreover, what the concept of social being grounded in an existential – ontological understanding disclosed was that our sociality and much of our sociabilities that define us stand to disappear into the standing reserve, to become mere resources and no more. As such we would be bereft of the sociality of our being, our humanity; we would have been substituted by a technological being, if we are not already in its destining. Heidegger
calls this our gravest danger of all, and in a word it is referred to as, nihilism. This is the conceptual efficacy of ‘social being’ in the way it is used and developed in this doctoral thesis.

1.4 Significance

The substantive significance of this thesis is that we have shown that in our existential – ontological constitution lies the basis not only for understanding social being and its dimensionality in sociality and sociabilities, but that equally importantly it has returned us to a modality of interpreting our social condition from the vantage point of our involvement –in-society as a prior task and corrective, and ultimately as a way of grounding our theoretical and paradigmatic recontextualisation of the social and society.

The theoretical significance of this thesis is that while our endeavors in sociology (science of society) and sociological theory are fundamentally necessary, important and legitimate they remain incomplete and adrift in a paradox; in this sense only, that we have sociology without a grounded concept of social being. It is our hope that in opening up a hermeneutic phenomenological interrogative into technology and perception-vision we have established something akin to grounding for sociology in an existential – ontological understanding of social being.

1.5 Chapter Organization and Division

The chapters follow a logical sequence in relation to setting up it problematic and the basis upon which it is interrogated culminating in the hermeneutic upon which a
resolution is offered. It is as such a theoretical work with a hermeneutic framework in an existential – ontological understanding of social being as its theoretical grounding.

Chapter one sets out the history of the topic starting as it did with a discourse analysis of television in South Africa in terms of its media content and its bearing on constituting national and continental (African) imaginations. This introduction serves as background and is followed up with what motivated the thesis and proceeds to delineate the theoretical problematic, focus, aims, theoretical framework, conceptual anchors, significance and its overall structure and organization.

Chapter two, titled “Philosophy of Technology: the technological condition”, spells out the first leg of the problematic and simultaneously outlines some of the disciplinary problems associated with taking up technology as object of enquiry and its epistemological implication in philosophy, as well as its relative neglect and research bias in sociology. In as much as it sketches the problematic it takes up what has been described as the ‘technological condition’ and tracks it through the discourse of philosophy and social theory. The sub-themes taken up here were not intended to be exhaustive and have been selected for their contribution to understanding the technological condition. In this regard we traced it through to ancient Greek philosophy through Plato and Aristotle and took it into the Enlightenment period where we considered both its optimistic and pessimistic outlooks. This was followed by some noteworthy views on technology which framed the problematic in deterministic terms and considered Marx, Ellul, Heilbroner and closed with Borgmann’s thesis on how it
related to contemporary life. And finally we set the terms of the technological condition in terms of Heidegger’s understanding thereof as a way of setting up a segue way into his hermeneutic phenomenology of technology and its import for his existential – ontological understanding of being.

Chapter three titled, “Heidegger’s philosophy of technology: ‘essence’ of techne and modern technology”, considers Heidegger’s philosophy of technology as he develops it in his “Question Concerning Technology”. The discussion in this chapter follows his claims as to the essence of techne, which is technology in its pre-modern modality and tracks into his hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of instrumentalism and causality. In doing so we establish the ontological dimension of technology which we take up in our existential ontological understanding of social being in relation to equipmentality as counterpoise in chapter seven We steer clear of making any references to the latter in chapter three so as to maintain a clear focus on Heidegger’s philosophy of technology. This we follow up in tracking into Heidegger’s analysis of modern technology and thus establish how he understands the nihilistic danger that it poses. We frame our discussion for its bearing on our conceptual anchors and thus refer to its implications and ramifications for social being, sociality and sociabilities. We close this chapter by considering the phenomena that might serve as our saving grace and thus serve as counterpoise, or what we have also identified as the Archimedean levers that will enable us to dislodge ourselves from the danger posed by the enframing of modern technology. Firstly, in technology as techne, that is, as a way of revealing social being; and in
equipmentality as a way of revealing sociality. Secondly, in art, though not in itself, but rather in relation to its underlying grounding in perception and vision, as ‘releasement’ or simply the freeing up of that which is to be perceived.

Chapter four, titled “Philosophy and Vision: the visual condition as subject – object distanciation”, sets up the second leg of our problematic and follows the structure of chapter two on the technological condition. Thus we similarly spell out the problematic and simultaneously outline some of the disciplinary problems associated with taking up vision as object of enquiry and its epistemological implications in philosophy. In as much as we sketch the problematic of vision, we set it up as a visual condition in as much as it involves a subject – object distanciation and its import for the dimensionality of our social being. Though, here too, we consider its modality in theory and science as counterpoise to the essence of modern technology, in chapter seven. The discursive strategy, as in chapter two, though in this instance related to the visual condition tracks it’s problematic through to philosophy and epistemology, and its expression in ancient Greek thinking. Our approach in this chapter is largely informed by Levin’s Heideggerian understanding of vision where we follow his line of thinking; though bring it to bear on our primary concern for social being and its mutual determinations. We close our discussion on the implications of vision for our human way of being, which Heidegger conceptualizes as Dasein, to separate his concerns from any anthropocentric overtones or any other social science disciplinary construct, which in our case happens to be sociology. We remain mindful of his project of an existential ontological understanding of being and in this spirit have not attempted to sociologise his thinking, though we have
found in his hermeneutic approach, such an emphasis on its social dimension, that we have directed his concept of being in our general disciplinary direction as ontological grounding of social being. This opened up as we lead into the next chapter Heidegger’s existential – ontological understanding of our social being as Dasein. Though for Heidegger, we note that Dasein is not only an ontological analysis of the existential structures constituting what it means to be human, but a “fundamental ontology” for the understanding of what it means for anything to be, that is, ‘Being’, in general.

Chapter five titled “Existential – Ontological understanding of social being: Dasein as horizon of intelligibility of be-ing” sets the basic terms in which our conception of social being is anchored. The issue of how we encounter and constitute the world and thus Dasein (human existence as be-ing) is spelt out and the ontological conditionality of our way of existing as human is established as the social horizon of intelligibility of being, in general. Moreover, we anchor the concept of social being in the existential complex of Dasein and its different modalities which, given its social embedding tends to speak to our conceptual anchors of social being, sociality and sociability, so much so, that to assert it at every turn seemed more of an exercise in tautology, than explication. We draw the relationship between Dasein and vision fairly tightly though also bring closer the question of technology, equipment, things and objects. The themes we take inter alia deal with modalities of vision and their relation to social being, fundamental ontology, our mode of dwelling and its sociality and sociabilities and the mode of gathering of things and its ontological dimension, that is, as way of revealing being and the social. We firm the existential – ontological grounding of social being in Heidegger’s concept Dasein as a
way to establish the clearing for taking up in the ensuing two chapters the matter of what holds as potential counterpoise to modern technology’s essence, viz., the intentional comportment of perception, and equipment and how this relates to the interpolation of social being.

Chapter six, is titled “Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Perception: perceptual intentional comportment as counterpoise”, we contextualize Heidegger’s phenomenology in relation to perception by showing that he is firstly, embedded in a hermeneutic which is grounded in the social as its ‘first surface of emergence’ (Foucault, 1971). And secondly that his understanding of intentionality does not center a cognitive subject, but rather grounds it in the intentional comportment that arises in the intersection of perception and Dasein.

What we develop in this chapter is the hermeneutic, as horizon of intelligibility of social being, at work in unveiling be-ing and a phenomenology that simultaneously describes the essence of perceivedness, as an uncovering such that entities may be released to be encountered in themselves. This intentional comportment is in turn linked with Dasein’s constitution such that an existential – ontological understanding emerges of Dasein as a field of disclosure or clearing, in which entities are perceived in themselves. It is this capacity of the intentional comportment for releasing entities to be perceived in themselves that we identify the potential for counterpoise, and thus make the claim that in as much as this faculty is in place modern technology’s reduction of everything into resources, or the standing army, can be counteracted, in so far as objects, things and equipment will still be perceived as such rather than the former. Thus, in setting out the
perceptual structure and its essence in this chapter we offer up the first of two counterpoises, which we have identified as such, and its relation to our social being and its redeeming sociability in our intentional comportment and its existential – ontological grounding in social being.

Chapter seven, is titled “Being-amidst-things: equipmentality as counterpoise”, we bring the thesis to a close and take up Heidegger’s analysis of equipment and its different modalities of being. We bring home our thesis that in equipment and its modality of being of ‘readiness-to-hand’, is encompassed our social be-ing in its dimensionality of sociality and sociability with an existential ontological grounding that suggests itself as our strongest counterpoise to the modality of revealing of modern technology, which threatens us with nihilism. In fact in equipment though we nuance the argument to consider its limitations as well, we are persuaded by its concentration of sociality in its equipmental nexus and equipmental whole such that our sociabilities, that is, our comportment with being-amidst-things coalesces, and thus grounds our social being. In this regard we conclude that equipmentality is on balance indeed an Archimedean lever, which we can use to dislodge the technological monolith, and thus release social being and our humanity from its nihilistic fate, if indeed, history is to prove Heidegger correct.

In addition to equipment as counterpoise in terms of its way of revealing of sociality we also take up the implications of theoretical thinking and science, but only if existentially and hermeneutically anchored in-society, for their potential to also serve as counterpoise in so far as these are able to constitute objects in their fullness and substantial being, and
thus counteract their reduction in being treated as resources or as ‘standing reserve’. And finally, in the modality of curiosity we show that when the equipmental mode of being is not recontextualised as in theory, but releases Dasein to a state of affairs where it abandons itself to the world in idle talk and idle seeing, then we are offered up to modern technology’s way of revealing as standing reserve and we become no more than resources to used and disposed in the pursuit of novelty for novelty sake. However, the strong argument holds out the hope that from within technology in its modality as in equipmentality we have a way of revealing that is our existential ontological understanding of social being which would ultimately counteract modern technology’s nihilistic interpolation of social being.

Chapter eight is our conclusion where we draw our argument to a close and offer some general comments on what we have established by way of our interrogatives of technology and perception-vision by way of their potential as counterpoise in the interpolation of being by modern technology such that our social being and with it our humanity stands in grave danger of being substituted by a technological modality of being. The state of affairs of this scenario is that we are left bereft of our humanity and social being, but as we have argued in relation to our perceptual intentional comportment, and equipmentality that this is not necessarily a fait accompli.

Moreover, in considering the fate of our humanity and in taking up Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, we have been alerted as to the existential displacement in
our modalities of theorizing and that at bottom we have taken for granted an understanding of social being, sociality and sociabilities. That in the main in sociology we have made reference to these dimension of sociality by proxy in our discourse on macro-sociology in structure, processes, relations and association, and in the form of micro-sociology we have engaged our sociabilities by proxy in social action and rule governed behavior in conversational rules, cognition and reflexivities, dramaturgies and all manner of inter-subjectivities and the like. To be sure these have all enlightened us theoretically in one way or another, though we claim at the expense of paradoxically distancing us from our existential – ontological grounding in social being.
Chapter Two

Philosophy of Technology: the technological condition

The rationale of this thesis as stated is that we seek to arrive at a grounding and understanding of what it means to be human, that is, a social being, in the light of our capacity of sociality and its translation into the various sociabilities which we come to have in coping with our quotidian lives. This latter concern is what is contained without saying too much about it at this point in the existential – ontological understanding of social being. What is of concern in this chapter is the terminus ad quo if the latter understanding is our terminus ad quem. To this end we set up in this chapter by way of our social problematic what has come to known in general as the “technological condition” (Scharff et al, 2003) that we find ourselves amidst of and that we bemoan as we encounter ourselves so transformed, each other so distanced, the world so transformed and everything rendered equivalent as “resources” (Dreyfus, 1991), a “standing reserve” as Heidegger (1977) conceives of it.

It is the sense of the transformations alluded to, in the preceding, which we have conceived of as the aporia of speaking to the changes that we are experiencing, since, as it stands, we have no philosophical or theoretical grounding in a concept of our social being in sociology that we may be able to make meaningful claims as to the nature and extent of perceived changes in our human –social condition. We speak by proxy of such changes through our references to and objects of study necessary as they are in social relations, associations, structures, institutions, processes and the like but what of our
social being, our sociality as existential – ontological capacity. It is towards the latter by way of an initial clearing firstly of the conceptual baggage suffusing our understanding of technology that we attend to immediately as part of the theoretical corrective of redressing the silence about social being and its modality of sociality and sociability that we are directly and indirectly concerned with in this thesis, in general and this chapter, in particular.

2.1 Philosophy of Technology:’ technology as philosophical problem’

In order to arrive at an existential – ontological understanding of social being we need to clear the ground so that the philosophy of technology that we have selected, viz. Heidegger’s can emerge with some clarity. To this end we sketch a range of philosophers and theorists who have engaged and contributed variously, though not always explicitly, to a philosophy of technology as distinct sub-discipline, in general; and in particular for their contributions towards filling out the arguments that make up our encounter in the contemporary age of what has been described as a ‘technological condition’.

The objective of this thesis is to provide by way of an analysis of the philosophy of technology an understanding of the conditions of possibility and impossibility portentous of our technological and social admixtures that tend to the former and the latter to varying degrees. In this regard the theoretical tasks that flow from the way the thesis has set up its problematic requires an exegesis of Heidegger’s (1977), also cited in Scharff and Dusek (2003), essay on the “Question concerning Technology”. The significance of
Heidegger’s text cited for this thesis rests simply in the fact that he is similarly concerned with what technology is rather than what it does and how we shape it.

Our starting point in this thesis is that the existence of technology is first and foremost not to be found in the technological object and thus should not be conflated as such. What should emerge is that as far as the thesis is concerned is that the dimensionality of technology and its philosophical discourse are fundamental to any understanding of its sociology as ‘technological condition’. Thus, any analysis that tends to offer up technology as background, that is, as canvas similarly renders mute the mutually transformative relationship it shares with the social. One ends up either with an exaggerated sense of human agency by way of sociologisms, or anthropologisms, or a view of technology as autonomous with human beings merely ‘technobots’. Neither of which is sufficient to the task of providing insight into what Heidegger contends is the real point of understanding technology and that is, the relationship between technology and society.

With respect to the latter we will see how Heidegger (1977) espouses an ontological thesis with respect to the essence of technology. For him technology is an ontological modality of being in so far as it ‘discloses’ the nature of the world and its structure as worldliness when one engages in the usability of equipment and its equipmental nexus. In other words the way of knowing the world is not epistemological that is there is no ‘royal road’ to knowledge of the world, but rather it is in the domain of practices and social
practices in particular that the conditions of possibility of disclosing the nature of the social as world, being and beings or things are surfaced..

However, before proceeding to Heidegger’s philosophy of technology we need to constitute the general technological problematic. To this end we will open up discussion on Scharff and Dusek’s (2003) notion of the “technological condition” as it is taken up in the emergent sub-discipline of “Philosophy of technology” as a means to contextualize Heidegger’s position and our own point of departure which takes up the latter in the direction of social being and its grounding in being-in-the-world which we in turn take up as a foundational sociality though we hasten to add that neither its content nor its practices or sociabilities are of a universalistic construct. Only that in order to be social or sociable presupposes a capacity and this is its homologous nature though how it is filled out is relative to the social formation and its normative order.

2.1.1 Disciplinary limitations

The philosophy of technology as a dedicated field of specialization has only of late come to the foreground in philosophical discourse. As such, this seeming recalcitrant emergence of a philosophy of technology strikes one intuitively as quite paradoxical given the centrality that technology occupies in contemporary social life. What this signals with respect to the emergence of philosophy of technology is that it occupies, in so far as it does, a contentious place in philosophy. From Mitcham and MacKay’s (1983) introduction to an anthology of essays somewhat guardedly titled “Philosophy and Technology” perhaps in reference to the emergent nature of a ‘philosophy of technology’
one gets a sense of their position on the disciplinary limitations philosophy imposes on understanding technology. Their argument (Mitcham & Mackay, 1983: 30) is that

… the philosophical problems of technology make it necessary to relate epistemology, anthropology and sociology in ways not usually found in philosophy. There is more than just a collection of philosophical problems centering on technology: there is a need for a comprehensive philosophy of technology.

The philosophical problems they allude to specifically relate to their contention that an adequate definition of technology is conditional upon three approaches which respectively, as stated above are epistemological, anthropological and sociological. (Ibid, 1983).

First, technology has been analyzed as an epistemological problem.

Second, technology has been considered in relation to the nature of man.

Third, Technology has been taken to be the defining characteristic of thought and action in modern society.

The significance of what appears as the disciplinary limitations associated with philosophy holds similarly for the disciplinary concerns of sociology. In this regard the theoretical challenge that is taken up is to ground one’s thinking on technology in a philosophical understanding of technology which is mindful of its problematic status and
most importantly, its complexity as reality sui generis. By contrast the sociology of technology in its incipient stages is defined by the ‘social constructivist approach’ which has faced some stringent criticism from the likes of Langdon Winner (2003) for what he calls its anti-realism. Though Elam’s (2003) response sees in Winner a rabid anti-constructivism which he claims overlooks the liberal position of deliberately avoiding making any value judgments as to the veracity of scientific claims in relation to technology. For our own purposes it would appear as if the social construction of technology approach is both epistemologically vague in its tendency to over-relativise both the processes science and technology.

Pinch and Bijker (2003) argue for an integration of sociology of science and sociology of technology in the development of the social construction of technology rather than for their separation and as such could potentially contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the techno-science complex. However, its resistance to a realist epistemology of science and technology weakens its approach which coupled with a fixation on the artifact amounts to navel gazing at sociabilities without being anchored in a sociality and social being. We are more inclined to a Heideggerian approach which does not seek the essence of technology in the artifact, but in its relation to being and society. By contrast the social construction of technology considers the wider social milieu but only insofar as it articulates with the artifact in terms of how it is shaped and what meanings are attributed to it. Useful in itself but it falls well short of informing an understanding of social being trained as it is the opposite direction of the social process embedded in the technological artifact, its ontology is directed away from social being.
and thus is not about to say much about our sociality and our sociability except by way of what goes into the artifact.

In relation to a Heideggerian sensibility what it offers might be a way to think about the technological process as scientific and social gathering made manifest in the outcome of the technological artifact but its isomorphic direction though inclined to a multiplicity of sources only accounts for the success or failure of the technological thing. The question we are asking is how technology resonates with being-in-world such that an account of social being with its sociability and sociabilities may emerge rather than remain at the surface of the ‘fate and fortunes’ of a technological artifact the domain it seems of sociology of technology in the delimited modality of constructivism.

Thus, in as much as it is held that technology encompasses more than can be contained in strict disciplinary boundaries it calls for one to expand one’s horizon of intelligibility. To this end we enjoin Mitcham and Mackey’s (1983) attempts to take in a broader analytical sweep of technology to effect a philosophical orientation that extends beyond epistemology to anthropological and sociological approaches. The theoretical task which this thesis sets itself is similarly placed though the disciplinary terminus ad quem is to contribute to sociology an existential – ontological understanding of social being that is anchored conceptually in a philosophical understanding of technology. That this sociological orientation is grounded in Heidegger’s (1977) “Question concerning Technology” and his “Being and Time” (1962, 1996) will become apparent as we proceed to develop an understanding of technology that is amenable to an understanding
of social being and its modalities. However, before we address Heidegger proper some
ground needs to be cleared with respect to the epistemological status of technology.
Through this it is expected that the ensuing analysis of Heidegger’s philosophy of
technology (2003) would have a point of reference against which the interpretation
offered in this thesis may be assessed. In other words that one is not taking too much
liberty and interpretive license, so to speak.

The matter of technology has thrown up, and continues to, all manner of problems across
the empirical – theoretical divide. Here we need only refer to the voluminous scholarship
on environmental degradation and exhaustion of natural resources to denote problems of
a substantive nature. Though one is mindful of these pressing empirical problems it is not
the primary concern of this chapter or the thesis and we merely point to some of the
scholarship dealing the relation between the environment, ecology and technology
(White, 1972; Simon, 1972; Merchant, 2003; Naess, 2003; Devall, 2003). What we are
particularly concerned with are second-order questions about what technology is, what is
its relation to epistemology, what is its relation to being and how do we live in and with
technology. And in this regard, that is, as philosophical problem technology’s standing is
somewhat ambivalent as McDermott (2003) captures with some sting in holding that
“technology: [is] the opiate of the intellectuals”.

The debate, then, as to the epistemological status of technology cast broadly asks whether
it is a distinct form of knowledge, or whether it is a debased form subsumed under
applied science or practical skills. In so far as it is relevant, it is a matter of
epistemological significance, in that its very existence as a field of knowledge is at stake either as philosophy of technology or as philosophy of science. Within this epistemological debate, Mitcham and Mackey (1972) pinpoint the different points of view of Feibleman (1983) and Skolimowski (1983) who argue that technology does have an epistemic claim to make, as philosophy of technology, while Bunge (1983) takes the view that it is applied science, and as such falls within the purview of a philosophy of science.

Moreover, Mitcham and Mackey (1983) make the point that Heidegger contends that technology is neither applied science, nor an instrumentality predicated on effectiveness, nor for that matter a modus operandi as such. Instead they argue that Heidegger posits in its stead, as far as the interpretations of Jonas (1983) and Hood (1983) are concerned, the view that technology discloses the world and as such can initially be taken within epistemology since knowledge is produced as object of disclosure. Even though this disclosure takes place at the level of social practices and not a theoretical engagement.

Heidegger (1962, 1996) takes the view that technology engages us ontologically since it discloses the conditions of possibility of the world and being. And since this disclosure is a function of an engagement in the world that is through social practices it is taken to be an “interactive epistemology” (Mitcham and Mackey, 1972). Though, Heidegger has no truck with technology as of the order of epistemology: for him the disclosure reveals the very condition of possibility of existence, that is, it is ontological with technological objects merely ontical in structure, in that they refer to entities of one kind or another.
Thus, as far as can be gleaned, what is at stake are not machines running amok even though this remote possibility does exist, but something much more fundamental, which is that our sense of the world, the meanings we make are mediated by a technological sensibility, a framework, perhaps even a “device paradigm” (Borgmann, 1984).

In addressing technology as a philosophical problem it is necessary to draw a distinction between what counts as such a problem and what lies outside its ambit. What attention is drawn to may be distinguished from the kinds of problems that ensue from social, economic and political concerns arising out of technological activity. Even though as Mitcham and Mackey (1983) point out philosophical questions underlie said substantive concerns in as much as they are based in a true understanding of technology. But strictly speaking these latter concerns are not of a philosophical order since the latter focuses on what are referred to as “second-order questions”. They (Ibid’ 1983) argue that the fundamental distinction between technological and philosophical problems hinge on the difference between empirical information (the former) and reason and understanding (the latter).

2.1.2 Technology and epistemology

The problem that arises with respect to the epistemological concerns raised by technology involves its status as a form of knowledge. In this regard there is no consensus on what the epistemological status of technology should be with respect to whether it constitutes a distinct form of knowledge, and if so, what might that be. On the one hand, the argument
is made by Jarvie (1983) that technology does enjoy an epistemological status in so far as it is a form of practical knowledge, which when expanded to include an anthropological dimension absorbs all forms of knowledge in its fold. This holds from the vantage point of an anthropological approach, he argues, since all knowledge ultimately is about humankind coming to terms with the world. Though, in this regard Mitcham and Mackay (1983) note that what is yet to obtain is an epistemological definition of technological/practical knowledge. Nevertheless, what is evident is that at the level of a philosophical approach technology’s epistemological status is undecided, though, at an anthropological level of analysis it takes on a generalized form as practical knowledge, as does all forms of knowledge. A reduction ad absurdum!

On the other hand the conventional argument is made that since technology does not pursue the truth as such, but is directed at effectiveness, it does not warrant an epistemological status within philosophy. Jarvie (1972), however, is not content with the epistemic evacuation of technology and puts forward instead the view that technology does embrace the truth in so far as it speaks to the truth of its effectiveness in the world. To be sure technology in its epistemic wake stops well short of providing explanations and as such is not to be conflated with scientific knowledge. But neither, argues Jarvie (1983) can technology be subsumed under applied science and as such fall within the rubric of a philosophy of science since it involves additionally the level of practice in and of itself. In effect he is making an argument for a distinct modality in a philosophy of technology as differentiated from a philosophy of science. It is this move towards consolidating a study of technology sui generis that is being singled out as a way to enter
the philosophical discourse and in so doing enable one to put a perspective on Heidegger (1977, 1962) when we engage him later.

The epistemological questions at hand then are what form does knowledge take in the realm of technology, and how does it relate to the structure of knowledge. In addressing the former question, Jarvie (1972: 54-61) draws on Ryle’s view of the distinction between “knowing that” and “knowing how”, to make an argument for the epistemological status of technology. What emerges is that whereas the philosophical convention is one of the epistemological privileging of the theoretical modality of knowledge entailed in “knowing that” its antithesis, that is, practical knowledge and with it technology is discounted as a form of knowledge. Jarvie (1983) challenges this conventional understanding of technology as bereft of knowledge by arguing that “knowing how” is also a form of knowledge. That as a form of knowledge, technology too is shaped by an epistemological imperative, that is, it is oriented to the truth, but only in so far as it relates to effectiveness rather than disclosure of the world.

In other words technology does not offer explanations of the nature and facts of the world that is the truth of the world but rather in Jarvie’s (1983) estimation it does entail knowledge or the truth of what works in the world. What makes the modality of knowledge associated with technology distinct for Jarvie (1983) is that whereas scientific knowledge is of a general i.e. theoretical form the former is environmentally-specific. Thus, what we have is an epistemic distinction between local and universal forms of knowledge which is analogous to the nomothetic and ideographic divide. Jarvie (1983)
makes us aware that beyond the divide between theoretical and practical knowledge is their mutual inclusiveness. All told with differences aside the net effect of Jarvie’s (1983) analysis is that technology does entail a particular form of knowledge, and at worst since “knowing that” and “knowing how” are interrelated it ipso facto is a part of the structure of knowledge.

Whilst one may be sympathetic to the project of providing an epistemological grounding of technology one should similarly be aware that there may be no ‘royal road’ to the truth; whether it is disclosure of nature and the social, or disclosure of effectiveness. The point is that technology’s truth is not of the order of an epistemology, but rather an ontology in as much as it discloses something in the order of the nature of our being and the world. In other words that in engaging the world through social practices as mediated by technology or things, the nature of the world is disclosed.

Thus, it is not an epistemological relation that informs the essence of technology with respect to its capacity to disclose the nature and structure of the world, being and the social. This is the crux of Heidegger’s (2003) ontological approach to the essence of technology; viz. that it serves to disclose the structure of the world and the nature of being. However, of epistemological note he argues that it is only when we engage the world through social practices involving relations with technology that one encounters the truths of nature, sociality and being, rather than exclusively through its form as knowledge. In other words we are thrust into a world amidst things technological and it is precisely this pervasive quality particularly in the 21st century to varying degrees across
the globe that informs the nature of the sensibility of our social being. It is this ‘technological condition’ of being amidst things technological that constitutes the real danger: one which stands to imperil our relationship to ourselves and the world. In short in Heideggerean vein the threat is to our very social being and humanity. But what is at stake here that has been isolated for theoretical scrutiny is what this nature and structure of social being is that is being threatened and how does it sit in our sociological state described as ‘technological condition’. The theoretical task here as identified is in uncovering the very essence of technology in general and modern technology in particular and thus the first step is a hermeneutic phenomenology. Put differently we need to uncover our understanding or interpretation of technology that is in place albeit it a vague and dim realization and related to this we need to let technology emerge in its reality sui generis.

The theoretical task at hand in a nutshell is then: how do we approach the question as to what it is that might have been altered, modified and transformed in the modalities of social existence in a technological milieu. And with this in mind what kind of theoretical sensibility is able to yield an understanding that simultaneously addresses its discursive foreclosure in Sociology, in general, and sociological theory, in particular. With respect to the first question the short answer is through a concept of social being though developed as an ‘existential – ontological’ understanding of social being. About which much more later, however, with respect to the matter as to how one is to anchor such an understanding it is marked by a Heideggerean framework which combines his particular
take of a combination of hermeneutics and phenomenology as applied firstly to technology and secondly to vision.

2.2 The technological condition

To varying degrees the aforementioned has constituted and addressed a given state of technological affairs confronting society. In referring to the latter state of affairs a “technological condition” is being signaled one that amounts to a conditioning of our sociality and sociabilities in short our social being. Although the sociological theme is particular to this thesis, Scharff and Dusek’s (2003) philosophy of technology takes up the theme of the “technological condition” to effect the latter and not the former. However, in the wake of pursuing a philosophy of technology they take up amongst others, themes which include a historical account of different conceptions of technology, which for our purposes is marshaled to elaborate the social philosophical import of the notion of a “technological condition”.

2.2.1 Technological condition and Ancient Greek Doctrine

Reaching far back to the ancient Greek doctrine of Plato and Aristotle, Scharff and Dusek (2003: 5) point out that despite their differences they shared:

“hierarchical conceptions of knowledge that make philosophical or scientific understanding of the universal and essential superior.”
From the above what emerges is that technology which is neither philosophical nor scientific as such does not inhabit in said Greek thinking the universe of superior knowledge, but is instead delimited to the province of practical techniques. In our contemporary understanding of modern technology the relationship between science and technology is not as clear-cut as it seems in ancient Greece but fraught with contestation as already alluded and about which more when we take up the matter of technology and epistemology. However, the import of this hierarchy points to the epistemic shape in as much as it reflects on a ‘technological condition’. Thus, one might say that in so far as technology is a form of practical knowledge its status was of a lower and subordinate order. This much is evident in the relative neglect and late arrival of technology to philosophy and for that matter sociology. However, as to how the ancient Greeks viewed the relationship between technology and society Scharff and Dusek (2003: 5) put it thus:

…ancient Greeks did not think of technological change and economic production in the modern terms of efficiency and progress. Practical techniques were judged as analogous to and as facilitating for our own purposes the cosmic and natural processes about which the human spirit above all seeks knowledge and with which we are in any case involved.

What is noteworthy above is that the idea of technological change or how the relationship between technology and society is viewed in ancient Greek doctrine has an ontological dimension to it, such that one is able to differentiate between the latter and a modern
Western modality. The distinction between the aforementioned is reducible to an ontological thesis on the one hand, and an instrumental one on the other hand. Considered in the light of a ‘technological condition’ what emerges is the diminution of the concept of technology such that its ontological dimension is effaced in the face of its re-specification in the modern context of rationalization (Weber) as means, i.e., instrumentalism. Paradoxically, Western thought seized upon the hierarchical conception of knowledge of ancient Greek doctrine, though abandoning the ontological dimension of their view of technology, and thus loses out on its ontological depth.

With respect to tracking into Heidegger’s ontology of modern technology this excursus is intended to map out the discursive force of a modality of being, which continues to veil our sociality with the technological condition, and its predisposition towards instrumentality. What this chapter and the ensuing one on technology seek to offer up is a hermeneutic phenomenology of technology without reference to social actors and their predilections, but rather the conditions of possibility for those technological predilections and how they are related to a particular constitution of social being.

In other words, what we argue is that what makes it even possible to think of philosophy and sociology of technology, in general, for that very matter, is the very idea of its ontological grounding. The technological condition made manifest here is that in removing the ontological dimension of technology, we conceptually remove a fundamental social understanding that is responsible for inuring us in our social worlds. And furthermore is responsible for semantically anchoring us in our worlds. It is this
ontological sense of technology which we seek to thread through the thesis and to argue that in effect it is redoubled in a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of vision, that is, its ontology, where both bear on revealing and disclosing the sociality of being. But, equally so, modern technology as will become evident, in the exegesis of Heidegger’s concept thereof, taken up later, is also the site of the obfuscation of social being and its sociality.

2.2.2 Technological condition, Enlightenment Optimism and Romantic Pessimism

The dialectic of ‘disclosure and obfuscation’ of technology taken up above is met with a symmetry in modern philosophy though taken up as ‘emancipation and oppression’. On the one hand we are referred by Scharff and Dusek (2003: 5-6) to the technological utopianism and enlightenment optimism of Bacon (“knowledge is power”), Comte (“order and progress”) and Saint Simon (“society as a vast factory”). Taken together their ideas converged on the understanding that science and technology would usher in progress and peace. Moreover that the agents and custodians of this progress and peace were to be scientists and technologists in Comte’s thinking the new priesthood an emergent technocracy.

By contrast Scharff and Dusek (2003: 6) refer us to the romantic critique of Rousseau who counter poses the enlightenment optimism of Comte’s “scientific progress leading to world peace and happiness” with a view that it will instead lead to “decline and decadence”. These contrasting perspectives of Comte and Rousseau considered in the
light of a technological condition captures one or the other pole of the debate which divides along the lines of utopians vis-à-vis dystopians. Their limitation is that neither considers the technological condition as a unity of the duality of emancipation and alienation. That is they do not consider the co-simultaneity and mutually constitutive nature of the dialectic of technology and society. And since they, Comte and Rousseau, are locked in an isomorphic understanding of the relationship between technology and society they both end up in a deterministic frame, though their respective outcomes as noted are different. Their understanding can be seen to converge on the idea that technology is a means, that is, it is about instrumentalism, though they differ on the ends that would be realized and on the extent to which such means are to be taken up given its effect on traditional social being. In effect this divide represents the bifurcation of the dialectic to the positive and negative dimensions of technology destined never to meet and as such always presenting a partial picture. Thus, in as much as one may speak of a technological condition one is referred to the Enlightenment optimism and Romantic pessimism as discursive foreclosures in as much as they are presented as mutually exclusive poles of social being involved in the ‘technological condition’.

2.2.3 The Technological condition, Marx and technological determinism

Considered, however, from such a perspective that allows of the unity of the opposites of the technological condition is Marx’s understanding of the relationship between technology and society. Scharff and Dusek (2003: 6) point out that “Marx is optimistic concerning the development of science and technology as well as about their benefiting
humanity in the long run even though he “ridiculed … Comtean conceptions of scientific and technological progress”. Equally so they (Ibid: 6) contend that Marx:

shares the pessimism of Rousseau and the romantics concerning the oppression and alienation produced by science and technology … in the present and short run”.

If the relationship between technology and society is a case of being ‘good and evil’ is there a point at which one may speak “beyond good and evil”. For Marx that terminus ad quem is Communism though whether we arrive at that through the development of the productive forces a technological determinism, or whether we arrive at that through class struggle that is a social determinism are the different directions that contemporary Marxism has taken.

With respect to Marxist variants favoring a technological determinist interpretation of social change Scharff and Dusek (2003: 6) show that in both the “Poverty of Philosophy” and in his highly influential “Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy” there is sufficient basis in Marx to support this position. For instance they contend that the former text of Marx to be taken lightly “contains his famous quip, “… the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; and the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist
This clearly resonates with a technological determinist theme. Similarly in the latter text it is argued that Marx “identifies the base of society with the technological forces and social power relations of production, thus making technology central in his system of thought. By contrast to this technological determinist theme Scharff and Dusek (2003:7) refer us to the social determinist thematic which they argue takes it cue from Marx’s claim in Capital where it is held that “class structure and class struggle control what sort of technology is developed”. Notwithstanding, Scharff and Dusek’s (2003) account of the technological and social deterministic offshoots of Marx there is also interpretive room to consider the dialectical import of such claims. In as much as they (Scharff and Dusek) disclose the bifurcation prevalent in Marxian thinking they do not similarly focus on the kind of thinking that shows that a mutual embeddedness is also evident. In other words in reversing the relationship between society and technology in what is referred to above as a so-called quip one may also infer that Marx makes explicit the dialectical nature of said relationship. That even though the comment may appear to be said in jest it nevertheless points to an understanding of the relationship between technology and society as mutually constitutive.

The question as to where Marx places weightage with respect to the debate as to whether “technology determines social relations or whether social power determines technological developments” is for Scharff and Dusek (2003: 7) a case of the latter. The technological condition in this regard is tantamount to seeing the relationship between technology and society as the mediation of the generalization and normalization of the vested interests of a dominant class. In other words as Williams (1974) argues that technology is socially
shaped and as such offers a ‘symptomatic’ read of the social interests which predisposes it in very definite ways. There is no disagreement with this level of analysis in as much as it shows the intersection between technology and society and its structural import, however, what is missing is that there does not appear to be an engagement with what technology is but only how it is appropriated and used. It comes across as an argument post fortiori with no mind to technology a priori. Notwithstanding, the allusion to dialectics, it is our contention that the dialectic of technology and society is strong on analyses of the intra societal dimension and on said relationship though weak on an intra technological analysis.

In other words, Marx accepts technology as fundamental, that is, as part of the material base of society, and moreover, he sees it as foundational in the dialectic of social change (contradictions between the forces and relations of production), though he does not open up technology, sui generis, to a dialectical analysis in itself. What is being contended is that the determinism both social and technological referred to above within Marxian vein arises as a result of the lack of an analysis of technology proper. It is arguably this gap that is responsible for destabilizing the discourse on the relationship between technology and society thus rendering problematic how we understand this latter relationship and thus its import in the constitution of social being.

**2.2.4 Technological condition: Ellul, Autonomy and technological determinism**

Seen in the light of a non-Marxian framework, technological determinism takes the form of an argument which stresses the ‘autonomy of technology’ as against its social determination. In this regard Scharff and Dusek (2003) refer us to Heilbroner (1967) and
Ellul (1980) and their variations on the theme of technological determinism and the emergent ‘technological condition. What the former (Ibid:2003) point out is that for Ellul the technological condition emerges as a kind of blindness when it comes to seeing and accepting that technology itself is self-propelling, that is autonomous. The logic of Ellul’s (1980) position as argued by Scharff and Dusek (2003: 383) is that in contrast to the “idea that technology is in fact just the collection of instrumental means” is the reality claim that “how “the technological phenomenon” (sic) actually functions demonstrates that all of the human activities we “grandly assume are independent from and thus empowered to direct and control technology are in fact bound up with and beholden to it.” In short what is being suggested is that society is shaped by the imperatives of technology rather than its inverse. Thus what obtains from the framework of Ellul according to Scharff and Dusek (2003: 383) with respect to technological determinacy is that:

Science, the political order, economics our (vastly overestimated) mental powers-all of these are repeatedly put in the service of “the technological demand” (sic) for more invention, more development, more control -…

It is not only that technology issues forth the imperatives of “more invention, more development, more control” but most importantly that it does so within the specificity of a technological modality. The form of this latter technological modality or demand which is captured by Ellul as the demands of “technique” is analogous Scharff and Dusek (2003: 383) contend to Weber’s conception of the “rationalization of social practice”.
What is pointed out is that both Ellul and Weber converge in as much as they identify an increasing tendency in the development of “technique” and “rationalization” towards a state in which reason is transformed into “something entirely instrumental and means oriented, and we thereby cease to think about the question of the ultimate ends of our practices” (Scharff and Dusek, 2003: 383). Notwithstanding, the latter it should be noted that their sociological orientations are entirely different in as much as where Ellul gives credence to technology as ‘purposive’ Weber moves in the opposite direction of the social actor as purposive. Moreover, where the ultimate social outcome of “technique’s” or technology’s hegemony leads to something of a ‘homo technologicus’ for Ellul, while rationalization, on the other hand, for Weber leads to a ‘homo bureaucraticus’. To these theoretical outcomes both dystopian we are offered a corrective in Weber’s cultural relativism and a fait accompli in Ellul’s technological autonomy.

If, this is putatively the reality of the “technological phenomenon”, as Scharff and Dusek (2003) understand Ellul, then the question that begs is, what is it that accounts for this blind spot so identified and reproduced, in the imperatives of the technological society and modernization. In this regard the following factors are identified by Scharff and Dusek (2003:383) as key to how Ellul understands the reasons behind the pervasive social blindness as to the ‘true’ nature of the autonomy of technology.

For one thing, it is characteristic of those who claim possession of the ability to control the direction of technological development to overestimate their skills.
Scientists and engineers display embarrassing naïveté and shallowness in dealing with the social impact of technology. Politicians are driven by ideological assumptions rather than knowledge in their efforts to direct or regulate technical practices. And ordinary citizens and consumers are seriously uninformed about both the technical practices and social realities that dominate everyday lives. Moreover the technological system itself entrances us all ... it comes to be admired as the primary “creative force” (sic) in our lives and its values displace traditional morality.

The assumption most noteworthy for an understanding of the relationship between technology and society is that as argued above there is the suggestion that there is a disjuncture to be found between the imperatives of technology and those across a spectrum of different social modalities. And that should we yield to the imperatives and rationale of technology, rather than superimpose factors extraneous to its development and its social sweep, then, we would be able to avoid the many disasters that accompany the political manipulation, hubris and ignorance surrounding technological practices. This amounts to reversing the conventional wisdom that ‘the state commands and technology obeys’ for an imperative that hails that ‘technology should command and the state obey’.

There is without a doubt the empirical reality, though gradations notwithstanding, that our social lives and social realities proliferate with technology in general (artifacts, systems, processes etc.) and that these are mediated to different effect across a range of institutions. However, to suggest that the dialectic between technology and society will
be consummated in a technological state of affairs at the complete erasure of our humanity and sociality that is the end of his and her story (history) and its substitution in the story of techne (techno-story) seems way too fatalistic perhaps even eschatological. But to suggest, however, that living in a world that is increasingly becoming technologised and is reaching a critical mass that is surely reacting back on us, as we no longer do things in the same way as before, nor do we think about things as we did once before the generalization of technology in electronics, and that its time to put this contemporary relationship between technology and society into perspective, is quite another matter. In other words we need to be mindful that technology’s relation to society is proportional and not absolute and that we are not compelled by an ineluctable technological force to an end over which we have no choice, but rather that this type of thinking is nothing else but the symptom of an instrumental thinking that has separated, as noted above with respect to Weber, the means from its social ends. It bifurcates our social being such that our sociality is separated from our sociabilities.

The question that begs and that is seized upon in this thesis is how we go about establishing or exploring not the “technological condition” as such, but the ‘sociological condition’ of living in a technological world. What is however held as the point of departure is that an understanding of the ‘sociological condition’ of contemporary life is fundamentally predicated on the nature of the relationship between technology and society and vice versa. Thus, we identify in the above sentiment that “ordinary citizens and consumers are seriously uninformed …” a qualified agreement in that one accepts that whilst they may be uninformed this does not mean that they do not generate their
own meanings through the quotidian practices and social realities engaged in. What is being argued here and taken up with gravitas later is that in focusing on “ordinary” peoples practices and concerns in their interaction with technology we may be in a position to give shape to their emergent social imaginaries or social being. That is in how different modalities of social being are gathered in the intersection of what Borgmann (1984) calls “focal concerns”, “focal practices” and technological forms in daily life. In other words, methodologically we might be in a position to consider the hermeneutic framework in which the conditions of possibility and impossibility of what is doable and sayable may emerge, in situ. That place where such a convergence is seen to take place is arguably around the intersection of technology and vision which we have tracked into Heidegger’s existential – ontological understanding of being-in as a way of connecting with social being. The latter is not Borgmann’s concern and as such we take our point of departure from him but remain mindful of his concern for the quotidian order of being, which we discuss later, in its everydayness at the level of his understanding of Heidegger’s notion of gathering. It is this gathering of being which we take seriously in our concern with technology and vision and thus focus on the disclosure of modalities of social being as it is uncovered in our circumspective dealings with the world.

2.2.5 Technological condition: Heilbroner and ‘Soft Determinism’

However, where Ellul does not appear to equivocate with respect to his deterministic understanding of the relation between technology and society Heilbroner (2003: 401, in Scharff and Dusek) by contrast does and opts for a thesis based on “what William James calls “soft determinism” (sic) with regard to the influence of the machine on social relations.” Establishing Marx as reference point Heilbroner (ibid: 398-399) sets out to
establish whether one might be able to “explain technological determinism historically as well as explain history by technological determination”. With respect to the argument for a historical explanation of technological determinism Heilbroner (2003: 398) invokes Marx’s quote on “the hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill …” to ask a question, which momentarily sidesteps the obvious suggestion of correspondence between technology and society, but that directly addresses the technological sequence implied. The sequence put forward by Heilbroner (Ibid: 399) takes this form:

… the steam-mill follows the hand-mill not by chance but because it is the next “stage” (sic) in a technical conquest of nature that follows one and only one grand avenue of advance.” …one cannot move to the age of the hydroelectric plant before one has mastered the steam-mill, nor to the nuclear power age until one has lived through that of electricity.

Paraphrasing Marx, Heilbroner (2003: 399) puts the question thus to open up the possibility of a history of productive technology (‘techno-story’ perhaps a ‘tech-no-story’):

Can we then explain the “laws of motion” (sic) of technology itself? Or to put the question less grandly, can we explain why technology evolves in the sequence that it does?

The ‘softness’ of Heilbroner’s (Ibid: 399) technological determinism surfaces in his mindful rendition of the counterfactuals that need to be accounted for such as the variegated nature of societies vis-à-vis the development of productive technology, the
social pressures exercised on the course of development of technology and the distinction between discovery and technological application. However, these attend to the second of his questions which deal with how technology relates to the social order, though one notes paradoxically an obdurate turn in his account of the evidence he marshals in support of a view of a determinate technological sequence. Thus, notwithstanding the differences in how societies relate to productive technology Heilbroner (ibid: 399) still contends that it does not discount the view that for those societies that do pursue it there exists a “determinate sequence”. The evidence for this sequence Heilbroner (Ibid: 399) finds in the specificity of the process of discovery and innovations immanent in the development of productive technology.

What Heilbroner (ibid: 399) finds in his historical purview of discovery and innovation in regard to the development of productive technology is that it is characterized by “the simultaneity of invention, the absence of technological leaps and the predictability of technology”. Without entering into the specifics of each, as they are sufficiently suggestive, what firms up in Heilbroner’s argument is that all three are bound up, and given definition and form, by the process implicated in the development of productive technology. Thus, with respect to the “simultaneity of invention” what is evident is that “discovery takes place along a well defined frontier of knowledge rather than in a grab-bag fashion”; that secondly “most advances …appear essentially incremental, evolutionary and finally that prediction admits to technology following “a developmental sequence rather than arriving in a more chancy fashion’ (Ibid: 399).
The softness, that is, the proportional role attributed to technological determinism by Heilbroner (Ibid: 400) is made manifest in the way he accounts for the “structured” (sic) history of technological sequencing. What becomes evident in his argument is that he does not restrict the “laws of motion” of technological development to only its internal dynamic since this would not be able to account for the obvious variegated nature of its spread across different societies. Nor, does he decenter the internal dynamic of technological progress, but rather he sets up the sociological context as constraints operating on and shaping technological development. In doing so he is able to support the idea of a “determinate sequence” but at the cost of producing a parallel line of determination. For not only is it argued that the process of technological discovery, invention and innovation marks a determinate course, but that this level of determination is socially circumscribed. In the words of Heilbroner (Ibid: 400) there are “order-bestowing social constraints on the development of technology such as “the gradual expansion of knowledge”, “… the stock of capital”, “the material competence of an age”, “technological congruence”, all of which set a limit on what is achievable and thus allows for a level of predictability and thus determinacy. To paraphrase Marx similarly it would appear from Heilbroner that technology does develop in and of itself, but not in the circumstances of its own choosing. It does so on the basis of a logic of articulation or ‘congruence’ between the technological and the social.

In sum, then, for Heilbroner it is not a theoretical reach to argue for a history of technological determinism that follows the sequential order of productive technology, as long as it is tied to a congruent sociological complex comprising in the main scientific
knowledge, technical expertise and a division of labour. What this does mean is that even though the sociological complex is seen to act on technology it nevertheless implies an autonomous process which accommodates itself to society whilst issuing forth its internally generated imperatives in relation to labor and the organization of work. Thus, asks Heilbroner (Ibid: 401) can one then take Marx at “face value” and argue that “the steam-mill does in fact give us society with the industrial complex” and furthermore that “the technological infrastructure is responsible for some of the sociological features of society.” To these questions Heilbroner does not give an unequivocal response and thus:

Certainly the class characteristics of a particular society are strongly implied in its functional organization. Yet it would seem wise to be cautious before relating political effects exclusive to functional economic causes.

Considered in the light of the erstwhile Soviet Union with its constellation of socialist states Heilbroner (Ibid: 401) suggests that technology is ambivalent as to whether the economic context is capitalist (industrial capitalist) or socialist (industrial manager), though what is beyond doubt is that it will bequeath the “technician and the bureaucrat”.

In other words what is being said here is that the scope of determinism associated with technology does not necessarily hold when it comes to the level of broad based social effects, but is limited more to the immediate technological sweep, which is, that it is more proximate and parochial with long term ramifications and indirect effects. It is in this sense that the effects of technology are reined in that one sees the shape of what is called a ‘soft determinism’ or a weaker effect than that suggested by an outright technological
determinism. Hence to wit Heilbroner (Ibid: 402) muses that “we cannot say whether the computer age will give us the latter day capitalist or commissar, but it seems beyond question that it will give us the technician and the bureaucrat.” Thus emerges technology and society in a relationship of mutual determination in which the imperatives of technology issue forth the technician and bureaucrat, while the sociological imperative recasts the latter as post-industrial capitalist or post-industrial administrator. If the matter of the dialectic of technology and society is settled for Heilbroner as that of mutual determination then what is it that might account for the persistence of technological determinism in contemporary thinking and thus so express a particular manifestation of the ‘technological condition’, so to speak.

What is argued is that the “rise of capitalism provided a major stimulus for the development of a technology of production”, in so far as the “emergence of the market system” based on the “principle of private property”, provided the institutional basis capable of “systematically guiding the inventive and innovative abilities of society”, geared as it is towards its social reproduction. However, what the market system also puts into play, notes Heilbroner (Ibid: 403), with direct import for technological determinism, particularly in so far as it relates to the notion of the ‘autonomy of technology’ was a “laissez-faire ideology”.

The argument advanced is that since it was market forces that governed the adoption of technology in the economy and that this selfsame market force is ruled by an “invisible hand”, meant that technology too was taken up in this notion of a “diffuse “force” (sic)
bearing on social and political life” (Ibid: 403). In addition to capitalism and the market system, Heilbroner (Ibid: 403) makes us aware that science too “gave a new impetus to technology”. What is striking about the relation of science to technology, a matter taken up variously in this chapter but of particular epistemological note here is that it is embedded in modern technology. Thus, it seems that as far as technology involves knowledge in its internal operations it could be argued that the social reaches into technology at its very heart. This surely undermines the extent to which one might hold that technology enjoys some form of autonomy from society such that one may speak of its relation to the latter. It would appear that such a division maintaining ‘blue water’ between technology and society is not entirely sustainable. And furthermore, when we consider how science tends to be reified from society one notes an additional impetus behind the pervasiveness of technological determinism even though it can be easily discounted.

At bottom what is implicit perhaps even explicit in Heilbroner argument is that the relationship between (productive) technology and society i.e. a market-driven society manifests an institutional lag, a ‘technological lag’. And that it is precisely within the space created by this “lag” that a ground is cleared for technological determinism to take root and to flourish. The form of this lag or disjuncture in which technological determinism insinuates itself has a sociological shape to it in Heilbroner’s (Ibid: 403) dialectical formulation of the problematic:
Technological determinism is thus peculiarly a problem of a certain historical epoch - ...in which the forces of technical change have been unleashed, but when the agencies for its control or guidance of technologically are rudimentary.”

In this thinking technological determinism amounts to a sociological problem in as much as society is deemed to have absconded from taking up the responsibility of circumscribing technology within the grasp of its social being. Thus, the technological condition as understood herein is a reinforcement of the mysterium that surrounds technology, in as much as it is deemed to be running amok, or certainly beyond the behest of social control. Heilbroner as far as can be gleaned from his argument addresses the relationship between technology and society as two domains in mutual engagement with each other, though what is unclear is the nature of their mutual implication in each other. What is being noted here is that there is no conception of the way in which technology as reality in itself imbricates human affairs through its imperatives reaching into modalities of being and sociality.

To Heilbroner’s credit he does make it explicit that these existential questions are not addressed in his ‘soft deterministic’ argument, as to the level at which machines do make ‘history’. However, in as much as Heilbroner’s argument holds for this thesis it is delimited to his historico-sociological explanation of the pervasiveness and insistence of technological determinism. Together with his account of the mutual determination of technology and society Heilbroner does raise the discourse on the nature of technological determinism by pointing to its relative and proportional influence. However where we are
left somewhat adrift is in accounting for the existential dimension in the relationship between technology and society.

The second question that Heilbroner (Ibid: 400) attests to is that concerned with Marx’s proposition that suggests that “a given technology imposes certain social and political characteristics upon society.” In this regard Heilbroner (Ibid: 401) holds that this is true particularly when we consider that which is directly implicated in the production process such as “the composition of the labour force” and “the hierarchical organization of work”. In both instances he points out that technology necessitates particular responses in order for it to function: the labour required in relation to different productive technologies may be skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled or a particular combination depending on whether one is dealing with a hand-mill, steam-mill etc.; while the organization of work required by different technologies involve different orders of supervision and coordination (Ibid: 401).

Thus, in both instances of technological development that is either when internally driven or externally acted upon by society there are to be found two levels of determination imputing structure and determinacy in respect of the sequential development of productive technology. The implications of this view on the predictability of technological change is that it emerges as a function of the internal dynamic of technology, i.e. its laws of motion’ on the one hand, and that of an external dynamic or sociological constraints, on the other hand. In effect one ends up with a bifurcation of the
technological and the sociological which Heilbroner (Ibid: 400) reconciles with his notion of “technological congruence”.

“In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production, and in changing their mode of production they change their way of living-they change all their social relations.”

The levels of determination that issue forth from Marx’s dialectical understanding of the relationship between technology and society is not of the type that suggests a direct relationship between productive forces and social relations. Rather that the level of determination that is seen to have direct consequences for social change is mediated at the level of the mode of production. This level of determination at the instance of the mode of production is in turn an expression of the unity of the dialectic manifest in the relations that unfold between the productive forces and the social relations of production. It is then when the contradictions and tensions are resolved one way or another between the latter and former that social changes of a general nature are instantiated.

However, the recessive nature of class struggle in the contemporary period seems to suggest its containment or domestication in the institutionalization of relations between labour and capital (e.g. collective bargaining) and as such signals some kind of displacement of this erstwhile central site of social struggle for surely there is a daily struggle. The question that then arises is what those forms of social struggles and
contestations might be that are now fore grounded though not centralized in the day-to-
day social lives of people contemporaneously. In this regard this thesis on technology is
leading to making a case for such decentering of the Marxian site of primary conflict
from the ‘factory-floor’ so to speak to the engagement of the technological and social in
peoples’ daily practices. In other words one is not privileging any domain of social
activity as in say work but rather shifting the unit of analysis to what Borgmann (1983)
refers to as “focal concerns” and “focal practices” of people in relation to their
technological milieus. But, as to what distinguishes this shift, it is characterized by an
existentialist analytical frame that brings people’s concerns, practices and objects
together on the basis of an experiential grounding. The question that arises in this regard
is not what effect technology has on society but rather in what sort of ways technology is
manifest as social practices that is in turning inwards to how we experience living in a
 technological world. Thus, before we attend to the central and foundational question of
Heidegger and its import for this thesis, we consider, by way of setting the philosophical
context, for the latter, Scharff and Dusek (2003: 487) on how technology is taken up in an
“experiential perspective” in order to “understand the cultural transformation technology
brings.”

2.2.6 Borgmann and the technological condition

In as much as Borgmann (1984) conceptualizes a problematic associated with technology
he is seen to take up a position, as argued by Scharff and Dusek (2003: 249), “between
technological determinists like Ellul and instrumentalists who view technology merely as
a means to freely chosen ends, …” They (Ibid:249) furthermore contend that Borgmann
(1984) is in agreement with Heidegger (1977, cited in Scharff et al, 2003) in so far as the former similarly recognizes the inherent “danger of modern technology”, but not without some modification to the latter. What this ‘danger of technology’ amounts to in Borgmann’s (1984) thinking is taken up and respecified as that constituting a “technological condition” ala Scharff and Dusek (2003) though given a different slant in this thesis.

Taking up the notion of the ‘technological condition’ in Borgmann’s diagnosis of “advanced technological way of life” two salient but related issues are apparent. Firstly, he (Borgmann, 1983: 3) points out that:

The problems that beset technological societies are thought to be extrinsic to technology: they stem, supposedly, from political indecision, social injustice and environment constraints. I consider this a serious misreading of our situation. I propose to show that there is a characteristic and constraining pattern to the entire fabric of our lives. … This pattern is visible first and most of all in the countless inconspicuous objects and procedures of daily life in a technological society.

In setting up the problematic, above as such, Borgmann (1984) addresses the “serious misreading” of the putative ‘technological condition’ as a matter bearing directly on the manner in which technology is understood, and moreover in its relationship to society. Taken at face-value technology is understood as somehow neutral and thus all problems ensuing are considered to be external; much like a tool is considered such that what begs
is the common-sense understanding, that a poor ‘workman’ (sic) always blames his tools when a job goes awry. And indeed in so far as a human hand is deemed culpable it is valid, however, beyond this instrumental understanding the point of relevance that Borgmann (1984) is drawing our attention to is that taken together, technology involves a substantive dimension which is made manifest in a “constraining pattern” and one that affects the “entire fabric of our lives” or we prefer, our social being. Thus, in so far as one may speak of a ‘technological condition’ or state of affairs as such it is in Borgmann’s (1984:3) estimation that there is much more than that which may be associated with ‘real politick’, moral imperatives and ecological sensitivities and which involves:

...the dominant way in which we in the modern era have been taking up with the world; and that characteristic approach to reality I call (modern) technology

However, what Borgmann (1984: 3-4) means by “been taking up” with modern technology not only refers to a definitive pattern, but also in Heideggerean vein devolves to a fatalism which threatens our very being and sociality. With respect to the definitive pattern (ibid: 3) it is discernible in as much as:

Technology becomes most concrete and evident in (technological) devices, in objects such as television sets, central heating plants, automobiles and the like. Devices therefore represent clear and accessible cases of the pattern or paradigm of modern technology.
The fatalism alluded to above on the other hand that emerges with the advent of modern technology with eschatological undertones becomes palpable in so far as it is a theoretical function of Borgmann’s “description of the device paradigm” and thus (ibid: 4):

This description reveals a fatally debilitating tendency in the present rule of technology. But that aspect of its rule can be made intelligible only if we turn explicitly to those forces in our lives that are endangered by the rule of the device paradigm.

What Borgmann brings within the purview of his analysis of modern technology captures what are at the heart of the ‘technological condition’, both as debilitating tendencies of the “device paradigm”, and that which stands at the threshold of his idea of how this tendency may be reformed. Before centering these two pillars of Borgmann’s analysis a brief by him on what these forces are (ibid: 4):

I use “focal things and practices” (sic) as approximate terms for those forces. …

A focal practice is one that can centre and illuminate our lives.

With this in place the question as to what the “device paradigm” is and what “focal concerns” are with respect to a Borgmann’s (1984) philosophy of technology becomes our concern, as the issue of its place in thinking the “technological condition” has been contextualized. The issue then is how technological devices as such threaten to imperil our elation to the nature of social being, i.e. our sociality and sociabilities. How is it possible that we are taken up with technology such that it is deemed to alter our sense of
being, sociality and the world we dwell in, in our everyday life? This latter question is what we seek to unravel in Borgmann’s (1984) conception of the device paradigm immediately below to illustrate how he understands the technological condition.

### 2.2.6.1 Borgmann’s Device Paradigm as Enframing

The argument that Borgmann (1984) develops with respect to how we are taken up with technology as contemporary condition hinges on his thesis that there is a distinctive pattern in the way in which it is implemented. This implementation of modern technology in society in its turn devolves to Borgmann’s (1984: 41) stated ‘promise of technology’ which involves “by way of the domination of nature” humanity’s liberation from “misery and toil’. In palpable terms Borgmann links the implementation of the promise of technology, that is “liberty and enrichment” to that of “availability” (ibid). In other words what seems to emerge in that it is through technology making things available that it insinuates itself and gives definition to our social being. But how is it possible that availability as technologically mediated comes to impose a pattern that somehow threatens us by disburdening us from what is commonly described as the drudgery of chores. The answer to this question is at the core of Borgmann’s (1984) philosophy of technology and involves as its initial task a theoretical clearing in which the notion of ‘availability’ is set into relief in the distinction drawn between “things and devices”. What obtains in Borgmann’s (1984: 41-42) analysis of a ‘thing’ is that it involves a context which comprises a “physical engagement” and a “social engagement” which is inextricably linked and which collectively constitutes it’s (the thing’s) world. Moreover,
Borgmann contends that a “thing” in as much as it calls “forth a manifold engagement [it] necessarily provides more than one commodity” (ibid: 41) or use. This concept of the ‘thing’ that Borgmann is working with becomes a lot clearer when reference is made to the example he cites to illustrate his argument (ibid: 41-42).

Thus a stove used to furnish more than mere warmth. It was a focus, a hearth, a place that gathered the work and leisure of a family and gave the house a centre. Its coldness marked the morning and the spreading of its warmth the beginning of the day. It assigned to the different family members tasks that defined their place in the household. The mother built the fire, the children kept the firebox filled, and the father cut the firewood. It provided for the entire family a regular and bodily engagement with the rhythm of the seasons that was woven together of the threat of cold and the solace of warmth, the smell of wood smoke, the exertion of sawing and of carrying, the teaching of skills, and the fidelity of daily tasks. … Physical engagement is not simply physical contact but the experience of the world through the manifold sensibility of the body.

In the above we see the manifold connections and imbrications of physical engagement and its social ordering and structuring of everyday life in a pre-modern technological setting. What follows are the implications of these self-same activities though extended to the realm of skill entailed in work and how it bears on social engagement beyond the domain of the household. Taking up the idea of the sensibility of the body above
Borgmann inures its link to the experience of the world and makes the sociological point thus (ibid):

That sensibility is sharpened and strengthened in skill. Skill is intensive and refined world engagement. Skill, in turn, is bound up with social engagement. It molds the person and gives the person character. Limitations of skill confine any one person’s primary engagement with the world to a small area. … Work again is only one example of the social context that sustains and comes to be focused in a thing. If we broaden our focus to include other practices, we can see similar social contexts in entertainment, meals, in the celebration of the great events of birth, marriage, and death. And in these wider horizons of social engagement we can see how the cultural and natural dimensions of the world open up.

What can be discerned in both the nature of physical engagements and social engagements is that in both cases one sees at work a complex engagement in which things disclose an intersection between being, sociality and the world that is congealed in the context of things. The point at hand in the juxtaposition of things and devices devolve in the main for Borgmann (1984) to the displacement or absorption of the embodied and social contexts of things by the machinery of devices. It is thus in the context of things that an understanding of that technological pattern to which Borgmann (1984) alludes can emerge with any clarity at all and thus be put into perspective. It is also within this logic of the device paradigm that the very idea of a technological condition that besets humanity contemporaneously is ultimately to receive it’s intelligibility as horizon of
social being. The question at hand is then what is it that distinguishes a device from a thing. Borgmann (198442-43) answers thus:

A device such as a central heating plant procures mere warmth and disburdens us of all other elements. These are taken over by the machinery 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 a device has therefore a tendency to become concealed or to shrink technology. Of all the physical properties of a device, those alone are crucial and prominent which constitute the commodity the device procures. Informally speaking, the commodity of a device is, “what a device is there for.” … The emphasis lies in the commodious way in which devices make goods and services available.

The basic thrust of Borgmann’s analysis is that modern technology in so far as it constitutes a pattern sets in motion a process of physical and social diminution of human involvement in their social reproduction. What we are witness to is that in place of the manifold engagements opened up by an involvement with things in a traditional modality of being, there is a steady emaciation of our physical and social being to the point at which an ontological substitution, or rupture is made manifest in our subordination to the machinery of the devices that procure human satisfactions. In this technological procurement of human satisfactions our engagement both physically and socially withdraws into the background of the machinery of the device, only to emerge in an
emaciated and diminished form as consumers of technologically supplied ends. Thus it is
not only that the machinery of the device is seen to shrink but most importantly the
context that makes up the ‘things’ world and hence our place in it and the horizon of
intelligibility it offers us as social grounding. In other words life loses the richness of its
meaning; it becomes increasingly less meaningful and thus contracts the nature of social
being.

The issue at hand in this technological patterning of life is that there is a distinction
between the machinery of the device and what it procures or what it is used for that
Borgmann isolates for treatment as symptomatic of modern technology and its
conditionality. Moreover, he identifies in this distinction of the general divide between
means and ends that which approximates respectively to the machinery and the
commodity of the device. It is this divide as fault-line cutting across pre-modern and
modern technology that appears reconstituted as ontological threshold of the latter that
needs to opened up for discussion. However, the withdrawal of the means into the
machinery of technology and with it the concomitant physical and social engagement
underscores Borgmann’s contention that the technological condition contemporaneously
as said pattern is not recognized and identified as such.

To redress this elision of the technological pattern Borgmann (1984: 48-49) specifies the
means-end divide spatially as the “background” (machinery-means) and “foreground”
(commodity/function-ends) of the device paradigm. The question thus begs what is it that
distinguishes modern technology from its precursor in traditional society, in so far as it
has a bearing on the distinction between means and ends. Borgmann (1984: 43) analysis below discloses that the means-end distinction or more accurately its separation is in fact symptomatic of modern technology and is indeed a threshold separating the latter from a pre-modern technological modality and as such signals the modality of modern technological being.

The distinction in the device between its machinery and its function is a general instance of the means-end distinction. In agreement with the general distinction, the machinery or the means is subservient to and validated by the function or the end. The technological distinction of means and ends differs from the general notion in two respects. … In the general case, it is very questionable how clearly and radically means and ends can be distinguished without doing violence to the phenomena. In the case of the technological device, however, the device can be changed radically without threat to the identity or familiarity of the function of the device. … This concomitance of radical variability of means and relative stability of ends is the first distinguishing feature. The second, closely tied to the first, is the concealment and unfamiliarity of the means and the simultaneous prominence and availability of the ends.

This argument as to, what we may call, the ontological violence inherent in separating means and ends from phenomena, outside modern technology, or the device paradigm is closely tied up with the inseparability of the context of a ‘things’ world from the thing itself, as far as its manifold engagements hold. And since we have already developed this
position at length it need not detain us any further, however, with regard to the modern technological rupture implicated in the conditions of possibility of the reification of means from ends and vice versa some illustration is necessary. With respect to the former Borgmann (1984: 43) draws our attention to the history in the variability of the means, that is, the machinery, employed in the powering of a wrist-watch to make his point. The fact that it was initially powered by mechanical means and displayed time with pointers or hands and replaced by electrical means displaying time digitally did not in the slightest alter its function or ends as such (ibid). Thus, through this example and countless others that could be cited one witnesses the reification of the means from its ends, and concomitantly, in this shift in technological modality, the effacement of its context, as the former (means) increasingly withdraws from view, whilst the latter (ends) profligates. This adumbration of means in the ensuing technological pattern and illumination of ends carries with it a social cost of some magnitude. Borgmann (1984: 44) contends that this cost is one of social anonymity and proceeds thus:

The concealment of the machinery and the disburdening character of the device go hand in hand. … A commodity is truly available when it can be enjoyed as a mere end, unencumbered by means. … The device provides social disburdenment, i.e., anonymity. …The starkness of social anonymity in the technological universe can be gauged only against a picture of the social relations in a world of things. Such a picture will show that social anonymity shades off into one of nature, culture and history. Here it pays to show … how nature and
culture were interwoven and how this texture was rent by the advance of technology and overtaken by anonymity.

What is particularly significant about Borgmann’s analysis of the technological pattern in which the machinery of the device so to speak covers up the means through which its function is procured or produced is that it brings to the fore a kind of ‘blind-faith’ in the manner in which we are taken up with modern technology or the device paradigm. This theme will be expanded when we take up the matter of vision and visuality (see chapter 4). What is pertinent in this instance is that technology instantiates a way of seeing that relates to the experiential visibility of the function of technology, and a way of not seeing that is related to the experiential invisibility of the means of technology, its blind-spot. All told Borgmann’s position bears testimony to the makings of a ‘technological condition’ in so far as it reaches into social being and its sociabilities, in how it alters and erodes social practices and functionalities, and in how it contracts the social context within the technological all contributing to a technological modality of being.

2.2.7 Technological condition and Heidegger

Heidegger’s description of the state of affairs confronting us to varying degrees, as social formations, also seems to disclose itself in what has been called the makings of a “technological condition”. This technological condition or rather its formative shape is traced by Scharff and Dusek (2003: 3-5) to the distinction between “practical-technical (artistic) understanding” and “scientific-philosophical understanding which ensued in ancient Greek thinking starting with Socrates through Plato to Aristotle. Considered
summarily, beyond the acknowledged differences between them there is general agreement noted in their epistemological privileging of philosophy-science over the practical-technical and artistic (Scharff & Dusek, 2003). What is pertinent in as much as it relates to the technological condition alluded to is that said epistemological disprivileging which was bequeathed to Western thinking by ancient Greek doctrine damned philosophical enquiry into technology to the margins and until relatively recently to a relative discursive silence. In effect the consideration of the epistemic shape of the technological condition disclosed in its stead the makings of a philosophical condition which so to speak testifies to the quietude on matters concerning what technology is and worse its misconception as “neutral” that is without essence. Thus two objectives were realized when technology was taken up as object of knowledge by Heidegger, in particular (1977): firstly technology was realized as object of knowledge philosophically and secondly technology was treated as reality sui generis.

What we shall be focusing on from this point forth is Heidegger’s (2003) philosophical understanding of what is entailed in the view that implicit in modern technology and in technology in general is the makings of a ‘technological condition’ which imperils what we may call the ‘human condition’ our humanity or social being. He is of the general dystopian view that the social relations that ensue between technology and society bears testimony to a problematic relationship in so far as it bears directly on the essence of our social being, our humanity. What is at stake from a sociological point of view is that the technological condition is that which intepellates the very nature of our sociality. In other
words we are hailed in such a particular way that it alters our “predisposition” to the world, which is our sociality: and considered further, in the light of Pierre Bourdieu’s (1980) framework of social practice one is dealing with the schemas of one’s habitus, our ways of thinking and doing what we prefer to refer to as our sociabilities. The question that begs is thus how the putative technological condition relates in toto to our social being. In this regard Heidegger (2003: 252)) argues that:

“[e]verywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it.”

If anything at all we could say this of existence in the 21st century that it is that we are thrust in the midst of a techno-social world from which there is no escape. This seems self evident though, the sociological import of Heidegger’s notion of “unfree and chained” speak to a relationship of complexity in which technology and society are inextricably bound up with and in each other. Considered as such, this relationship of being mutually bound up characterizes the techno-social complex of modern technology, which in turn informs social being and which in its turn is proximate in ways of questioning and thinking about not only technology, as case in point, but the nature of the world and being and their mutual embeddedness. Though clearly this pervasive discursive influence of the ‘conventional’ or ‘correct view’ which Heidegger (2003) argues is always partial because it fixates on some aspect of the object of knowledge or discourse in question and as such it relates to all manner of conceptualization and theorization. And it is precisely because of this very reason that we should remain
mindful that attempts to think through the essence of technology are rendered problematic. How? In short, as we will glean from Heidegger, but through the interference of a discourse imbued with the vestiges of the techno-social logic of instrumentalism, which we take up in the next chapter, in our discussion of Heidegger’s philosophy of technology.

So what is at stake in unraveling the relationship between technology and society is firstly that it should be separated from the adumbration of a concept suited to addressing what we do with technology, but entirely unsuited to addressing what technology is, namely its essence. And this conflation of what it does for what it is can only be avoided, Heidegger (2003) holds, once one has identified and mapped what this thesis respecifies as the technological modality of social being or the sociality constituted in instrumental conceptions rendering problematic a deep theoretical engagement with the nature of technology, sui generis. Thus, in contradistinction this thesis does not share in analyses that proceed only from technology postfactum, that is, address only the social interests that shape it in its wake and in so doing remain at the level of sociabilities, what we can do by way of our practices and functionalities,, as it is held that this latter approach is taken up in the vector of the discursive force of what Heidegger calls “the will to master” technology.

The real question, which is been thrown up now, is what might the ontological costs be, of an instrumental view, when considered, in relation to its position on the neutrality of technology, i.e., merely as means to an end. Considered as such Heidegger (1977) offers
us what we might proffer as diagnosis to remain consistent with spelling out the nature of the ‘technological condition’ so essentialised that we.

… we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to pay homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.

In considering the above it is noted that Heidegger attributes, as far as can be gleaned from the above, an obfuscation and truncation, with respect to how we encounter technology when arguing on the basis of its neutrality. In being “delivered to technology in the worst possible way” suggests that one’s encounter with technology within the ‘framing’ of neutrality obscures the path to a true understanding. Furthermore in reducing the essence of technology to that which is neutral and as such a mere means, an instrumentality forecloses on the possibility of confirming anything else but what is already presupposed. By contrast Heidegger (1977) makes it clear that the question concerning technology is to answer what it is and in answering what it is one arrives at what “ancient doctrine” (Plato, Aristotle) regarded as “the essence of a thing”. So when he puts the question out there to conventional wisdom, so to speak, as to what technology is, what obtains are in the main two predispositions (Heidegger, 2003: 252).

Technology is a means to an end. … Technology is a human activity. The two definitions belong together. For to posit ends and to procure and utilize the means
to them is a human activity. … The current conception of technology, … can therefore be called the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology.

In Heidegger we see that the essence of the conventional view of technology is instrumentalism. It is this viewpoint that Heidegger identifies as both a vice and virtue in relation to his theoretical objective of establishing the essence of technology. It is a virtue because it is through an analysis of the instrumental view that Heidegger is able to free up a discursive space to engage the ontology of technology indirectly. And it is a vice because the discursive force of instrumentalism stalks all attempts to think beyond an instrumentalist understanding of technology. And finally it is a virtue because at the limits of instrumentality lies the saving power of the essence of technology, namely, that which “grants” through its capacity for “disclosure” an alternate modality of “revealing” being, which leaves society “free” to establish a non-instrumental relationship with it.

Thus, in short, the ‘technological condition’ amounts to the instrumentalist negation of being such that one ends up with an emaciated sociality and humanity. The question as to which way the synthesis of the technological and the sociological seems to be heading for Heidegger clearly settles on a dystopian view though, most importantly not as fait accompli. What Heidegger (2003) offers as way out of the ‘technological condition’ which consumes itself in an instrumentalist rationality is an understanding of technology that reaches beyond the discursive foreclosure of instrumentalism. And this latter possibility arises out of Heidegger’s critique of instrumentalism that is based on drawing an ontological distinction between that which is correct from that which is true. This is
what we will turn to next as we track Heidegger’s conception of technology and its implications for social being as it elates to its sociality and sociabilities.
Chapter Three

Heidegger’s Philosophy of Technology: ‘essence’ of techne and modern technology

What is taken up in this chapter now that we have somewhat cleared the conceptual ground is a discussion which delves into the overall structure of Heidegger’s (1977) philosophy of technology. We do so in the light of what Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology unveils and thus uncovers about technology per se, in its various modalities and as far as it offers a particular understanding of the relationship between technology and society. This will mean that we intend to tease out some of the theoretical significances in his mode of analysis to refine our understanding of Heidegger’s concept of technology and in so doing to develop our conception of social being. We take up for consideration those areas of existential and ontological note in his estimation of the discursive process engaged in, to establish what he calls a “free” relationship with technology. In sociological, that is, Durkheimian, vein it might be spoken of as the study of technology sui generis, as reality in itself, as ‘social fact’. And in so far as technology reaches into society it involves its relationship with social being and thus our sociality and sociability as technological mien within a technological milieu.

3.1 Heidegger’s discursive modality/theoretical Project in context

Heidegger’s philosophical orientation sees him set up subtle distinctions of major epistemological import in his discursive pursuit to establish a clear ground, so to speak, of the essence of technology. And herein lays the paradox or dialectic depending on one’s
predisposition; in order to free him, from the all pervasive instrumental view, he has to explore this very instrumentality to its limits. By establishing its limits or essence he puts himself in a position to contemplate technology beyond the discursive reign of instrumentalism. In this manner he is able to distinguish between what he calls a “correct” understanding (instrumental and anthropological) from a “true” understanding (hermeneutic phenomenological--its essence). Furthermore, in Heidegger’s (2003) analysis of the distinction between technology and modern technology we see the same discursive strategy at work privileging essence as ontological condition and thus true understanding.

3.1.1 Heidegger’s “Question Concerning Technology”: Mode of analysis

Heidegger is not explicit about his mode of analysis though the cursory statements made reveal its orientation. His fundamental concern or object of knowledge is technology and his approach is baldly put as questioning and thinking about the essence of things technological. So his question in “The question concerning technology” (1977), also cited in full in (Sharff et el.: 2003) is; what is technology. He sets up the problematic of questioning and thinking about technology as one in which conventional wisdom both points to and obscures a true understanding though his starting point is that it is modestly correct. His strong point is that the focus on technology as means, that is, as instrumentality over which it is claimed that humans exercise a putative mastery obfuscates a true understanding of its essence. However, in order to arrive at such a true understanding Heidegger has to settle for pursuing a seemingly paradoxical path through the epistemic truncation of correct understanding which to reiterate stops short of a true one. The reason for invoking the guarded formulation of a seeming paradox is that
Heidegger seems to move between a hermeneutic phenomenology and a dialectic epistemology, in his analysis of technology. For in as much as he discloses the ontological dimension to technology as a way of revealing the truth of being and the world he operates within his customized hermeneutic phenomenology, but in as much as theorizes what appears to be a dystopian view a kind of ‘techno-pessimism’ he nevertheless argues, in effect, that in this very technological distemper there lies it’s saving power, and thus offers a dialectic.

The theoretical objective of Heidegger as he makes abundantly clear is to establish a “free” space in which to engage the essence of technology. It is in this regard that Heidegger employs a hermeneutic analysis to fix the underlying conceptions that frame an understanding of technology, which we have made explicit in the previous chapter and thus offer up a theoretical clearing or “free space” to think technology. However, whereas the hermeneutic approach engages the interpretations that are extant it does not in and of itself reveal what technology is and thus he adopts a phenomenological approach, which he grounds in sociality (contra Husserl and Sartre see chapter one) as a way to return to technology sui generis, thus revealing its essence. To this end Heidegger engages in an analysis which, maps out the discursive range of instrumentalism in so far as it encircles, frames and reaches into the sociality of a being that finds itself thrust amidst technology. In other words by mapping out the discursive sphere of influence of an instrumental view he is thus able to establish a clearing in which, it becomes possible to confront technology outside of the conventional strictures that gather and confine its meaning.
Heidegger is also deeply embedded in discourse and its hermeneutic significance, as the means to clear the ground, for as he holds it is in language, particularly those of ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle that he finds a discursive site in which, to contemplate ways of thinking and questioning technology, outside of the instrumentalist horizon of intelligibility. In this regard what this chapter seeks to probe is to what extent the theoretical reorientation of technology as horizon of intelligibility can hold as ontology of social being and how the latter in turn may function in relation to its grounding in an existential – ontological understanding. What remains is to track into Heidegger’s philosophy of technology so as to engage how this bears on the sociality and sociabilities of social being in the course of his discourse.

The course of this analysis henceforth and the discussion that ensues asks the following questions: What is it like to be immersed in a technological world? What is the essence of technology? What is the essence of modern technology? What is the danger and savior of technology? These questions are employed to direct us towards an understanding of Heidegger’s philosophy of technology and to take in his particular mode of application of the hermeneutic phenomenological method. And thirdly, to draw out those ontological aspects that tease out for our purposes that which constitutes an understanding of social being since this is our point of departure in as much as we take this to be the sine qua non for an understanding being in general as will be made evident. And finally, we intend to bring the preceding to bear on Heidegger’s understanding of the different modes of being and what we have conceptualized as its sociality, in its articulation with its related
visionary sociabilities to engage the matter of social being in a thorough going fashion within a techno-social complex.

The term techno-social is used to denote two dimensions of being: techno speaks to the technological imperative and its sociabilities, which is how we comport to the equipment, gizmos and gadgets. While social speaks to the imperative of sociality and its concomitant horizon of intelligibility and refers us to social practices that come under the sway of the essence of technology and thus its displacement or substitution. And finally, conjointly they both speak to a logic of articulation as perhaps an admixture pulling in the direction of the technological and thus against the imperative of social being and its sociabilities as existential-ontological understanding. In this regard as far as the latter is concerned one is directed to Heidegger’s (2003) ontological thesis of technology as the basis for disclosing and revealing what he considers to be a true understanding of social being and being in general. For it is technology which allows us to capture the essence of nature, the cosmos and being in as much as it involves us in a particular type of social engagement within our world. The fundamental shape of this technological modality and its ontological capacity for disclosure of social being and being in general is our primary concern.

3.2 What is technology?

The objective that Heidegger seems to have in mind when considering what appears to be a subtle ontological distinction between a correct and true understanding is in fact the drawing of a deeper distinction, namely that between the appearance of technology and its essence. In its most manifest guise that is ‘technology as means to an end’ Heidegger
(2003: 252) points out that it is “in obvious conformity with what we are envisaging when we talk about technology”. One could hardly say that this interpretational stance (hermeneutic) was not in evidence as it would contradict our commonsense experience of how technology is understood. In fact, if hard pushed, one might even concede that it was ‘true’ that technology is in the ‘final instance’ a means to an end. So with all this hermeneutic weight favoring an instrumental conception why does Heidegger make the distinction count as much as he does? For in distinguishing between understandings he is able to reconcile himself to the instrumentalist; that which is commonplace and immanent in our sociabilities or comportments, and still hold out that whilst correct it was incomplete. However, by the time Heidegger (1977) draws his argument to a close he baldly rejects the instrumental and anthropological conceptions of technology as false. What we turn to now is Heidegger’s analysis of the essence of instrumentalism and set the epistemic potentialities and limits of this conception.

3.2.1 Technology and Instrumentalism: A correct understanding

We consider here what it is that an instrumental discourse seizes upon and upon what it is predicated. In relation to the former we can see in what sense the discourse may be described as seizing upon certain hermeneutic features of technology. For Heidegger (2003: 253) “the correct always fixes upon something pertinent in whatever is under consideration”. The discursive import of Heidegger’s distinction is that in describing some pertinent feature and setting it up as definitive of technology as case in point runs the risk of veiling it and most significantly establishing an ‘unfree’ relationship to it thus compromising its phenomenology. With respect to the former one confronts certain aspects of technology (instrumentality) though at the expense of covering others
(disclosure); the latter arises in as much as one ends up being bound by the discursive foreclosure bound up with its conventional hermeneutic thus reproducing instrumentalism. With this much at stake epistemically, Heidegger meticulously clears the path to understanding the essence of instrumentality. The point of departure for Heidegger is to pursue the true (essence of technology) by way of the correct (instrumental) and to this end Heidegger (2003:253) asks “What is the instrumental itself? The key to thinking phenomenologically about this question Heidegger (2003: 253) points out lies in revealing what “instrumentality” and “causality” are and how this sits with technology. What we will come to see is that the conventional hermeneutic with its interpretational bent for instrumentality veils and covers up what technology is and that what Heidegger is heading towards is a hermeneutic that contains the seeds of our understanding of being. In identifying the basis upon which this hermeneutic of being rests we have noted its sociality and sociabilities and thus have seized upon social being as its essence. We have pushed quite far downstream though it is deemed necessary to have this understanding present in the discussion that follows on instrumentalism and causality.

3.2.2 Instrumentalism and fourfold causality

In Heidegger’s (2003) analysis of causality what is noteworthy is that he sets up a trajectory in which an understanding of the essence of causality is at its fullest in ancient Greek doctrine and most truncated in the Modern age. What this amounts to may be called an ‘existential, ontological and epistemological diminution in so far as an instrumentalist view of technology involves the narrowing of what it is that is knowable
about technology sui generis, being in general and the social way of being human. Thus, the question as to the significance of entering into a discussion of causality is that it affords us the theoretical scope to consider, through Heidegger (2003), the threshold between a true understanding of technology, and one that is false albeit seemingly ‘correct’. The point at hand is to consider causality in its totality: this accordingly involved an initial conception comprising four modalities; though later it was compressed into one, in the main. Underlying this discussion is the elaboration of Heidegger’s (2003) understanding of technology which he considers to be in essence a framework that reveals and discloses the nature of being, worldliness (sociality) and nature. It is to the matter at hand that is the quaternary concept of cause that we now turn.

Causality, which which is collectively responsible for occasioning some thing into ‘being’ or presence that is producing things as understood in ancient Greek philosophy, according to Heidegger (1977: 6), implicates four different though unified modes. These are:

1. the *causa materialis* (sic), the material, the matter out of which, for example, a chalice is made;
2. the *causa formalis*, the form, the shape into which the material enters;
3. the *causa finalis*, the end, for example, the sacrificial rite in relation to which the chalice is determined as to its form and matter;
4. the *causa efficiens*, which brings about the effect that is the finished, actual chalice, in this instance, the silversmith.
The first two causes point us to the substance or material content and its form, its shape, the way it occupies a given space. Put differently it refers to the physicality of the object or thing as matter and as form. However, embedded in this object are the markers of its origins in so far as the form and material suggest that it had been selected and transformed by some means and agency which implies a sociability which is is a comportment, that which a given social formation cultivates in its members through socialization.

This sociability for identifying with and relating to particular material substances like silver as in Heidegger’s example disappears into these modalities of causality. In other words in these first two modalities of matter and form causality situates the social as allusion. The social is recessive, that is, it comes across as tacit as an inclination, that is, neither explicit nor made manifest as a modality of social being. What is particularly important and holds significance for its truncation or diminution is that these two modalities from the vantage point of cause require that we confront the object only on its own terms as matter and as form without any recourse to its congealed sociality.

The third and fourth modality of cause on the other hand foregrounds the social and cultural as determinant moments in delimiting the causal complex. It is thus apparent that in spite of the instrumentality of the technological imaginary it is yet embedded in the socio-cultural dimension of social life. Of critical note one needs to ask how it is, then, that we speak of a technological state in which we are imprisoned, fettered, when in the composite sense of causality presented above the sociological content seems prominent.
First, as introduced, with respect to the argument made for the ontological diminution of causality, it is made explicit, in Heidegger’s (2003:253) view that over time cause has come to be represented “as that which brings something about.” And given the causal complex above we are referred to “causa efficiens” by Heidegger (2003:253) who states that despite being only one of four causes it “sets the standard for all causality.” In consequence Heidegger (2003:253) bemoans the fact that it “goes so far that we no longer even count the causa finalis, telic finality, as causality.”

And secondly in regard to the existential matter of social erasure and being fettered we are once again referred to the argument that the great casualty in this discursive disprivileging of causa finalis evacuates the sociological precisely at the time it is made explicit and co-determinant in the causal complex. Consequently, this social erasure in the face of the instrumentalisation of the causal complex is respecified in this thesis as the discursive need to restore the sociological in its guise as social being to ontological equivalence by way of making explicit causa finalis as well as materialis and formalis in accounting for the sociality of the causal complex.

In fact what we are witness to in this tendency towards the reification of causa efficiens, that is, instrumentality and the attendant marginalization and diminution of the social is perhaps the imperative of technological substitution at work. This takes the form as Borgmann (see 2.2.6.1) makes clear in the way the means are separated from the ends and the social context is absorbed into the technological efficiency of taking over social
practices in its modality of what Heidegger’s calls ‘challenging-forth’ into presence or production. In other words with the proliferation of technological artifacts in our lives we are witness to the diminution of social practices and its concomitant sociabilities which previously was used in tandem with the former, however, the contemporary age modern technology comes to substitute for actual engagement in the world and thus reduces its ontological scope.

To be sure Heidegger unlike the social constructivists of technology does not conflate technology with what happens in the outcome of the technological artifact. By contrast Heidegger holds that the essence of technology is not in any technological artifact but in its ontological capacity for disclosing being to which we will add and its sociality.

What we turn our attention to now are inferences alluded to above that the four modalities of cause are unified to constitute a causal complex and consider whether considered as such it restored that which has been erased and or truncated. Put in Heidegger’s interrogative he asks:

> From whence does it come that the causal character of the four causes is so unifiedly determined that they belong together?

For Heidegger (2003:253) “the four causes are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else.” He illustrates this by way of the example used earlier of the silver chalice to clarify the argument. In summary he delineates the
four causes in relation to the chalice thus. In causa materialis, the matter, namely the silver out of which the chalice is made is held to be “co-responsible” for the formation of the chalice. As a chalice, however, the causa formalis that is the form that the chalice takes is that to which the general concept of chalice is given. However, in so far as the form takes its meaning from a general concept presupposes a social and cultural convention at work and thus testifies in Heideggerian vein to a gathering of what we have attributed to social being as sociality and sociabilities which is congealed in causa formalis.

The same would also hold for causa materialis in as much as one note the variations across socio-cultural formations with respect to the materials employed in say the making of chalices or the normative order informing the choice of materials, form and so on. Perhaps it may be noted that the level of definition of sociability and sociabilities differ in intensity in regard to the first two modalities of cause. Whether, the raw material is easily given or intensely worked as in mined or looted elsewhere is a measure of the sociabilities involved in training and being fitted for such eventualities and thus of the sociality embedded in such a social formation.

Thus even in something seemingly material and physical as metal it is traceable at some level so that it manifests its origins in nature and in social contexts and thus marks its social being even in this modality. However, when it comes to the form of the technological object this need not bear any relationship whatsoever to nature and its forms, though it can and does, it is nevertheless arbitrary and conventional and thus
consummately social. The distinction though not important as such that is being made here is that the social dimension of being is registered in both modalities of matter and form; though what is also noted is that arguably the latter tends to presence the social more so than could be averred from the former. Thus, both the modalities of matter and form are not only technologically but equally so socially co-responsible in their respective ways for the formation of the chalice, as case in point.

The third modality of cause that enters into play involves what may be called a sociological delimitation which involves in Heidegger’s (1977) analysis the modality causa finalis. It is in this modality of cause that he sees that the “chalice is circumscribed as sacrificial vessel” Heidegger (2003:253). Though, in seeing the chalice reach completion that is in its finality Heidegger is able to recuperate the discursive complexity of the Greek concept telos. By contrast we are alerted to its methodological truncation or epistemological diminution in sociological research which sees telos reduced in scope to goal or purpose. To explain the expanded sense of the teleological Heidegger (2003: 253) draws on its Greek conception, however, with the specific ‘aim’ of illustrating what is meant by causa finalis.

The telos is responsible for what as matter and what as aspect are together co-responsible for the sacrificial vessel.

In other words telos is concerned with that which has delimited the choice of “matter” to silver, delimited the choice of “aspect” to its form the chalice, and that which binds and
circumscribes, that is conjoins both in its completion in the “realm of consecration and bestowal”, the sociality of belief and its said modalities of sociability. Clearly we are dealing here with much more than an aim or a purpose. This then are three of the modalities of cause brought together to show how they operate as a causal complex in the unities that ensue in their interaction and their social being which in the main is overlooked or given scant regard.

With respect to the fourth cause, namely, causa efficiens what is made clear is that it is not in the silversmith per se that responsibility is attributed, as would be the case with its ontological privileging alluded to earlier. In this regard Heidegger (2003:253) reins in causa efficiens from exaggerated notions of causality and confines it to the “pondering of the silversmith for the “that” and the “how” of their coming into appearance and into play, for the production of the sacrificial vessel.” Since the entire process of causality merges in the means of transformation and the production of the artifact it concentrates the entire modality of the social in its wake, which partially explains its reification. In this analysis of Heidegger we see the different modalities of cause brought into relation with each other and even suggest that some of these relations constitute social unities. But as Heidegger pointedly asks “what unites from the beginning? What is the source of their unity?

The answer that Heidegger proffers brings the correct understanding to a close and signals that the epistemological threshold is in reach to engage the essence of technology. We now see why Heidegger sees fit to engage in an analysis of the instrumental essence
of technology even though he accepts that it is not a ‘true understanding’ of what technology is, in essence. Heidegger’s probing of the fourfold modality of cause, central to the instrumental conception, discloses in its causal unity the very raison d’etre of technology. In other words it is in, establishing what it is that unifies, the four modalities of cause that Heidegger finds the path to the essence of technology. And true to his promise we now find ourselves at the hermeneutic limits of a ‘correct understanding’ and at the threshold of a ‘true understanding’.

Heidegger asks, in relation to his example of the chalice, what it is for that the four modalities of cause are responsible. And in concrete fashion reference is made to the chalice as sacrificial vessel lying before us. Taken further, but what does it mean for something to be lying present before us? Heidegger points out that in so far as something is present it may manifest itself as two different modalities of being or presence as “laying before” (present-at-hand) us or “lying ready” (ready-to-hand) for us. This somewhat counterintuitive move to introduce gradations to presence or what it means to be holds much ontological and epistemological gravitas, in that it questions the relative lack of the problematisation of what we understand by something being present and presence itself. It may be read that Heidegger is signaling a ‘wake-up call’ from the naïve approach to presence as in what we may call ‘immaculate existence’, that is, he invokes a critique of positivism, which is also evident in Derrida’s (1976) “metaphysics of presence”. This certainly has the shape of waking us, as Kant did, from our ‘anthropological sleep’ and at the risk of sounding immodest our attempt at anchoring ‘social being’ might incipiently refer us to our ‘sociological sleep’ Without saying too
much here it is also in this spirit of problematising presence as appearance that we take our cue to open up the matter of vision and perception, (see chapters four, and six), in terms of the modalities of social being involved in inuring us in-the-world, and enabling us to perceive that which is at-hand, and that which is merely present for contemplation or to satisfy our insatiable curiosities.

What is then crucial for understanding the unification or essence of the four modalities of cause is that they are “responsible” for bringing “something into appearance” (Heidegger, 2003:255). However, for Heidegger things that are brought into presence, and this is its profundity, are not merely there but have a particular modality of being. It is not simply there before us as chalice but it has a particular modality of being, which we will discuss later (see chapter seven) in detail, in order to grasp its significance, but which for now we merely want to point to, in its modalities as thing which is “ready-to-hand”, that is “Zuhanden” and not as “present-at-hand” that is “Vorhanden”, merely occurring as such (see chapter seven, Heidegger, 1962). The point is that the chalice is ‘ready-to-hand’ as it is taken up in the modality of ‘causa finalis’ in order to manifest it functionality in the Greek ritual for the sake of our mode of being of spirituality.

Most importantly it is in the unity of the four causes, that is its combined effect, as causal complex that we encounter the essence of technology, in that which brings-forth something into appearance, into presence though human efforts and thus at the ontological level discloses it modality of being, as such. In other words technology in terms of its fundamental characteristic of instrumentality points to an essence which is
other than what may be construed as technological. This quality that defines the formative essence of technology Heidegger (1977: 10) says we find in “bringing forth” which then brings us to the phenomenological threshold of the essence of technology. Thus we ask in the words of Heidegger (Ibid:11) “But how does bringing-forth happen ..?

3.2.3 Essence of instrumental causality and the ontological threshold of technology

In opening up the modality of ‘bringing-forth’ to scrutiny we find in Heidegger’s (1977: phenomenological analysis a historical demarcation which does not include modern technology but in Greek thought includes:

Not only handcraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery, is a bringing-forth, poiesis. Physis also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, poiesis. Physis is indeed poiesis in the highest sense. For what presences by means of physis has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g. the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself. In contrast what is brought forth by the artisan, or the artist, e.g. the silver chalice, has the irruption belonging to bringing-forth not in itself, but in another, in the craftsman or artist.

What we may note in the above is that not only is there a point of differentiation in modalities of bringing-forth, but that there is also a point of equivalence which holds particular significance for interest in bringing together technology and vision. Firstly, the bringing-forth associated with nature is of a higher order that that associated with the sociabilities involved in art, poetry and handcraft. The striking aspect to the equivalence
of the three domains of social practice is that while the bringing-forth of nature, that is, physis is an end in itself and thus constitutes a higher order in the ontological schema a similar distinction between “arts of the mind”, fine art and poetry vis-à-vis handcraft is not made. The latter three are collectively known in Greek thought as “techne”.

Consider that in the bringing-forth of theoria, art and poetry granted that is through social agency and as such differentiated it holds in common with physis that what is brought-forth is an end in itself. Certainly that is what one could understand of works of art and poetry as opposed to handcraft which is that its products are not ends in themselves. In other words as a bringing-forth in terms of the modality of efficiens or means a distinction between nature and the social holds ontologically, though at the level of the modality of causa finalis might we not say that an ontological distinction can be made that touches on the essence of technology. We do not wish to be pedantic or fastidious on this matter but it seems as it holds some significance if we foreground the matter of the sociality and sociabilities involved and thus social being. In this regard the distinction we draw attention to has a particular bearing for the comportment or sociability involved in theoria (to see, i.e. as understanding), and art and thus in perception (understanding) and vision (as mental picture) as that which offers a different vantage point to the modality of being as it relates to technology and its nascent development in handcraft manufacture. This will become apparent when we take up the technological sweep of modern technology and its essence in terms of how it relates to the danger and savior of being and social being. The point we are making here in relation to the thesis as a whole is the
ontological basis for including vision with technology as heuristic for probing the matter of social being.

Putting technology, then, in terms we are seeking to consider, the modality of being, in that which is brought-forth, presents itself to us in a way that reveals its sociality, that is, that it presents its facticity as social, at the level of ontological specificity. What this comes down to is what it means for that which is brought-forth to be, in a relation to human co-presence both in its making and its use as it unfolds in its temporality and its historicity. Thus, what rests in this bringing-forth is but a condition of possibility, a way being, and not its ostensive appearance in what is manufactured or produced as such. In other words the set of four modalities of cause coming together as the causal complex is the bringing-forth of a social conditionality that makes possible the technological as opposed to the appearance of something in itself as natural, that is, ‘physis’. However, the question still begs; what is has really happened in, what we have called, the social conditionality and that has been brought forth in all this bringing into appearance?

What seems to be at issue is that in engaging causality Heidegger’s phenomenological description discloses that “bringing-forth” yields the essence of technology as that quality which is responsible for “revealing” ontological truths about the world and being. This in turn is made possible since Heidegger (1977: 11) holds that every ‘bringing-forth’ brings something from “concealment into unconcealment”. Thus, what arises between ‘concealment and unconcealment’ is none other than a “revealing” (Ibid: 11). Clearly the visual implications (see chapter 6) of the discourse employed by Heidegger is stark,
though the sense in which it is used refers more to the hermeneutic, which is embedded in our understanding of being, and that makes for unveiling and the reference to ‘seeing’ as understanding phenomena as they are phenomenologically uncovered that we need to bring to bear, in making sense of the ontological dimension involved in the disclosure of the being of beings. In arriving at this Heideggerean essence of technology which was distilled from his analysis of causality as an instrumental complex we have been enabled to cross the threshold into a true understanding of technology. In other words we can now inure an understanding of technology which involves getting to know what it truly is, that is, its essence and its intimate connection with vision in as much as we examined it closely and carefully and unpacked its imaginative perception as revelation.

3.3 Technology: A true understanding

What was established as we concluded above was that the essence of technology involved what Heidegger calls a “revealing”. What does technology have to do with revealing? Heidegger (1977: 12) asks. His most succinct of answers is “everything” though his grounded response puts his argument into sharp relief:

For every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing. Bringing-forth indeed gathers within itself the four modes of occasioning-causality- and rules them throughout. Within its domain belong end and means as well as instrumentality. Instrumentality is considered to be the fundamental characteristic of technology. If we inquire step by step into what technology, represented as means, actually is, then we shall arrive at revealing. The possibility of all productive manufacturing lies in revealing. Technology is no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing.
If we ask quite fundamentally what is being revealed, then surely the most direct answer is that the four modes of causality and with it the very social conditionality of possibility of ‘bringing-forth’ And moreover in the actual appearance of the artifact what technology reveals is the modality of being of that which is brought forth and thus its mode of being as it relates to the particular way of being human at a given point in time, that is, the historically constituted sociality. When we take up Heidegger’s example of the chalice and ask what a true ontological understanding of technology succinctly, amounts to, this is what might obtain in unpacking the causal complex,

- **causa materialis** reveals the chalice raw material, its natural properties and qualities and thus its social suitability and value and in this sense its sociality and sociability and by extension that of the social agent which additionally, includes the functionality of making the silver available;
- **causa formalis**, takes up this silver with the aim of producing a form, namely, the chalice, and thereby reveals its sociality and sociability as aesthetic;
- **causa finalis**, in the context of spiritual and ritualistic purposes, the chalice reveals its sociality and sociability as such and thus its social context and its worldliness is disclosed;
- and finally in **causa efficiens**, the means of its transformation is revealed and thus the totality of social being is visited upon this modality as the artifact is released into its context..
What this revealing, immanent in causality, turns out to be is a modality of knowing, but most importantly not as a site in the formation of knowledge, as epistemological, but in reality a way of primordially disclosing in social practice both the natural and social worlds. Both of which occur in the movement from “concealment” to “unconcealment”, or as Heidegger also refers to it from “hiddenness” to “unhiddenness”. What the hermeneutic phenomenology has revealed thus far is that we have crossed over from the ontological and existential diminution of instrumentalism to its release into the complexity of a social hermeneutic which makes of technology much more than a means with or without ends. Instead technology is an ontological modality for disclosing social being, being and worldliness, in a word, reality in so far as it is a way of ‘revealing’.

What we now ask is, if, this ontological dimension is indeed its province, then, how does technology and ontology end up being bound together, in Heidegger’s (2003:255) thinking, such that he is able to say that “it [technology] is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.”

3.3.1 “Techne and “episteme”: technology, and truth

Heidegger (1977: 13) traces this relationship between technology and epistemology to the origins of the word technology, and finds that it “stems for the Greek technikon [and] means that which belongs to techne. He cautions that the word techne, then, carried different meanings that is, before it became a site in which the hierarchy between the sciences and the crafts was established (see 2.2.1). Firstly (Ibid):
Techne is the name not only for the activities and skills of craftmen but also for
the arts of the mind and the fine arts. Techne belongs to bringing-forth, to poeisis,
it is something poetic.

Secondly, Heidegger (Ibid) identifies in Plato a second type of use:

The word is linked to episteme. Both words are terms of knowing in the widest
sense. … Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a
revealing.

The first point of note is that the ancient Greeks as far as the concept ‘techne’ is
concerned drew a point of equivalence between the manual and ideational. Thus even
though one may be dealing with two different orders (art and craft) it nevertheless
amounted to the same essence in its bringing-forth as a way of ‘revealing’. And it is this
essence that renders it equivalent in this sense that it is a way of bringing-forth as
opposed to the hierarchical relationship that is suggested between science and technology
as epistemic formations. This distinction between bringing-forth and knowledge
formations should be clear lest we confuse and consider what was earlier raised (see
2.2.1) as contradictory and miss the point about its essence. What this essence is is that
forms of activity, both manual and ideational, cause something to come into appearance
or presence and as such reveals its way of being.
In Heidegger’s concept both craftwork and the arts of the mind is a bringing-forth. But each bringing forth in turn as terminus as quem (causa finalis) conceals its modalities of cause whilst the process of its production (causa efficiens) reveals the latter modality in the said causal complex. In so far as the technological is a mode of producing it is that which sets up or marshals the modalities of causation in its sweep. However, without the requisite knowledge entailed in the four modalities of course and their unity, the technological act remains mute except for the artifact and its allusions. The point being made epistemologically does not hinge on the content of the modalities of cause in each instance, but rather hinges on the very quaternary modality of causation itself. In this regard the discursive scope of ‘techne’ opened up by Heidegger (2003) issues forth a way of speaking about the essence of technology that suspends issues concerning the social or intellectual division of labour. In this regard we may say that the latter is arguably true at the level of the sociabilities involved though we would argue it does open up in the essence of technology as revealing a way to engage with social being and its related sociality. This we would say is manifest in the way something presences itself in our presence and how our presence as such is in turn overdetermined by the given way of revealing.

What seems to be at stake is an understanding of all modalities of production, beyond ‘good and evil’, something in itself (an sich, sui generis), as that which is a way of bringing something into presence. Furthermore, at a fundamental level, one encounters in technology’s instrumentality, its means, that which makes possible the appearance of
something, or another, but this, as noted, is not its essence merely the reductionism we find in our contemporary understanding of technology and its truncated hermeneutic.

There is the added quality to that which makes possible some appearance, in other words, to the unity of the four modality of causality occasioned by “bringing-forth”. What this is, is simply that the bringing-forth in moving between “concealment and unconcealment” come to rest in its essence which is its way of “revealing”. And it is a ‘revealing’ in as much as it is presupposed in the object, as case in point, which comes into appearance as such it is a way of being which as far as we can tell is a way of social being. This will become apparent when we engage the existential – ontological dimension of this thesis in our account of what the sociality and sociability is that comes to constitute the basis of what it means to human and Dasein; and thus inform our understanding and interpretation of being as we engage the world we are in and constituted by. It is the way of revealing that is embedded in technology and its critical position in Heidegger’s technological understanding of being that we engage this phenomenological description.

3.3.2 Technology and revealing

In what specific sense does Heidegger (2003:255) means that technology is a revealing of the world when intuitively and experientially we encounter it as instrumentality.

Whoever builds a house or ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth, according to the four modes of occasioning.
What is noteworthy, here, for coming to grips with Heidegger’s concept, is his repeated emphasis of that moment, which he considers to be critical in seizing upon when technology discloses its essence, as that, which is a way of knowing. The modality in which this way of knowing impresses itself upon the human agent, is through an engagement in the world, in sociabilities as social practices of all sorts such that therein the nature of the world stands revealed; but what makes for such revealing, which is such that its epistemology is too fleeting to catch. To be sure: there is something of a mysterium to be countenanced in the way a human imaginary is able conjure up a theory, works of art, poetry, technological design from its contemplation in the mind. Thus it seems to us that Heidegger chooses to approach the problematic of technology from the ontological end, that is, from what it says about the nature of the world and being as mutually engaged and embedded in its existential – ontological structure. Put differently what we may infer from Heidegger’s analysis is that the revealing he refers to is an ontological imperative of technology as it relates, in this instance, to the nature of the world and its object formations while its instrumentality may be considered its teleological imperative in the restricted sense of the term. The epistemological principle of this revealing seems to suggest a logic of integration and articulation of four modes of causality based on an extant technological modality (modern and or pre-modern).

Heidegger, however, takes issue with the instrumental tendency predisposed as it is towards ontologically embellishing causa efficiens in virtue of its position to revealing by arguing that all four modalities are co-responsible in the causal complex. The technological imaginary or way of revealing configures causality and though it is a
human activity it is not of human making. It is rather of the order of an ontological imperative. How this plays itself out in technology Heidegger has this to say:

This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisaged as completed, and from this gathering determine the manner of its construction.

What is sought here with Heidegger’s notion of the essence of technology is a concept of this technological way of revealing as a modality of social being. Though, similarly, we intend to remain consistent with Heidegger who is mindful of obviating the attendant pitfalls associated with an instrumentalist reduction of causality to only that of causa efficiens (i.e. the means). Likewise when considered in relation to the modality of causa finalis the essence of social being can similarly suffer ontological diminution viz. that of being reduced to one modality of cause, only this time its sociabilities in causa finalis, or as efficiens a means to be used and disposed of as contemporary case in point. Rather, what we have in mind with respect to the very condition of possibility of the technological is its relation to social being. This ontological quality he refers to as “revealing” does not inhere in the technological, that is, it cannot be read off technological artifacts. As such it is of the essence of technology, a quality of all technology but a quality not to be found in anything technological, in particular.

Thus, revealing as it is being developed is not passed on from technological artifact to human beings thus informing our social being; but rather in the particular modality of
technology as a complex whole, a particular way of revealing is imparted to the social
formation, in its wake. Through our socialization and acculturation within this
technological milieu we acquire a technological understanding of being and a
 technological mien as distinct sociality and a normative order which is a distinct set of
sociabilities or practices and functionalities. Of course, the problem that Heidegger
identifies in this regard is that the striking efficacy of technology as means realizing all
manner of things useful and superfluous has overshadowed its ontological essence. The
point, with dystopian undertones, is that in making the means available to provide weird
and wonderful ‘gadgets and gizmos’, which shape our daily lives in perceptible and
imperceptible ways, and which often drive us to distraction, technology simultaneously,
in its ontological dimension impresses upon us a technologically conditioned way of
being. This way of technological social being is tied to its particular way of revealing
which in its modern equivalent threatens to imperil us with its nihilism displacing as it
does our social being, and its attendant humanity for a technological being with nothing
but a technological functionality in place, as we will uncover when we next deal with
modern technology.

Thus, in Heidegger (2003) we are able to draw a relationship between technology,
causality, revealing and social being. Technology as a modality of revealing in this regard
discloses itself to the shipbuilder as a gathering of the four modes of causality. Heidegger
makes this quite explicit in the quote above where he makes reference to the quaternary
causal complex evidenced as the aspect (or form), which refers us to causa formalis, its
matter to causa materialis, the finished thing in terms of the socio-cultural relationship it
engenders as causa finalis and finally the manner of its construction which gathers all the modalities of cause and amounts to a causa efficiens. Thus, in his examples of ship, house and chalice it is clear that when considered in relation to the four modes of cause one can clearly account for their causality in a composite and comprehensive manner. However, considered from the vantage point of its instrumentality as it is considered in the main, the biggest casualty in this concept as far as the disciplinary concerns of this thesis are concerned is the diminution nay erasure of the social composition of technology. In displacing causa finalis that is its social framing, technology’s essence, as way of revealing or knowing cannot be marshaled to shed light on the true relationship between technology and society. Put differently seen from the vantage point of causa efficiens (instrumentality) what obtains is a dialectic without its opposite that is a technological dimension without the social and that is indeed a dystopia. Though properly conceived technology’s essence lies not in any one mode of cause nor in all of them conjointly but rather in the way of revealing or knowing that unifies or concentrates the modalities of cause in engagements in the world, in social practices.

It should have become apparent by now that Heidegger is not fixing the essence of technology to the process of its production nor to the means of bringing it about. In precise terms the essence comes down to (Heidegger, 2003:255):

Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment takes place, where aletheia, truth happens.
The essence of technology lies in the particular way in which the four modalities of causation are revealed in social being prior to its actualization in the thing. In this sense it amounts to a way of knowing through doing but most of all in being embedded in the social formation. The question remains what does technology as essence reveals to us. We may think of technology as that which is brought to bear in our quest to know something. In other words in addition to asking what the essence of technology is as means and instrumentality that is in relation to doing one also asks what is its essence sui generis in relation to knowing the world. With respect to the latter technology is predicated upon revealing the ‘ontological truth’, that is, at bottom, according to Heidegger (2003), about the nature of the world and being. What this amounts to is that technology viewed outside the purview of instrumentality and its attendant rationality is a way of getting to know what has become of the world and being through probing the relationship between technology and society as it has unfolded or unfolds in the relationship between social beings, their concerns and practices and the things or objects taken up by them and in them being taken up by things and objects. This is technology’s essence, a complex social reality, whereas technology considered as instrumental is discounted to such an extent that it approximates to a ‘reductio ad absurdum’.

Thus far, what we have isolated in Heidegger’s (2003) analysis is his concept of technology in general with regard to the distinction between a correct understanding of technology and a true understanding. What has emerged is that the essence of technology is a “way of revealing” (aletheia) though what is fundamental to it is its instrumentality, or so it may seem. And as we are all too aware in sociology is that all is hardly ever as it
seems and thus we will track into Heidegger’s (2003) analysis of the essence of modern technology and its ontological distinctions. What we are moving to is a concept of technology in which to think, how social being brought under its sway might serve as a heuristic to understand the relationship between technology and society in the 21st century.

Perhaps the question is fatally flawed in as much as the modality chosen (technology) is of such a nature as to confirm rather tautologically that the world is being technologised. Such a danger is indeed proximate in a correct understanding of technology but notwithstanding this pervasive danger what frees one from such an instrumentalist discursive shadow is that we are approaching technology from a different vantage point viz. its ontological dimension. Thus, we seek in the heuristic of technology something by way of what it might reveal about sociality and the sociabilities that arise in relation to being involved in-the-techno-social-complex in terms of how it increasingly comes to ontologically substitute the real for the virtual and the simulated, and as such comes to constitute as social being a technological modality of being, that is, a particular way of questioning, thinking, knowing and revealing. The objective herein is to tap into the unique position of technology poised as it is in the crossover from an analogue world to digitally constituted world. In other words we are put in a relationship with modern technology which has shifted from one involving us in discrete technological objects to one which involves us as part of an interconnected electronic technological world.
In other words the world that we have come to dwell in, in the 21st century, involves us in a different relationship with technology because it has undergone a fundamental shift from the modality of “bringing-forth” and it is this rupture or break that we now turn our attention to under the rubric of modern technology from Heidegger’s (1977) understanding in his “Question concerning technology”. Our concern is not with the specificities of this transformation and its technological artifacts but rather in hermeneutic phenomenological vein we seek the understanding that underlies the shift to modern technology and its modality of “bringing-forth” with its concomitant way of revealing and how it informs our understanding and interpretation of social being.

3.4 The essence of Modern Technology

What is being suggested is that while the essence of technology according to Heidegger lies in the ontological domain of revealing it is not homogenous for all time and space. Thus, what we have here is the dimension of time, historicity, and moreover different social modalities related to technology, and thus moreover, a sociology. And, in this regard, what is noteworthy is that in the ontological distinction between technology per se and modern technology there are not only different modalities of revealing that are evidenced but moreover that these approximate to different sociological sensitivities and sensibilities, or, in the concept that is being developed in this thesis, social being. These modalities, Heidegger (2003) contends, in turn evidence qualitatively different types of relationships that ensue in relation to the particular modes of revealing classified as “bringing-forth” and by contrast its modern version which is a “challenging-forth”.

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We will focus on Heidegger’s (2003) distinction between the modality of “bringing-forth” (poiesis) which evidences a close relationship to the ontological dimension of technology, that is truth (aletheia) and modern technology where this access to the ontological domain is blurred and obfuscated by the particular way in which revealing is reconfigured as “enframing” which as such reshapes social being. The discussion that follows, hones in on this distinction, in order to develop a clear understanding of Heidegger’s concept of modern technology, so that we may free up a discursive space, to later, think the specificity of its sociality as modern technological being and its relation to the sociality of social being.

3.4.1 Modern Technology and revealing

The point of distinction that is taken up here is the way in which, Heidegger posits an essence to technology per se, and yet maintains that modern technology has a distinctive essence. In approaching the question thus we intend to probe the kind of relationship Heidegger (2003:256) proffers with respect to modern technology and society.

What is modern technology? It too is a revealing. Only when we allow our attention to rest on this fundamental characteristic does that which is new in modern technology show itself to us.

For Heidegger (2003) modern technology sets upon the world or nature in a way that is qualitatively different from its precursor. In his use of the examples below he sets out what he considers to be the essence of modern technology. Of note Heidegger (2003) identifies the essence of modern technology to rest in a ‘way of revealing the being of the
actual’ or the world, but this time he introduces a distinction that typifies the modern condition, which he refers to as a “challenging –forth” as opposed to a “bringing-forth” of nature. This concept of challenging nature or setting upon as distinct modality of revealing of modern technology is distinguished from “bringing-forth” in Heidegger’s (2003; 256) example of farming and the generation of power. Thus:

The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In sowing grain it places seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase.

What Heidegger conjures up here is an organic relationship between society and nature that is mediated by a particular modality of technology that amounts to a “bringing-forth”. In this modality we are presented with a view of technology that suggests that its essence or way of reveling is a “bringing-forth”, so to speak, of the harvest, as case in point. What distinguishes this relationship from its modern equivalent is that “bringing-forth” is not predicated upon exacting from nature as it is with the former but is concerned with fitting in with the rhythm and pace and essence of nature premised in the ‘care and maintenance’ of its forces, and thus, in this process, over its revealing. Here we find in a pre-modern technological modality of social being an attunement with nature or physis as that highest position in the ontological schema.
In the 21st century we are confronted with modern technology and a sociability which
seizes and sets upon nature through genetic engineering and large scale commercial food
production, as case in point. By contrast, that which is a ‘bringing-forth’ provides the
basis for seeing the harvest as object in its own right and as such is celebrated as thing in
itself, sui generis, the product of great care and maintenance. In other words the social
being in attendance in pre-modern technology treats nature with integrity and dignity
with a sociability that sets things in order for the bringing-forth of physis to take its
course as its way of revealing being. The issue at hand is how this “setting-upon-nature”
attributed to the “challenging-forth” of modern technology differ according to Heidegger

This setting-upon that challenges the energies of nature is an expediting, and in
two ways. It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is
always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e.,
toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense.

The distinction between the modality of revealing as bringing-forth from that of
challenging forth is captured in the above in as much it surfaces the question of the
relationship of modern technology to modern physics in regard to unlocking and
exposing nature. And secondly, with respect to “maximum yield …” above, it addresses
the logic or imperative of modern technology in so far as its realization sees the
reconfiguration of nature, as storehouse, that is, a “standing reserve” in which all objects
and forces take the form of resources that are at hand, and make up an inventory, so to
speak. Modern Physics sets the theoretical terms in which nature is reconfigured in such a way as to render it “as a calculable coherence of forces”. It is through this measurability that modern technology is able to set upon nature and exact its quanta demanding ever more to ensure that the standing reserve is “ready to hand”. This is in direct contrast to bringing forth which Heidegger (2003) tells us is a setting in order, in order to fall within the forces and natural capacity of nature.

The theoretical distinction that Heidegger brings to bear is that in both cases viz. ‘bringing-forth’ and ‘challenging-forth’ they are equivalent as ‘ways of revealing’. As such they stand in a historical relationship to each other the latter deriving from the former. However, with regard to their distinctions this emerges in the kinds of relationships that characterize how a given social formation is engaged in its technological modality. In this respect pre-modern technology is oriented to bringing-forth objects in tune with the imperative of nature whereas modern technology is oriented to challenging forth nature in tune with its imperative, that is, the “standing reserve”. Both, as technology, are ways of revealing though what they reveal and how they relate to revealing differs fundamentally in as much as bringing-forth reveals a clear relationship albeit fleetingly, to truth i.e., in what is unlocked and exposed about being and social being.

Modern technology by contrast not so much as reveals but confirms nature to be that which has already been reconfigured by modern physics/ science as that which is orderable and calculable. What comes to mind is the logic of paradigms ala Kuhn (1962)
and Heisenberg’s ontological sensibility in the act of measurement constituting the reality of the thing being measured. In this respect modern technology through its imperative for ordering and measuring consequentially obscures and obstructs a clear relationship to truth. The critical question, then, to which we now turn, is what it is about the essence of modern technology and its modality of revealing that sets up an ontological block to social being and an epistemological block to truth, aletheia. And this brings us to Heidegger’s concepts of “Enframing” and “destining” which for the purposes of this thesis have been respecified as imperatives of modern technology; what we may refer to as the ontological shaping of modern technology.

3.4.2 Enframing and revealing: imperative one, of modern technology

What follows is at the heart of the modality of being of modern technology and thus drives its type of sociality and its accompanying sociabilities, that is, its practices and comportments. We now turn to the meaning of this central concept of “Enframing” which Heidegger (2003, 258) has developed to capture the essence of modern technology and simultaneously establish its equivalence across different modalities of revealing.

Enframing means the gathering together of the setting-upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve. Enframing means the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology and that is itself nothing technological.

The relationship between society and technology that Heidegger sets up here is something of a technological modality of being that predisposes social being towards an
erasure of its sociality, its nihilistic imperative. In this instance of modern technology “Enframing” is made manifest epistemologically in the principle of “ordering” and ontologically in the actual as “standing reserve”. What is at stake here as can be gleaned from the above is nothing of the order of the technological but rather that of a much more fundamental and substantial nature as said and thus involves the very essence of our social formations. In as much as the essence of modern technology “holds sway” does it mean that society stands in a relationship of over-determination? To the extent that society participates in modern technology it is brought under the adumbration of “enframing”, that is, the way of revealing the actual in its ordering, as standing reserve. This is the technological import of a modality that is predicated upon an “enframing” that is a “challenging-forth” of the ‘energies of nature’ and that threatens to substitute social being with technological being should we not become aware of this ontological state of affairs. The question that arises is what the fate of social beings and the social formation is in the ontology of modern technology and its way of revealing being, in general, and social being, in particular. What Heidegger (1977: spells out does not bode well as the following suggests:

Always the unconcealment of that which is goes upon a way of revealing. Always the destining of revealing holds complete sway over men. But that destining is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only in so far as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens, though not one who simply obeys. (Heidegger, 2003: 260)
On the one hand we have an ontological imperative at work in “Enframing” in the “destining of revealing” and over which we have no control, while on the other hand we are not compelled as a social formation by the imperatives of technology. Are we witness to Heidegger drawing a distinction between an epistemological order in the essence of technology over which we have no control and an ontological order in which we are able to secure the essence of our being, as epistemic subject and not as technological subject? What Heidegger (2003) makes us aware of is that the essence of technology as such posits a particular discursive formation viz. that of ordering the standing reserve, and thus reduces all revealing, that is, truth to that which is measurable, calculable and orderable. The point of note is that Heidegger does not suggest that this ‘technological imperative’ is necessarily determinant of being. In participating in modern technology the strong point that Heidegger makes is that one needs to free up a discursive space in which one confronts its essence, its truth as reality, its ontology and not only its applied dimension, its instrumentality. Thus what is evident is that one cannot as social agents take ownership of the essence of technology and shape it as it is not a technological thing: but one may be in a position to experience it as a way of revealing, that is a modality of the knowable. In this regard we now ask what it is that Heidegger has to say about the essence of modern technology in as much as it has a bearing on what it is that holds “sway” in the way of revealing of modern technology. This is Heidegger’s (2003: 256) succinct but pointed response to the nature of “destining” which is that which holds sway:

The revealing reveals to itself its own manifoldly interlocking paths, through regulating their course. This regulating itself is, for its part, everywhere secured.
Regulating and securing even become the chief characteristics of a revealing that challenges.

What emerges in Heidegger’s thinking is that at one level one is dealing with that which is internal to revealing. In this regard one is referred to the previous discussion on the unity of the four modalities of cause as gathered within the technological imaginary of an “enframing” which was a “bringing-forth”. In this instance the relationship between Enframing and revealing is evidenced in the modality of the “bringing-forth as that which regulates the course and unity of the modalities of the causal complex. And that which regulates in the latter modality has the character of an “enframing” which Heidegger describes as a “setting-in-order” of nature. By extension in the contemporary context that which regulates or holds sway in modern technology in as much as it involves revealing as a causal complex or more precisely that which is responsible for its particular type of causal unity has the character of a “setting-upon” of nature. With respect to the teleology of modern technology, that is, the question as to what it is that is being regulated or secured and to what ends this process is being marshaled towards one encounters the actual as “standing reserve”.

To reiterate in general terms for its sociological significance what this enframing comes down to is that it is an ontology that constitutes the reality of the world as that which is orderable, measurable and calculable and ultimately manifest as standing reserve or inventory of resources. And that this fundamental relationship ensues when society engages modern technology in the pursuit of social life which as such does not offer any
choice as to whether society comes under its particular sway or not; this is a fait accompli, as one is within its essential sweep. But neither is it a relation of determination argues Heidegger (2003): in taking up modern technology the imperative rests in society observing its essence but in not necessarily obeying it. In other words in Enframing the world is revealed in a particular way as that of a “standing reserve”, a “storehouse”, an inventory of resources predicated on a Positivistic science of quantification. This epistemological model reveals nature and the world to be that which is calculable, measurable and orderable on the basis of its horizon of presence, which in Heidegger (2003) amounts to as “Enframing”. The strong point is that we need not surrender to “Enframing” to such a point where we become enveloped by the technological condition that Heidegger calls “the objectlessness of the standing reserve”. In other words it amounts to evacuating the social from the social being such that what remains are agents as “orderers of standing reserve”, as stock, as resource sans humanity.

The sociological sweep of this “Enframing” in its manifestation as instrumentalism has been evidenced in the movement of the modality of “scientific management” (Taylorism, Fordism) from the domain of industrial production into the state and civil society (Post-Fordism), as in the inner sanctum of the academy (neo-managerialism, the university and the epistemic project) and right into the micro domain of the private (micro-wave suppers, TV-dinners) access to personal information). This much is experientially borne out. What we seize upon here is that Heidegger is in effect making the argument that the essence of modern technology, “Enframing”, has the power of a ‘command’, that is a ‘call to action’ to address that which is ‘urgently necessary’. Moreover, that this action is
obligatory and preemptory in as much as it sets the terms and clears the ground for participation in modern technology. In a word what “Enframing” then is, is taken up in this thesis as that which is akin to a social imperative.

What is of critical note here is the kind of relationship that Heidegger (2003) posits between Enframing and destining and hence to establish what it is that sets off the process and what role the social being plays in this technological process which up to now has tended to constitute its technological sociality by and large determinate if not determined. In order to address this epistemological matter of determinism with its isomorphic logic the thesis considers the relationship between society and technology as one informed by non-determinism but that is yet determinate. By this it is meant that the essence of technology as “Enframing” is a modality of determination but as Heidegger (2003) contends it is not a compelling force since the social agent has a choice as to how it admits itself into the technological realm. That is as “one who is spoken to” in the sense that social agency registers an awareness of the essence of technology as a way of revealing being and social being, rather than as one who seeks the illusion of mastery by reducing the technological complex discursively to its instrumentality.

What Heidegger (2003) raises here is the paradox of the essence technology: on the one hand there is that which once in its pre-modern mode as techne (bringing-forth) granted us close proximity to revealing of being, that is, its truth; and on the other hand there is that which in modern technology as enframing (challenging-forth) blocks access to its way revealing or truth by delimiting us to the horizon of intelligibility of the standing
reserve. And it is to this matter of the danger and the saving grace of the essence of modern technology to which we now turn.

3.4.3 Destining of enframing: imperative two, of modern technology-danger and saving power

What has already been established is that the essence of technology is of an ontological nature in that it is a way of revealing, which through its instrumental modality of producing things yields the causal complex that is responsible for such formations. The matter at hand now is how this ontology (revealing the actual) that is at the heart of technology as Heidegger claims (2003) bears on the relationship between technology and society. It seems that Heidegger is making two claims of sociological import. On the one hand Heidegger’s is making the claim that in participating in modern technology or its precursor for that matter society comes under the sway of the essence of technology which is its dimension of “Enframing”. This dimension of “Enframing” or framing the world within a particular technological imaginary, as case in point the “mode of ordering the actual as standing reserve” is that which configures the world and is something over which we have no control. In this regard the danger that Heidegger (2003) warns us of is that we are caught within the ontological grip of the essence of modern technology, so to speak. If, this is indeed the case, then, the question that begs is what is the ‘destiny’ of a social formation under the sway of an enframing which is a ordering of the standing reserve? Heidegger (2003:261) outlines his argument thus:
…when destining reigns in the mode of enframing, it is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing reserve, then he comes to the brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing reserve.

The character of the destining that reigns in the mode of enframing to reiterate is one described as a “setting-upon” nature in as much as the latter’s energies are challenged-forth to yield to its reconfiguration as standing-reserve or storehouse. What is unconcealed in the enframing of modern technology takes the form of an ordering of nature such that its energies are “unlocked, transformed, stored, distributed and switched about anew”. In short what is being described is the unmaking of the being of nature and the social being of the world in the making of a standing reserve where everything is reconfigured as resources.

There is thus an ontological substitution at work which leads to an epistemological substitution; on the one hand with respect to the former the objects of nature are replaced by the stock or the resources of an objectless ‘standing reserve’, and on the other hand the causality of a bringing-forth into appearance, that is, the unity of the four modalities of cause is replaced by the causality of a challenging-forth that is the ordering, regulating and securing of the standing reserve. What we now have is a technological modality of being in place of a social modality in as much as all significances which comes with the
‘relationality’ or relational nexus of the social world disappears into the disposability of beings as that which is available in the technological inventory, the standing reserve. The great casualty and supreme cost for Heidegger is that being has been forgotten and the way of revealing as its truth is all but taken up in technological being and with it our sociality and humanity our care and concern for self, others and the world.

Nothing escapes this fate of nihilism. The elision of objects that Heidegger (1977) refers to above as objectless-ness is a condition that arises as a result of the substitution of nature for the standing reserve. Whereas in the realms of nature one encounters a staggering variety of objects and energies which are brought-forth sui generis and thus differentiated the opposite is true for Heidegger (2003) in the realms of the standing reserve. In nature as storehouse, that is as standing reserve objects lose their integrity as such since they are no longer related to as differentiated entities with autonomy but as resources which are on standby ready to be taken up on demand and used accordingly in a complex interrelated techno-social world.

The point that Heidegger (2003) seems to be making is that as stock and a resource all objects have equivalence and as such they stand undifferentiated, furthermore, they have no standing as autonomous entities but exist as a function of the standing reserve. It is thus in this sense that Heidegger (2003) speaks of the objectless-ness of the standing reserve. What is of gravest concern for Heidegger (2003) is that this destining of objects in the way of revealing being of enframing of modern technology threatens human beings with the same fate. What concerns us as the gravest danger is that in seeking to show how
our sociabilities are changing we remain at the ontical level in such sociological analyses, but in taking up the issue of social being we move the plane of analysis to the ontological level and ask the deeper question as to what is the reach of technology into the provenance of what it means to be human. To say that we have become materialistic and vain is good and well but to take this into our existential – ontological understanding of social being is quite another matter one we seek to arrive at in this thesis.

Let’s examine how Heidegger arrives at his understanding of technological being by considering the ontological implications of the role Heidegger assigns the social agent in the sociology of the standing reserve. He states above that social being within the enframing of modern technology is assigned the sociability of the “orderer of the standing reserve”. This does not mean that social being does not engage nature at all in terms of its objects and energies but rather that this engagement is the extension of the logic of the standing reserve. In other words nature is viewed in terms of how it can be ordered such that it resembles a storehouse, a “standing reserve”. Thus the primary engagement with nature does not stop even start with the unlocking of its mysteries, it moves from its transformation as standing reserve which is its terminus ad quo not its terminus ad quem. This is the radical import of Heidegger’s position on the way of revealing of modern technology as ‘standing reserve’. In this regard Heidegger (2003) argues that society is no longer engaged directly in techne as a way of revealing the truth but rather that revealing devolves to ordering with the social being’s sociability reduced in scope to the practices and functionalities entailed in being its “chief orderer”.

The hermeneutic import of this is that the social agent as ontological subject is denied access to the “primal truth” or “aletheia” contained in world-disclosure and its way of revealing. Thus the supreme danger that Heidegger (2003) refers us to is twofold: on the one hand the essence of modern technology (enframing as ordering) potentially stands to dehumanize society (as resources of the standing reserve); and on the other hand enframing stands to obfuscate if not obstruct an original ontological access to “bringing-forth” or poiesis and thus revealing as truth or aletheia.

The question that begs, since we have already established that the essence of technology while determinant is not compelling, is in what relationship we stand to this unfolding of modern technology. Heidegger has attested to the “supreme danger” that the essence of technology holds thus the matter at hand is what his argument is for the “saving power” of technology. Thus Heidegger (2003: 263):

The essence of technology is in a lofty sense ambiguous. Such ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing, i.e., of truth. On the one hand enframing challenges forth into the frenziedness of ordering that blocks every view into … revealing and … endangers the relation to the essence of truth. On the other hand enframing appropriates for its part in the granting that lets man endure- as yet inexperienced …- that he may be the one who is needed and used for the safekeeping of the essence of truth. Thus the rising of the saving power appears.
In considering the saving power of enframing we are once again returned to the matter of revealing and the potentially redemptive relationship that social being can have with modern technology. Heidegger (2003: 263) restates this relationship to make his argument as to the saving power of technology.

…the challenging-forth into the ordering of the actual as standing reserve remains a destining that starts man upon a way of revealing. As this destining the essential unfolding of technology gives man entry into something which, of himself, he can neither invent nor in any way make. For there is no such thing as a man who exists singly and solely on his own.

There are two points of note that need to be isolated that bear light on Heidegger’s conception of the relationship between technology and society and the nature of the former. Firstly, technology is conceived of as standing separate from society and somewhat autonomous in as much as it constitutes an independent domain and is imbued with a revelatory essence which is its real raison d’etre. Secondly that this modality is not the preserve of the individual but is fundamentally societal in its scope and content. In other words the essence of technology does not act on the individual as much as it acts at the level of the sociological, that is, it defines a zeitgeist. Thus the saving power as its danger are conditions of possibility that ensue in the unfolding of enframing though unlike the former the latter rests not in ‘enframing’ as a way of revealing but in revealing as ‘poiesis’, as a ‘bringing-forth’ of the truth of being. But, how are we to avert the ontological hold of ‘challenging forth’ and its way of revealing the ‘enframing’ that is a
‘standing reserve’ so that we may have clear ontological access to the way of revealing of techne, as aletheia, i.e., truth.

We are offered the following caveat and corrective by Heidegger (2003: 264) as to how social being is able to engage the saving power of technology.

Above all through our catching sight of the essential unfolding in technology; instead of merely gaping at the technological. So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain transfixed in the will to master it. We press on past the essence. When we ask how the instrumental unfolds essentially as a kind of causality, then we experience the essential unfolding as a destining of revealing.

What emerges from the above with respect to the ‘will to mastery’ is that an instrumental bearing which invokes the opposite may also be said to be true or at least potentially so as far as it is able to see in its causal modality its way of revealing in ‘bringing-forth’. That is the technological assumes mastery over society and society operates at the behest of the “machine” is a dystopian view that has much currency contemporaneously. However, as Heidegger makes clear this stems from the idea that technology is an instrument and an instrumentality which while correct is not necessarily true since it never leaves the provenance of the instrumental. It is this predisposition towards the means that is, causa efficiens that shifts our gaze from the unfolding of causality as the unity of the four modalities of cause in its transcendence as a way of revealing being and social being.
The ontological casualty so to speak is that we are no longer in the proximity of revealing as the truth of being and sociality (the social world) but in the domain of the instrumental as the “destining of enframing” of modern technology and how it reshapes and reorients being and sociality. But, equally so, as Heidegger points out, we need not dwell in this ontological truncation or diminution if our gaze is trained on the essence of technology as bringing-forth. Since after all modern technology may be determinant but it is not deterministic in the sense that we are compelled to obey its imperatives that are its call to the ‘standing reserve’. In other words, as ontological subjects, that is, as disclosers of being and social being we can press past the “enframing which is an ordering”, and move onto an “enframing which is a destining of revealing”, that is, we can establish a commensurability between ourselves as ontological and epistemic subjects (disclosers of being and truth) and not fall prey to our diminution as adjuncts of the “standing reserve”, just resources and no more.

Technology is what it is: the point is to admit to a relationship with technology that is fixed on its essence which is a way of revealing; its imperatives are a destining of revealing and a destining which is a way of being as enframing. Thus, the essence of technology is akin to technology but it is nothing technological, it is in fact ontological, that is, it is conditionality for that which is, its being and its sociality. This is the saving power of technology; its essence offers us entry into its way of disclosing and knowing; it makes of society, certainly in one of its manifestations, ontological subjects as social beings and, no less. This however does not mean we have a vantage point or an Archimedean point from which we can engage the danger of technology since as
Heidegger holds we are in its midst and can only take a position subsequent to it. That is we are caught within the enframing that is an ordering and all our standards according to Heidegger (2003) are as such derived from this way of being, the standing reserve. We can confirm nothing other than the actual as measurable, calculable and orderable.

Thus Heidegger needs a vantage point outside the enframing that is an ordering of being, sociality and nature but that is yet a part of revealing to maintain the duality of “irresistibility” of enframing and the “restraint” of the saving power he sets up. To this end Heidegger takes us back to the ancient Greek concept of techne which was taken up in discussion earlier though this time to effect the very possibility of such a vantage point. It is thus to art and our visual and perceptual being that Heidegger points the way out of the technological mire and simultaneously into the theoretical path of this thesis in as much as it opens up the theme of visuality, its second leg. Given this theme of the visual it suffices to point out that to keep from muddying the waters of the discussion and development of an understanding of Heidegger’s (2003) philosophy of technology we have exercised restraint with respect to drawing out the relationship between revealing and visuality so as to take this up in its appropriate analytical space. What follows is a discussion on how Heidegger’s understands the discursive space that offers itself as a basis to engage with modern technology through the sociability of art.

3.5 Technology, art, perception – vision: saving grace as counterpoise

The problematic that Heidegger (2003) sets up with respect to the ‘ontological blind spot’ inherent in the essence of modern technology under the adumbration of its way of revealing of enframing and its destining in the standing reserve yields to the limitations
imposed on social engagement with technology. Thus Heidegger (2003: 263) contends that:

Human activity can never directly encounter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving-power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.

What emerges for consideration is that social engagement with technology at the level of its essence is a non starter since one is not dealing with something technological in nature. The essence of technology to reiterate takes the form of a modality of revealing as such one may participate in its reproduction or one may abstain, but in enjoining it one come under its determinate sway i.e. ordering leads to the possibility that “everything will present itself only in the unconcealment of standing reserve”. If this is how order manifests itself (standing reserve) in modern technology then the saving power that is revealing as aletheia (blind spot) though premised in techne is paradoxically non-technological or not of the order of technikon. To this end Heidegger (2003: 264) returns his analysis to the ancient Greek conceptual complex of techne:

There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name techne. …

There was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called techne. …Because it was a revealing that brought-forth and made present, therefore belonged with poiesis. It was finally that revealing which holds complete sway in all the fine arts, in poetry and in everything poetical that obtained poiesis as its proper name.
Clearly Heidegger above holds the view that the essence of technology as revealing that
is, as truth holds sway in the modality of bringing-forth of techne which has the character
of poiesis. But since the enframing of the challenging-forth which is the essence of
modern technology blocks access to poiesis it has to be sought elsewhere in the complex
of that of techne; in other words in fine art and poetry. Heidegger (2003: 264)
speculatively asks of this possibility and its alternative:

Could it be that revealing lays claim to the arts most primally, so that they for
their part may expressly foster the growth of the saving power, may awaken and
found anew our vision of, and trust in, that which grants?

If indeed the fine arts are granted this possibility Heidegger (2003: 264) offers a
conditional response which holds “only if reflection upon art, for its part does not shut its
eyes to the constellation of truth, … This recourse to poiesis offered as corrective in as
much as it involves reestablishing a path to aletheia or truth is but one possibility. Of its
alternative Heidegger (2003: 264) says:

: that the frenziedness of technology may entrench itself everywhere to such an
extent that someday, throughout everything technological, the essence of
technology may unfold essentially in the propriative event of truth

In the above the dialectical import of danger and saving grace Heidegger’s argument
bears on the transformation of quantity into quality in as much as he seems to suggest a
point of saturation and perhaps an ontological implosion in which enframing as standing reserve sheds the latter and yields to its essence as a “destining of revealing”. What this opens up for the thesis is that (modern) technology justifiably is a viable means to pursue the matter of social being because it serves as a sociological principle insofar as we see in it the ‘frenziedness’ with which the natural and social are continuously ordered and revealed as ‘standing reserve’ that is as technological being. In this transformation of virtually everything into the modern technological being of standing reserve or resources lays the very conditions of possibility of the danger of technology and indeed in dialectical fashion its savior which might burst open its social being in its technological malady. It is thus with this very condition and its possibility that we have sought to open up social being to an existential – ontological understanding so as to contextualize where we are in terms of the technologically transformed sociality and how far that is from the sociality that comes with our existentiality as Dasein, and or ontological and what it opens up in relation to social being and sociality. In approaching this question thus we note Heidegger’s (2003: 264) sensitivities and convergence of technology and vision albeit in art:

… in our sheer preoccupation with technology we do not yet experience the essential unfolding of technology, that in our sheer aesthetic-mindedness we no longer guard and preserve the essential unfolding of art.

What Heidegger means would be in line with his understanding that our anthropological and instrumental views on technology veils and covers it in such a way that we are unable
to let technology be and thus appropriate its being as one of disclosing and revealing what it means to be in-the-world, amongst-others and towards-our selves. Similarly, in art we become fixed by an aesthetic of some kind, and thus lose the essence of art, as disclosing and revealing of the truth of being and beings, as such we tend to close ourselves off from an understanding of perception which a phenomenological analysis reveals is about releasing something to be perceived. It is this ‘releasement’ that we seek from technology that we have seized upon in our visual beings as the ability to consider things in their unconcealment. But what this entails and how this comports with our being is the subject of a clearing of the philosophical ground of vision (chapter 4), its relation to Dasein and social being (chapter 5), and finally its complex perceptual structure (chapter six) as it pertains to vision.

We then firstly set up something of a the visual condition as analogous to the technological condition that is then subsequently taken existentially and which culminates phenomenologically in perception as a means to constitute in themselves and collectively an existential -ontological understanding of what it means to be human and how this is in its turn tied to our sociality. The sociological passage is then from the technological condition to the visual condition in order to reach the human condition as social condition which is tied to our social being that is its sociality and sociability understood existentially and ontologically, that is not taken for granted or as given. Moreover, it is in the dialectical unity of opposites of technology and art and its social being in vision suggestive in Heidegger above that we take on the latter two as heuristic
to probe the sociological conditionality of what we have centered in the notion of social being and its dimensionality of sociality and sociability.

Thus, in as much as we stand in a relation of being imperiled by modern technology and being saved by a modality of vision of art as truth that we see fit to seize upon this visile dimension and thus pursue its understanding in the relation between philosophy and vision and later its phenomenology. For it is in the modality of vision and its relation to social being and its intentional comportment as Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology reveals that is at issue in grounding and in so doing come to terms with how our sociality is threatened and what kind of sociability is to be at-hand in bailing us out so to speak. The latter is the subject of chapter five but before this we need to set out the terrain in which we think about vision as a way of clearing the ground and freeing our self from the discursive gambit of notions such as ‘natural vision’, the ‘innocent eye’, ‘immaculate perception’ and ‘bare perception’ and the like.
Chapter Four

Philosophy and Vision: visual condition as subject – object distanciation

The previous chapter took up the challenge of articulating a position on modalities of being and sociality as technologically interpolated and thus situated the basis for such an understanding within the conceptual complex of a philosophy of technology, in general, and a hermeneutic phenomenology of technology, in particular. Though, in both instances, the objective was not to remain at the philosophical level, but to probe these dimensions of thinking for their social relevance, i.e., to consider the question as to how technology is taken up in the quotidien order of being, and thus informs and shapes a ‘social horizon of intelligibility’, that is our social being and sociality. Similarly, we intend to take up the matter of vision across a broad range of conceptions to probe its grounding in sociality and thus inform particular modalities of social practices as visual condition, or visuality as such, i.e., the way in which vision shapes and reconfigures our sociality and sociabilities.

The structure and organization of this chapter on vision and visuality and their sociological import will start with some general comments on philosophy and vision and it’s problematic. The idea behind which is to embed the argument, from the outset, that vision like technology is not neutral, that is, unfettered and unencumbered, but rather that the social and the cultural is taken up in vision in ways that reconfigure our sociality reconstituting it as a distinct modality of visuality (objectification and detachment) and
vice versa. In taking up this theme we intend to shape our reading of the philosophers and social theorists who have pronounced on vision and visuality in such a way that their views are telling for its social import, that is, that it says something about social being and its dimensions albeit from the vantage point of vision and the visual. In the main we address the epistemological and ontological privileging of vision, its propensity for objectification and detachment and confront notions such as ‘immaculate perception’ and the ‘innocent eye’ all by way of clearing the ground much like was done in relation to technology. Our argument is that vision is not an unproblematic phenomenon in that it is not an autonomous entity producing its visual form in some neutral medium, but rather is ontologically grounded which gives its intelligibility, and as such opens up the theoretical task of constituting the implicit hermeneutic at work in vision derived from our social being (mode of existence-sociality), beings (human selves) and worlds (social practices, comportment to things-sociabilities).

The object of this chapter then is to consider the different ways in which, vision and the visual is understood philosophically and theoretically; its implications for how being and the world is understood; its relation to cognition, believing and knowing; and ultimately at the phenomenological level in so far as we have developed an understanding of vision and visuality that is commensurate with our concern for different modalities of being as it relates to its sociality and sociabilities in vision a little later. The objective is to move towards considering ways of seeing that do not reproduce the imperative of modern technology with its lens of enframing, but rather one that conjoins us to a modality of vision that is connected to aletheia, an ontological vision and its concomitant modality of
social being premised in Dasein as a way of revealing that offers an Archimedeian lever to dislodge ourselves from the adumbration of the standing reserve.

4.1 Philosophy of vision: vision as philosophical problem

We take up the paradox that even though vision is centered in contemporary society it is not considered explicitly when we consider how television as an example has been taken up in study. It comes somewhat as a surprise, then, that the concept of vision which features so prominently in television has by and large been overlooked and has not been given to any reflexive engagement in studies thereof. In short, it has been taken for granted. Or alternatively in the logic of Barthes (1973) notion of ‘ex-nomination’ it is precisely because vision is hegemonic that it need not be mentioned. In other words that it does not constitute an object of enquiry as such is in some sense a function of the power of the visual and it’s perceived ‘natural’ order of being. Notwithstanding, it is nevertheless obvious enough that television as a technological object of an electronic kind is consummately visual in its functioning in so far as it beams out or transmit images of all kinds accompanied by acoustics of all kinds. What concerns this chapter is not television per se but how we relate to matters concerning vision and for this reason we briefly take up the lack of a reflexive approach to vision in studies which take television as its thematic.

Whereas previously, we noted the significance of technology for being we now turn our attention to the latter as it is constituted as such within a field of vision. By way of an approach to this phenomenon of vision we tease out a paradox which looms large in
studies on media, in general and for that matter, television in particular. What one would expect to find, given the expansion and foregrounding of visuality in our contemporary age of digital technology (television, cellular phones, cameras, internet, personal computers etc., etc.), is that an understanding of vision would be considered a sine qua non for grounding a sociology of media or television. Instead of an explicit account of vision one encounters a conspicuous silence which is particularly disturbing in the otherwise pioneering and theoretically rich work on television by someone of the stature of Raymond Williams (1974). We found that even though Williams (1974: 75-76) shows an awareness of the visual dimensions of television and some of its intrinsic qualities it is still bereft of a philosophy or theory of vision. In effect he offers very little except to show as in his technological thesis on television a ruptured dialectic featuring only its conventional and social shaping.

However, to Williams’s credit he does signal the need to consider the visual dimensions of television, though here again it is not suggestive of a field of vision in which to make sense thereof, but rather at the level of a visibility, or what seems to this writer to be its visiogenic, that is its aesthetic features. Whereas Williams (1974) gives at least scant attention to the visual dimension sans vision, Fiske (1987) deals with the visual by proxy through representation and spectacle on television, though to his credit he does open up gendered ways of looking, though here again it is not contextualized within a theory or concept of vision. Adorno (1991), on the other, hand invokes a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ in considering the “hidden messages” in television images, but without
contextualizing this in a field of vision or scopic or cultural regime of signification much less a philosophy of vision.

McLuhan (1962, 1964) by contrast has much to say about the visual dimension of being in ‘light’ of the advent of the phonetic alphabet, in as much he contends that the latter witnessed “trading an ear for an eye”, though in this instance it is done within the logic of the sensorium. However, McLuhan’s (1964) error is in accepting the visual sense unproblematically as “cool and neutral” but he does open a different ontological perspective on television, which is that its mode of being is “tactile” in virtue of its capacity for synaesthesia, that is, of uniting the senses. Shifting the attention back to vision to Bourdieu (1996) ‘on television’ it is noted that his analysis is mainly concerned with a sociological analysis of the ‘field of cultural production’ and its articulation with content, as it relates to the producers and audience. There is very little reference to vision as such except to draw on literary critics who have pointed out that images produce a “reality effect”, Bourdieu (1996: 21). What is then implied in this reference to the reality effect of images is that there is something intrinsic to vision and the visual that allows for such embellishment. But without a phenomenology of vision one is left without any means to understand how images are indeed experienced at the visiogenic level, that is, in ‘light’ of its modality of visibility on television, as case in point.

Taken together what the aforementioned and countless others involved, in the main, in such research have in common are theories and analyses of television without a theory of how vision or the visual is experienced, and thus bereft of a concept of visuality to guide
and ground their thinking. We take our cue for taking up the matter of vision from such lacuna and from the fact that the contemporary technological age has fore grounded a visual modality of being, but has simultaneously pushed to the background its conceptualization and thus its relation to our social being.

What emerges is that much like the neutral and instrumental treatment of technology we find a symmetrical understanding of vision which accepts the visual as given and largely unproblematic in and of itself, and only problematised with respect to its social and ideological shaping, in the forms of representation that television images bias conventionally and ideologically. On the positive side with some felicity for our thesis the aspect of the former, that is, the conventional shaping by television raises to the fore the technological imperatives involved in how technology articulates with and informs sociabilities dealing with interpretive practices that are implied in our modalities of vision. However, with respect to the question of neutrality there is a similar tendency as to how audiences and the phenomenon of viewing television are treated. What one finds is that either a theory of vision is overlooked or subordinated thus conflating it with the sociological complex of the viewer; or it over relativises the viewers interpretive resources and thus over subjectivises vision in an under theorized and taken for granted notion of vision and the visual, thus conflating it with a semiotic of signs.

Against these concerns raised and those yet to emerge the move to seek philosophical grounding in our understanding of vision, the visual and visuality is then not only a corrective but a fundamental theoretical task. One that remains informed by a
Heideggerean sensibility also taken up by Levin’s (1988) magnum opus, “The Opening of Vision”. To this end a hermeneutic phenomenological opening of vision reveals the social practices of vision with their attendant modalities and their social import, which we consider in the light of its sociality and concomitant sociabilities. In particular we focus on the contemporary condition of technological saturation that Heidegger (2003) argues has produced a way of being or ontology of modern technology in which its essence “enframing” has closed off and blocked access to our social being thus necessitating that we open up alternate modalities of vision which challenge said technological modality of being.

We take up the theoretical challenge of exploring an alternate modality that is able to counteract the reductionist understanding of vision as instrumentalised and rationalized, that is, moving beyond a ‘visual condition’ to a nuanced concept of what is entailed in the social complexities involved in reconfiguring our ontological relation to ‘social being and becoming’. However, before we engage the latter we proceed by way of a contextualization of the theoretical ground as set and take up the different ways in which vision has been philosophized and sociologized and set up the problematic of vision. This we argue takes the form of a vision condition which amounts to the subject – object distanciation and thus the reification and objectification of our social being. The virtue, so to speak of the vision condition is that it contains the conditionality of our modality as theoretical beings but its vice is that it ruptures our existential involvement in-society.
4.1.1 Ancient Greek doctrine: Plato and Aristotle on ontological and epistemological privileging of vision

In ancient Greek thinking, with respect to Plato and Aristotle, sight is considered the noblest sense and imbued with the significance of being, both an ontological and an epistemological threshold. Synnott (1992:620) takes up the disciplinary challenge of the relative lack in taking up vision in sociology, in his “Sociology of Sight”, and much to his credit anchors it philosophically in “Plato (Timaeus 47; 1963: 1174-1175)”, to draw out the epistemic links between Greek thinking and “sight …reason, understanding, knowledge, wisdom and truth”.

The sight in my opinion is the source of greatest benefit for us, for had we never seen the stars and the sun and the heaven, none of the words which we have spoken about the universe would ever have been uttered … And from this source we have derived philosophy, than which no greater good ever was or will be given by the gods to mortal man.

In juxtaposing our being as humans to the cosmos as evident above we have the makings of the epistemological dualism in the subject – object juxtaposition as constructed and in it the incipient form of the distanciation that has come to characterize Western Philosophy particularly in its Cartesian form. It is our contention and the basis of our thesis that this is the ontological basis of the centering of a discourse in which our primary relationship to the world is accepted as epistemic and thereby centered while our existential involvement is decentered and our social being thereby attenuated.
In addition to the epistemological ramifications of Plato’s thinking that we have drawn out in relation to Synnott (1992) and made explicit there remains an ontological point to be made. In this regard one sees in Plato’s understanding above the setting up of a conditionality which raises the matter of how we come to apprehend the world through vision, and thus establish a relationship to the cosmos; and moreover that this ‘gift’ of vision by the gods discloses something of the order of being, that is, of the order of our nature as human beings. In further extending the analysis in the direction of the ‘nobility’ in which vision is held and its occularcentric dimensions is the sequential order suggestive in Plato above, which we see and then speak. What is certainly implicit in this understanding of Plato that one may infer from the above quote is that vision is considered to be unmediated, a neutral phenomenon through which we take in the world and then impart to it through discourse a measure of its intelligibility. However, this understanding is not unproblematic at all and has been taken variously in different critiques such as Jenks (1995) on the problematic of “immaculate perception”, Mitchell (1986?) on the naivety of the “innocent eye”, Merleau-Ponty’s (1964), corrective in his understanding that perception is open to a “horizon of an infinite number of perspectival views”, Levin’s (1988) phenomenology of vision in the face of the nihilism of modern technology and Heidegger’s (1962, 1975) hermeneutic phenomenology of vision and his critique of “bare perception”.

Continuing, however, with the ancient Greek theme and vision, Synnott (1992) in developing his “sociology of sight” finds in Aristotle too the makings of an epistemological privileging of sight, and thus the subject – object distanciation and
reification of social being. Though, in this regard, we too add, insofar as we are directed towards social being, the ontological significance in his analysis. Synnott (1992: 620) cites from “(Metaphysics 980; 1984: 1552)”:

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves … The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.

What we seem to concur with Synnott is the discursive foreshadowing of an empiricist epistemology in Aristotle’s understanding of the role of the senses in the production of knowledge, in general, in so far as the ‘senses’ has this epistemic capacity that it “makes us know”. At the ontological level two aspects are evident: firstly, Aristotle’s understanding of the nature of being in relation to our senses is that we are in essence epistemic beings in as much as we are given the “desire to know”. And secondly that our senses endow us with what Heidegger distinguishes as an ontological capacity, though most importantly, not in themselves, that is the ability to disclose the nature of the world and an ontical ability to distinguish things or objects in the world. Now given these capacities that we are imbued with by the senses and given the role played by vision both ontologically and epistemologically it is clear that sight is then centered. Thus as Synnott (1992: 620) points out:
“Sight is, said Aristotle, “the clearest” and “noblest” of all the senses (Dialogues; 1984: 2412-2413). The primacy of sight therefore has an ancient classical lineage.

It is this lineage in so far as it insinuates itself in the modern age and thus is implicated in Western philosophy that we seek to explicate, to which we now turn to embed our understanding of vision, epistemology and ontology. In closing, the point that needs to be made explicit, as it is only alluded to and quite veiled at that, is how this hegemony of vision of the ancient Greeks relates to the sociological condition of modernity. To this end it is noted that since vision establishes our place in the world, the cosmos, being, discourse and knowledge it is really offered as sine qua non for our very sociality and our sociability. In other words vision as understood by the ancient doctrine of Plato and Aristotle in particular is mutually constitutive.

From this natural faculty of vision emerges a sociality (awareness of being-in-the-world/cosmos) which in turn variously informs the visual as discursive visibilities (romantic and prosaic being-with-others) and finally firms up a visuality, that is, a modality in which, seeing is framed as a scopic or cultural regime of vision which as such is ontologically and epistemologically privileged. What is at issue heretofore is thus how this aspect of vision is able to transcend the threshold from the seen to the known and as such is deemed to feature prominently in Western philosophy and is thus implicated in our (post) modern condition.
4.1.2 Ancient Greek epistemological privileging of vision and western philosophy

The ancient lineage of Greek thinking as described above finds its way into Western philosophy in virtue of a visualization of knowledge predicated on the immanent logic of vision. Jay (1993: 24-26) draws on Jonas (1982) to show how vision is elevated in Greek thought and what this ocular bias implies for Western philosophy. There are three epistemic implications of note as foundational in constituting the vision condition, that is, the subject – object distanciation, which we find in Jay’s (1993) analysis. The latter engages Jonas (1982) insights into the nature of sight which we in turn marshal insofar as it bears directly on our thesis in relation to Heidegger’s philosophy of technology and its visual implications for social being. The first point of note of Jonas (1982: 145, cited in, Jay 1993: 24} deals with the privileging of the static over the dynamic as a direct import of the nature of seeing and thus:

…sight he contends is preeminently the sense of simultaneity, capable of surveying a wide visual field at one moment. …less temporal than … hearing or touch it thus tends to elevate the static Being over dynamic Becoming, fixed essences over ephemeral appearances. Greek philosophy from Parmenides through to Plato accordingly emphasized an unchanging and eternal presence.

There are a few implications that flow from this view as taken up by Jay (1993) that is of pertinence for an understanding of the experiences entailed in vision and for how this in turn is embedded epistemically and thus reaches into our social being. What strikes one from the above is that vision enjoys an expansive horizon when compared to the other
senses as far as its capacity to cover a “wide field” is concerned. This means at one level that as far as this is of epistemic bearing vision is able to take in more knowledge of the world than the other senses. However, this fecundity accordingly comes at an epistemological cost in as much as vision imparts its sensory imperatives in the form of principles that inform the knowledge production process.

Considered in light of simultaneity vision undermines the process and experiential orientation of knowledge which is its existential dimension and thus its sociality for its seeming immediacy. Thus, in effect eliding or certainly suppressing the dimension of the historicity of knowledge in social being so far as vision involves rendering that which enters its field of visibility “less temporal” and as such fully present. In reducing this temporal dimension of social being the ontological flux of life is exchanged for an ontological constancy and thus “static Being” is favored over “dynamic Becoming”.

At the level of its epistemological import the principle of knowledge is then one of establishing “fixed essences” as of the order of the world and not its “ephemeral appearances”. What we might in Heideggerean vein (see 3.2.1 and 3.3) respectively refer to as the ontological distinction between a true understanding and a correct understanding in terms of how it relates to and what it discloses about social being. The net effect of social practices of vision which limit its expansive horizon by reducing the ontological scope of vision simultaneously reduces its efficacy for engaging, or being-in-the-world, and thus limits one’s capacity for “becoming”. And similarly social practices of vision that are fixated by its visiogenic are ipso facto locked into an essentialist view and as
such beyond the pale of temporality and historicity rendering such epistemic forms sociologically decontextualised and an emaciated concept of social being.

Secondly, Jay (1993:25) takes up Jonas’s (1982:147) understanding of the import of vision for the way in which the subject-object relationship is construed on the basis of Greek thought and for its implications for setting up objectivity as such.

Jonas’s second contention is that the externality of sight allows the observer to avoid direct engagement with the object of his gaze. Thus, the very distinction between subject and object and the belief in the neutral apprehension of the latter by the former, a distinction so crucial for much of later thought is abetted by the occularcentrism of Greek thought.

This property of vision, specifically its capacity for “externality” and thus its constitution of a subject-object dichotomy culminates in social science methodology as the position referred to as “epistemological dualism”. Whilst this latter ‘view’ has come under much criticism, and legitimately so, for its wholesale borrowing of a natural science sensibility, and for taking up the Comtean positivist project calling for the methodological unity of natural and social sciences, the point here, notwithstanding, is that this orientation arises as a result of the privileging of the function of the visual as epistemological condition in the constitution of knowledge. Of further epistemological note and consistent with the dualism attendant to the externality of vision is the problematic ‘view’ that this relationship is “neutral”. Thus the occularcentrism of Greek
thought is seen to be complicit in setting up the ‘perspective’ which abstracts vision and reifies it from what we will argue is otherwise a mutually constitutive process that receives its intelligibility from the sociality of being and not the visuality of being. Thus, while the sociabilities, as epistemic practices, arising in this mutually constitutive process is visually informed they receive their intelligibility from our existential involvement in-society, which is our social being. Conversely, if what we are alluding to are the epistemological costs of occularcentrism, then what might the gains be of such a vision-centered ontology and epistemology. To this end Jay (1993: 25) refers us once again to Jonas’s (1982: 147) thinking in this regard:

“The gain”, Jonas writes, “is the concept of objectivity, of the thing as it is in itself as distinct from the thing as it affects me, and from this distinction arise the whole idea of theoria and theoretical truth. Perhaps lost by this “dynamic neutralization”, as Jonas calls it, is a clear sense of causality, because the constitutive link between the subject and object is suppressed or forgotten.

Whilst we agree with the contention that the concept of objectivity is indeed a major gain, it however is a qualified one. The point of Heideggerian significance taken up rigorously by Dreyfus (1991) is that this epistemological principle of objectivity and its stance of detachment does indeed inaugurate theory and science and as such is definitive of the Western epistemic formation. Though, what is also evident is that it comes with a reversal to the order of theory and practice, insofar as it relates to our primary and initial engagement with the world. We take this up later in much detail later (see 7.1.2.3 -7.1.3)
and as such defer to that discussion, though with regard to its occularcentric formation we seek to point out that we have here a logic of inverse proportionality. The greater the ontological force with which theory is propounded as our primary engagement with the world, the lesser is the practical and existential engagement and thus the greater is the subject–object distanciation. The ‘true’ relationship as Heidegger shows is that theory is derived from a breakdown in our practical involvement in-the-world and not vice versa. What is at stake is the decentering of our social being and with it our social hermeneutic which lies at the core of our ‘horizon of intelligibility’. Nevertheless, in as much as one is confronted by an object of knowledge in its facticity and apprehends it as such, is indeed of profound epistemological significance, as Jonas avers, in that it opens up the very condition of possibility of theory, paradigmatic thought and science. Though, we hasten to add that the positivistic conception of science could do with its social supplement in an existential science (see 7.1.2.2).

On the matter of causality we have previously argued in line with Heidegger that the Greek concept of causality (see 1.4.2) proffered by Plato and Aristotle is of the order of a conceptual complexity that is marked off against the epistemological diminution accorded it in the sensibility of modern technology with its bias for instrumentalism and its reification at the expense of taking cognizance of its embedded sociality. We still stand by this and offer a corrective to the above by suggesting that what might be missing in the ancient Greek conception is a phenomenological dimension of the experiential since their quaternary concept of causality (see 3.2.2) seems adequate enough in the light of modern technology and its reductionism. However, moving in the opposite direction of
the latter is the final point of relevance in making explicit the ocularcentrism of Greek thought and its implications for Western Philosophy. In this regard Jay (1993: 25-26) takes up Jonas’s (198; 147) themes of infinity and foresight:

The Greek idea of infinity was encouraged by contemplating the vast reach of our ocular range. So too the pull of the eye into a distant landscape seemed to grant the viewer the all important “prospective capacity for foreknowledge, which was the premise of instrumental and adaptive behavior. Once the battle against Sophism, which defended rhetoric and the ear was won, Greek philosophy could elevate a visually defined notion of disinterested, monologic epistemic truth over mere opinion or doxa.

The argument that was made previously in respect of a decontextualised understanding of essentialism, which was imparted to the ocular logic of a fixed gaze is reinforced in the a-temporality of “infinity”, and thus one is not able to rein in vision to its proportional role and is left instead with an understanding of the power of the visual as transcendental, even absolute. This capacity of the ocular for contemplating vast ranges does not end with a predisposition for infinity, but also opens up an epistemic space as indicated above for “foreknowledge” in as much as one is invited into the observation of an event as it unfolds over time and space, that is, at a distance as case in point. On the one hand it introduced a temporality in the causal unfolding of the sequential nature of an event its epistemic dimension though in reifying this property there is the cost of an ontological
displacement in as much as the finitude of human life is not as such computed and thus
with it is evacuated a sense of our epistemological limits.

What is of particular significance of this analysis of occularcentrism in Greek thought
and its implications for Western thought with a Heideggerean slant is that it foreshadows
the modality of instrumentalism. Thus, in the capacity for compressing time and space in
the “prospective capacity of forethought” an instrumental bearing is disclosed which as
yet is reined in by a social sensibility that treats objects as things in and of themselves, sui
generis, and thus as “present at hand’, amenable to being studied as such open to being
theorized. This changes under the rubric of modern technology and modern science
where instrumentalism is given full reign ontologically in as much as objects are no
longer autonomous but “ready-to-hand” as resources that together with being are
consumed by “enframing” and the imperative of the “standing reserve” such that we
stand facing the possibility of having our sociality evacuated from our being and
substituted with a technological being. But also holds epistemologically in as much as
forms of knowledge are reduced to the modality of the instrumental, that is, to the
reproduction of that which is “orderable, calculable and measurable” and as such bereft
of its social being ‘untimely ripping us from our a de-distanciated being-in-the-world and
recontextualising us in a distanciated (from our selves, each other, things and the world)
technological being in a technological world.

And finally in Greek occularcentrism Jay and Jonas point to a state of affairs in which the
sense of sight not only establishes its hegemony over the other senses, but that this
domination extends to the realm of knowledge, and the epistemic privileging of detachment over experiential involvement. With this ocularcentrism of Greek thought in place the stage was set for the reign of vision as made manifest in the ocular metaphor of the “Enlightenment” and the makings of a ‘rational’ being couched in science over and above a social being couched in social existence.

4.2 Disciplinary concerns: constituting the problematic

The critical concern at hand with respect to the matter of vision and visuality and how it may relate to social being is predicated on the subject-object distanciation and how this has bearing on the latter and its articulation with modern technology. To reiterate, as a means to set the ground for how we are to understand vision and visuality in relation to the theoretical task set, the point that is paramount is that modern technology reconfigures being, sociality and sociabilities through the imperative of enframing such that the emergent field of vision constitutes all within its purview, as resources or a standing reserve.

In Heideggerean vein what we ‘see’ in the enframing of modern technology presents itself as that which has use or is “ready-to-hand” awaiting to be taken up and used within a field of utility or instrumentality as opposed to that which is “present-at-hand” and taken up within a field of observation for theoretical or scientific study. The latter admits social being into a field of theoretical vision to be seen and studied as objects or phenomena in themselves, sociology as case in point, in the modality of a subject–object distanciation. While the former admits social being to the logic of modern technology as standing reserve, and thus is not seen as being in its own right nor even as an object even,
but rather disappears from view so to speak into the standing reserve as a unit of an integrated technological utilitarian whole, or more directly as a function of an instrumental field with a specific purpose as resource in the ‘scheme of things’.

What is being argued here is not that vision is considered to be some autonomous phenomenon, namely, that which is rendered visible nor is it but a function of sight. Instead at the ontological level, that is, in so far as one is thinking the very condition of possibility of vision and visuality one is invoking technology, in general, as a foundational basis informing the substrate or horizon of intelligibility (social hermeneutic) of what we see and how we see that which is seen. Put directly vision as a function of a modern technological ‘imaginary’ or technological, sans social, being. In particular that vision has a modality of sociality (historically informed) tied to a spatial logic (distanciation) and articulated in different modalities of technology with both ontological (conditionality of being) and ontical implications (the realm of beings, what is seen).

4.3 Heidegger and the problematic of vision:

In setting out to develop an understanding of vision as part of the problematic of our contemporary age, that is, as function of a sociological complex and the technological modality thereto attached, we have started above with the ancient Greek conception of vision as ontologically and epistemologically privileged. Moreover, we have argued that this ancient lineage is imbricated in our modern age and as such sets up an ocular problematic as ‘vision condition’, that is subject – object distanciation. What we develop
in this section is Levin’s philosophy of vision predicated as it is on Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology for a concept of vision that comports with an existential visionary being and which de-distanciates our social being such that we are returned to being-in-the-world. The objective here is not to reckon with the “metaphysical tradition” as such, nor to take up the question of the ontology of Being per se, but rather, to reconfigure the analyses of Levin such that an emergent ‘social hermeneutic’ or understanding or interpretation firms up as horizon of intelligibility which serves as connective to social ‘be-ing’. We seek not only to understand the contemporary period as a visual problematic, that is, as social symptomatic of detachment and distanciation but also as a basis upon which to think through the modality of an alternate vision capable of resisting and challenging the technological imperative implicit in our sociological condition described by Heidegger as nihilistic and imperiling our social being.

If it seems that we are going over the same ground to arrive at our conception of vision what should be borne in mind is that it is done to different effect and from a different analytic. With this in mind we take up the occularcentric problematic of vision of the ancient Greek and modern lineage to open up discussion on Levin’s (1988) phenomenological understanding of vision. The problematisation of vision serves negatively as a basis to contradict the idea that vision is neutral, innocent and sociologically unencumbered and unfettered, but positively it serves as basis to ontologically anchor our social being.
The ontological and epistemological priority that Plato and Aristotle accord to vision as discussed previously is taken to task by Heidegger (1962, cited in Levin, 1988) in his critique of the ‘metaphysical tradition’ made explicit in “Being and Time”. However, what we find in Levin (1988: 7) despite Heidegger’s protestations to the contrary is a continuation of “the paradigmatic function of vision in the formulation of ontology and the conditions of knowledge.” Citing Heidegger directly (1962: 187), Levin (ibid) presents the case thus:

In giving existential significance to ‘sight’, we have merely drawn upon the peculiar feature of seeing, that it lets entities which are accessible to it be encountered unceaselessly in themselves. Of course, every ‘sense’ does this within that domain of discovery which is genuinely its own. But from the beginning onwards the tradition of philosophy has been oriented primarily towards ‘seeing’ as a way of access to beings and to Being. To keep the connection with this tradition, we may formalize ‘sight’ and ‘seeing’ enough to obtain therewith a universal term for characterizing any access to entities or to being, as access in general.

In Levin’s (ibid) analysis of the above he makes points that are similar to those previously raised, that is, he also makes connections to occularcentrism but he does so in the language of a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ and thus speaks of a “complicity of vision” as “paradigm for knowledge” and “rationality”. By way of a qualification, we need to insert that in Heidegger above, we have identified a terminus ad quo that offers itself up
as Archimedean lever, in as much as sight at the level of its perceptual structure serves as corrective, as far as its intentional comportment (see chapter six) to release entities, such that they may be perceived, sui generis, is concerned. Thus, we take Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology of perception in a different direction and as such we serve notification of this here, though it is to different effect that we take up Levin’s (1988) analysis in this instance. Additionally, however, he raises the matter of complicity to the level where vision as problematic is taken up in the tasks necessitated presently in the “deconstruction of metaphysics”. But it is not this reference to the critical theoretical injunction, though important, that is immediately relevant for our purposes, rather it is his point that (ibid; 8)

What is in question in the deconstruction of metaphysics must be, therefore, the opening of vision as a ‘way of access to beings and to Being’. This question will be understood, here, as demanding a discourse on the nature and character of our normal everyday vision: the vision of das Man, of anyone-and-everyone. Such a discourse needs to be spelled out in the hermeneutical language of phenomenological psychology for experiential concreteness will call our attention to matters otherwise disregarded and can accordingly dispel some persistent forms of mystification and delusion.

‘Suspending’ the theoretical and methodological import, of what Levin holds above, for imputing a concreteness to the problematic of vision, for the moment, what is particularly significant for our thesis are the social ramifications of the metaphysical “opening of
vision”. If as Levin holds that the ontology of vision within the metaphysical tradition is such that it enables the possibility of establishing access to our way of being human, that is, the essence of our lived human reality or human existence, then it is in fact opening up a primordial or original aspect of our existence which we may take to be our ‘qualia’ for sociality, as such. For Levin, what we may call a ‘socialized’ vision offers a vantage point from which to interrogate the ontology of ‘Being’ without falling prey to the metaphysical propensity for reifying and abstracting the human social condition which we might find in what we would call a ‘sociological vision’. The latter serves to drive the point home that sociology offers us invaluable insight into society and it causal ‘laws’ emergent properties, conditions of emergence, formation, existence and transformation though from the vantage point of our social being it does so paradoxically and inadvertently from the epistemic vantage point of a subject – object distanciation and thus severs us from our place in-society. By calling attention to a socialized vision we seek to make the point that an existential dimension to sociology allows for a connective between our social being and our theoretical understanding of that being.

However, for us Levin’s interrogation of visionary being offers a way to access the socialized condition of vision in as much as it involves a conception of “normal everyday vision: the vision of “das Man, of anyone and everyone”. In as much as there is talk then of “normal everyday vision” what is implied is a prior process of socialization, acculturalisation, and thus ‘normalization’ in the notion of the vision or seeing of anyone and everyone, what we may call a ‘quotidian vision’. And as such one is referring to a ‘socialized vision’ that is embedded in-society in a particular time and de-severed space,
and thus our ontologically anchored social being. But, moreover, there is also the added implication of a vision that is not of a socialized normality but a preceding stage, a biological one that is prior to socialization, and hence primordial.

The ‘socialised’ vision when taken up in Heidegger’s distinction between ontological and ontical, where the former refers to the condition of possibility of social being, and the existential structures of being-in-the-world and being-towards-self then one sees its ontological dimension in Dasein as authentic being (see 5.3). Authenticity of being is a function of a true understanding of Dasein’s nature and it way of being human, which is foundationless and unsettled, and as such suggests a specific modality of existential vision, which is an ontological vision. By contrast a being-in-the-world or social being which is based on a social being that amounts to ‘falling’ into an understanding of sociality that is essentialised in the social roles or social identities, that is, the sociabilities, society proffers we may call to distinguish it an ‘ontical vision’, a modality of the “existentiell”.

We make this call as this modality of vision is based on an inauthentic or undifferentiated understanding of social being since it is conflated with ‘das Man’, that is, the herd instinct, and it is not towards Dasein or the self (in a non-egocentric sense) but towards whatever anyone and everyone does to be a part of them- a particular manifestation of a social role and a social identity as fixed and given social subjectivities (e.g. caste system, colonial subject, social rank, etc). Writ large it is the surrender towards a modern technological being bereft of both subjectivity and objectivity in a short a being towards
the ‘standing reserve’ and not towards the sociality of being-in-the-word-with-others-towards-self and being amidst-things as equipment and objects not merely being-resources. In other words the ontical is that concrete socialized anyone or everyone who is becoming of a particular mien and hails from a specific milieu as a matter of course without an authentic or true understanding of his or her existential – ontological social being and its open-endedness. What lies embedded in this modality of existential vision as ‘ontical vision’ is a deeper visionary being one that is aware of its authentic way of being human and that is an ‘ontological vision’. The key point is that both modalities of existential vision have their provenance in society though only the latter is borne of a true understanding of what it means to be while the former has a correct understanding that being is tied to existence its falls short in accepting that what society has to offer is of the order of an essentialised being. But most importantly in railing against the mode of revealing of modern technology and its imperative of the standing reserve, ‘ontical vision’ amounts to a surrender while ontological vision offers a vantage point to resist the nihilism that stalks social being.

There are thus two modalities of vision that we need to grasp: one of that is tied to our ‘primordial or original sociality’ and implied in Heidegger’s existential structures of the care and concern that comes with authentic Dasein’s “being-in-the-world”, “being-with-others”, “being-amidst-things” and “being-towards-self”, an ‘ontological vision’. The other of a quotidian order called ‘ontical vision’ which may or may not hold as such is distinguished by beig bound up and foreclosed in the concrete existential conditions of everyday life without a thought as to the open possibilities that lay fallow in our social
being a truncated version of the human condition. Thus, we have two theoretical tasks that arise in this regard in our concern for anchoring a concept of social being: one that shows how modalities of seeing as part of a modern technological rationality and instrumentality produces a foreclosure; and two, how an ‘ontological vision’ has within it the possibility of resisting the technological imperative and as such offers an alternative to Virilio's “vision machine” and “machinic vision” as that which stands to negate the essence of our humanity, that is our sociality.

The problematic of our modern age, in as much as one conceptualizes it, in terms of vision and its socialized correlate as visuality is offered up by Levin (1988: 8) as a social diagnostic with the following historical and sociological imperatives.

But our discourse must also bring to light the historical character of our vision: the hidden violence, the hidden nihilism. Therefore it must diagnose hermeneutically, and in an experientially familiar language, the closure-to-Being which underlies the historical character of our vision- its character, in particular, as suffering and affliction, its cultural psychopathology. Our discourse must be a ‘speech of suffering,’ telling the truth about its social production and reproduction in the world of our vision.

The sociological theme, as point of departure, with its ontological ramifications and implications, devolve, respectively, to firstly, opening up the sociality implied in the concept of the human nature of the social agent we assume in sociology, which is to be
taken up explicitly in an ontology of vision; and secondly, as diagnostic to take up the
meaning of the socialized being of *das man* as that site of the repressed, in the “hidden
violence” and “hidden nihilism” that is involved in the technological sensibility, which
has visited, and continues to visit its alienation and estrangement in the form of an
instrumentalism that has blocked us from our social being and humanity. To be replaced
it with a being, which is de-subjectified and reconfigured as ‘standing reserve’
(Heidegger, 1972) or as ‘resource’ (Dreyfus, 1991), thus reconstituted as technological
being, ‘homo technologicus’. It is these dimensions of a technological modality of being
that is denoted and connotated in vision and visuality that we have fore grounded as a way
of confronting the technological modality of being with one that bears the hallmarks of
our existential – ontological understanding of social being and its modalities of seeing.

Most of all, the problematic of vision is brought to bear positively in as much as it is
sought phenomenologically in the experience associated with relating to social being; and
negatively as a response to the pervasive silence confronting vision in the study of the
social and society in most of its guises. There is however an added dimension to this
socialized and existential vision which is of disciplinary import. To introduce it here it is
of the order of what we may call a ‘sociological vision’, one that is predicated on a
critical theoretical gaze and implied obliquely in our notion of social being as existential
– ontological interpretive framework. Though there is mush that would need to be done
to cast off its epistemological dualism in the subject – object distanciation in the form of
its recontextualisation in an existential science and a hermeneutic philosophy of science
though this is beyond the scope of this thesis it is signaled as a prospective area for
research. The real scope of an existential – understanding of social being as far as it relates to vision lays in chapter six where we open up Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology of perception and consider the notion of a perceptual release as counterpoise to modern technology as our point of departure from his claims as to the efficacy of art as alternate modality of revealing.

4.3.1 Heideggerean problematic of vision and Critical Social Theory: Levin’s mode of analysis

The nature of this critical interpretive framework or critical hermeneutic as Levin (1988) refers to it is accordingly fleshed out by way of the latter’s engagement with Heidegger’s deconstruction of the ‘metaphysical tradition’. We take this up as a way of opening up Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology to scrutiny and to contextualize his though where we otherwise feel that given his complexity the introduction of additional theoretical voices into his discourse while offering the virtue of a context nevertheless detracts from its explication. We therefore take this opportunity before we move to his phenomenology of perception. The central problem that Heidegger confronts in his theoretical quest to understand Being is directed as Levin (1988: 6) points out at the:

struggle to release the question of Being from its metaphysical history – a history of reification and totalization, egocentrism and logocentrism. But we must understand that this struggle is never finished, never final. All we can do is maintain the vigilance of a critical spirit repeatedly questioning itself.
What is at issue here is not only that the metaphysical tradition evacuates the sociological and historical context, that is, the specific and concrete conditions constituting Being from the analysis, but that we are also caught in the paradigmatic adumbration of this very tradition. Thus, even though one might be able to establish a ‘clearing’ in which to posit the question of the ontology of Being, one is never quite beyond the pale of the ‘woods’ (perhaps jungle is more suggestive) of metaphysics, so to speak. However, it is only in critical vein that we are put in a position to remain vigilant, and thus to rein in the discursive effects of the metaphysical tradition. To this end, in taking up the ‘opening of vision’ to access an understanding of Being outside of the metaphysical tradition, we are required to engage this critically by embedding it, as Heidegger does, in the existential conditions of Being, namely, one in which an abstraction and reification is traded for a “being-in-the-world” and a “being-with-others”.

Thus, the ontological question remains, though, in this instance the meaning of Being is reined in by an existential framing, albeit ‘primordial’ and even paradoxically pre-ontological. What is at work here, argues Levin (1988) is Heidegger’s ‘existential phenomenology’, as a specific instance of his mode of ontological analysis, and simultaneously his critique of the metaphysical ontological tradition and his deconstruction thereof. The point simply put is that Heidegger’s critique does not leave a void in its wake but embeds his concept of Being both historically and socially and it in this sense that we have seen fit to anchor it as social being.
In light of this concrete and specific grounding Levin (1988: 34) is doubly mindful of being critical on the one hand and on the other hand of the need for

A basic trust in our reflectively lived-in experience: how we experience our historical situation. This has to be our starting point.

Here again Levin takes care not to fall prey to the metaphysical tradition associated with the ‘reifications’, ‘abstractions’ and ‘certainties’ that frame such an understanding of experience. The way to counteract such fixities in metaphysical thinking Levin (ibid) suggests is to remember that our experiences always come from the “standpoint and viewpoint of some corner” which quite clearly refers us to social being. In this regard Levin (ibid) refers us to Heidegger’s concept of “Befindlichkeit” translated as the ‘situatedness’ (Langenscheidt’s, German-English Dictionary) of our experiences, and hence its multiplicities, that is, what we take to be its sociabilities. And flowing from this multiplicity of experiences Levin (1988: 34-35) makes the methodological point thus:

This, the saying of our Befindlichkeit, is the task I assign to our hermeneutical phenomenology, whose method trains us in the discipline of critical perception: the meticulous, exacting discipline of attention to our life-world, to what we are experiencing in the course of our daily lives. It will become apparent that that the use we shall make of this method is a critical one- that we shall be drawing upon the inherently critical power of a method which teaches us to see what previously was not to be seen. In particular we shall give hermeneutic phenomenology a
diagnostic and potentially emancipatory function, using its powers of awareness to bring to light; through the channels of our experience, the suffering and needs of our time.

In accepting that vision has two modalities that are predicated respectively on ontological and ontical dimension opens up the interpretive necessity of establishing their respective domains and their possible conjunctures and dysjunctures. These two ‘visions’ surface both an existential (former) and socialized (latter) modalities brought into a potentially contradictory relationship given their distinct articulation with social being and how they are overdetermined by their existential – ontological understanding of Dasein or what it means to be human. In as much as they are in agreement they take the form of an ontological vision, but in as much as they are contradictory they are overdetermined by an ‘ontical vision’, or ‘commonsense vision’, or better yet the vision of ‘das man’ it is the ‘socialized vision’ as ontical over the socialized vision as ontological. In other words the awareness of two distinct modalities of vision is not necessarily apparent as such.

Now given the instrumentality of the modern age and the ‘enframing’ of modern technology, the ‘ontological vision’ is displaced by a ‘falling into the technological milieu of modern technology and what passes for sociality and sociabilities is then the normative order of the way of revealing which is the standing reserve, a virtual sociality, in a word a simulacrum of the social. However, in as much as one is caught within the imperative of modern technology and the standing reserve it assumes the proportions of what Baudrillard (1994) has conceptualized as the “precession of the simulacrum”. This
is necessarily so in so far as the simulation of the social, that is, the standing reserve comes to be the real, and that which was our social be-ing now stands as the imposter at odds with the technological-reality. The ontical that is beings (presencing of entities) take precedence over being (meaning of being) the ontological, and with it our existential – ontological understanding of being for a technological one. Our vision no longer takes it intelligibility from a social hermeneutic but from technology and no more

It is thus incumbent, as Levin (1988) argues, upon a hermeneutic phenomenology to provide the theoretical and methodological wherewithal to prize open this visionary life-world of modern technology with its technological conditionality such that access to Being, that sociality which defines the essence of our humanity as ‘existence’ might be freed or opened to a different vision and visuality: one anchored in an existential-ontological understanding of social being. But it is equally incumbent as we have argued upon a ‘sociological vision’ with its disciplinary gaze, to complement Levin’s theoretical sensibilities (phenomenological psychology and a hermeneutical phenomenology) and Heidegger’s philosophy, to take up the question as to what has become or is becoming of our contemporary age with respect to the existing modalities of being and our sociality. However, how we are to get there Levin (1988: 17) contends would require a theoretical and methodological complex that engages

… critical social theory in a sustained reflection on our capacity for vision, and on the social conditions which limit, disorganize, and predispose us to misinterpret it. In order to accomplish this task, however, social theory must collaborate with a
hermeneutically critical interpretation of the history of Being represented in the discourse of metaphysics, and also with a phenomenological psychology which will put us in touch with our historical experience and enable us to understand it without being misled—without being incapacitated—by prevailing ideological interpretation, presently circulating in our culture.

With regard to that which obfuscates our understanding of vision the primary imperative that is held responsible for this state of affairs is informed by Heidegger’s modern technological “enframing” thesis (1977) and his philosophy of technology (see chapter three). Secondly, the collaboration suggested between “social theory” and a “hermeneutically critical interpretation of Being” is in line with hermeneutic approaches in Sociology, in particular, with the likes of Berger and Kellner (1981: 11) and their concept of what they call the “modern sociological perspective”. Moreover, the latter offer in their understanding of sociology a theoretical vision which equips the individual with a critical faculty with which to challenge extant dogma and to subvert their ideological assumptions and as such goes some way to address the psychological dimension without psychologising the social and thus losing grip on the modern sociological perspective (ibid).

At the heart of the modern sociological perspective is the perception of the autonomous and frequently covert dynamics of human collective entities. … It follows that to be able to perceive ‘society’ at all there must be a certain debunking angle of vision. It follows further that sociology was a way of seeing
the world as soon as it found its object of enquiry, and all later elaborations of this peculiar vision are a sort of unpacking of what was already implied in that first act of perception.

The convergence between Levin above and Berger and Kellner is that they are all critical of the way in which social existence presents itself in terms of its appearance. In fact what is being suggested is that social reality or social being (existence) is, so to speak, muddied on the surface, which as such should be debunked by a sociological vision, which is able to penetrate the surface reality so as to uncover its “covert dynamics”. Levin on the other hand suggests that in order to penetrate the manifest social obfuscations requires a critical interpretive framework or hermeneutic.

There is however an important distinction that needs to be made in respect of the way I have used socialized vision as opposed to Levin’s analysis of Heidegger in relation to the conception of the vision of “anyone-and-everyone (das man), or put slightly differently, the ‘commonsense’ ‘viewpoint’. To distinguish between these visions it should be noted that reference is made to socialized vision to demarcate its basis in ‘Das man’ from a sociological vision which is more akin to the vision associated with critical hermeneutics and its penetrative theoretical gaze. What we might see if such a conception proves viable is that such a sociological vision would move our ‘ontical vision’ beyond the obfuscations of socialized vision to one that sets up the conditions of possibility of a true rather than a correct understanding of the sociological conditionality of our contemporary age predicated as it is on modern technology. However, there is more that one might
expect from the critical modality that is to be embedded in a ‘sociological vision’ and which does bring an added dimension to Levin’s critical hermeneutics as made evident in Berger and Kellner (1981: 12).

In this debunking quality of sociology lies its intrinsically subversive character. Any collective order is always legitimated by official definitions, and the demonstration that only the latter tell only a part of the story or, worse, serve to obfuscate what really goes on, is intrinsically subversive of ‘good order’. In other words, sociology begins to ‘subvert’ from the first moment that it applies to social reality its peculiar way of seeing. It is very important to emphasize that this is so regardless of whether a particular sociologist intends to subvert.

The point of engaging in research to paraphrase what Marx famously made apparent was not only to interpret the world, but to change it and in this sensibility the critical dimension in sociology amounts to ‘being’ subversive. If, as Heidegger believes and Levin has echoed that modernity with its technological imperative for enframing and reducing everything to the way of revealing of a standing reserve leads to nihilism, that is, the evacuation or erasure of our humanity, our sociality, then, the theoretical imperative of sociology is to make this condition apparent in its sociabilities; and the social imperative is to offer an alternative socialized vision of ‘das man’ in an existential – ontological understanding of social being; and its political imperative is to challenge an order that legitimizes and entrenches the technological distemper of instrumentality and neutrality, that is, a technocracy. To this end we enjoin Levin as he takes up the
theoretical and methodological complex of the ‘opening of vision’ though we will do so
with the aim of centering sociality in a way that adds disciplinary rigor to our theoretical
quest for an existential – ontological understanding of social being as diagnostic, critique
and subversion of the sociological condition of our contemporary age as an instance of
the mutually constitutive nature of technology and visuality in the imaginary of what we
may call the time of the hegemony of the visiogenic (the simulacrum) and the evacuation
of our humanity.

4.4 Defining an ontology of vision: being and society

The critical concerns that we focus on here take into account the different modalities of
vision that we have spoken to in various ways to make specific points about visionary
being without necessarily offering an interpretation or our understanding of these terms.
Here we take up the matter of vision explicitly and attempt to flesh out what its structure
and nature is, as taken up by Levin (1988) especially for its Heideggerean framing
towards an understanding of how it relates to our technological modality of being as a
way of clearing some of the ground for a hermeneutic phenomenology of perception
later. Much of our discussion above has demarcated variously three types of vision, two
of which was used to disciplinary ends in as much as it involved its ramifications for a
sociological way of seeing, that is, a theoretical vision; and in so far as it was implicated
in the socialized vision of ‘das man’, that is a common sense vision. However, we also
referred to ontological vision that is tied to an existential understanding of our being as
Dasein (see)–and that this is linked to the modality of being as authentic. What we hold is
that this ontological vision is ultimately the only legitimate basis from which to proceed
to a theoretical vision, as sociological vision, for without which the starting point, if
located in an ontical vision, or ‘socialized vision as end in itself, rests on a spurious premise. This inauthentic understanding of being invariably leads down the road to confirming that which otherwise should have been debunked. Thus ontological vision is the existential grounding, which serve as the connective for our sociological theorizing since it is anchored in social being. And even though the former (theory) leads us into the social detachment of a subject–object distanciation, if however we are to be anchored in the latter (social being) we would do so with one ‘eye’ firmly in-society. If we consider it in this sense that it is stereoscopic vision that gives us dept-perception we would have an ontological eye (existential seeing) and a sociological eye (theoretical seeing). But in a manner of speaking, we would not seek a theoretical eye and a sociological eye which is one and the same, and thus entirely removed from society, sociality and social being. In formulaic fashion sociology plus sociological theory gives us a double dose of theory, we are twice removed from our social being, but existential ontological understanding of being and sociology/sociological theory might give us an existential sociology which amounts to being-in rather than being beyond.

What we develop now is a discussion and analysis of the different modalities of vision from an ontological and phenomenological point of view though always mindful of its ramifications and implications for both a sociological vision and a socialized vision. The argument is roughly that an ontological vision that is not tied to a true understanding of social being as authentic self, and being-towards self becomes subsumed by the ontical vision of a socialization that is towards the other as one of ‘them’, that is, ‘anyone and everyone’. This latter socialized vision is in turn conditioned by an ‘enframed’ which is
the way of revealing of the standing reserve a technological vision. These latter two ‘visions’ may be disclosed by a phenomenological sociological vision which has disciplinary overtones but is not necessarily limited to it in the formal sense, but rather captures those who may have a developed as per Levin a critical hermeneutic with which to look at the social world in a way which discloses its underlying structure and being and is most importantly able to link it to the ‘question of social being’.

What is argued is that the disclosure of our visionary being is not as Heidegger argues a function of our theoretical being (present-at-hand vision), but rather of our existential conditionality (circumspect vision) oriented to care through the structures of ‘being-in”, “being-with, “being-amidst” and “being-towards”. This offers to Heidegger’s existential understanding the corrective that our being is not as the metaphysical ontological tradition would have it, that we are all at some level philosophers (epistemic beings) but rather that in our embodied social being and existential – ontological understanding of this being we might more appropriately be ‘sociologists’ (homo sociologicus), in the hermeneutic phenomenological sense, though decidedly not in the positivistic modality as this serves merely to confirm our ‘enframing’. However, most importantly it may be so but only in the derivative sense as flowing from our existential social being-in-the-world and our practical engagement in the world and its ontological vision which when ruptured surfaces that capacity for theory and thus our sociological vision as such kicks in.

4.4.1 Primordial vision, socialized vision and being
The need for a phenomenology and hermeneutic of ‘primordial’ understood as earlier and original vision arises from the import of Heidegger’s technological thesis that ‘being’, that is, all organic and inorganic forms of existence, including of course human beings, are caught within the imperative of ‘enframing’, that is, the reconfiguration of all that exists (beings) as ‘standing reserve’, stock’ or resources, in sum a utilitarian or functional value. If this is indeed the case, that we have consequentially, over time, become estranged and even alienated from ‘Being’, (that which constitutes or grounds existence, in general), and ‘beings’, (that is, different forms of existence), then the primordial question that arises is what is the nature of this rudimentary or earlier formed ontological capacity which has been transformed. And most importantly, for our purpose, in tandem with Levin’s reading, in this instance, of Heidegger’s (1962) “Being and Time”, though to different ends, we ask how primordiality relates to our visionary being as such. To this end Levin (1988: 9) is most efficacious in the way he sets up the relationship between being and vision thus:

‘The essence of thinking’ according to Heidegger, ‘is the understanding of Being in the possibilities of its development….’ Vision is a capacity of our being. As such vision is a process of development. There is no reason to suppose that this development does not, or could not continue- for a lifetime. If, in our adulthood, vision is ruled over by an ego-logical subject, what could vision become when it is committed to overcoming this rule? Since we are visionary beings, this question is addressed to us, questioning our being.
What emerges above is in fact a case of primordial analysis in so far as Levin ties Heidegger’s notion of thinking and our visionary capacity to the onset of our developmental trajectory. The problematic, as Levin constructs it, is that, if, we assume that vision is indeed subject to a developmental process, but that it is intercepted in our adulthood and ‘overruled by a rational mindedness, then, the matter of its primordial nature becomes an issue for contemplation, where the content of this ‘ego-logical’ deviation in visionary being is one characterized by nihilism, as previously stated, and thus symptomatic of the contemporary sociological condition.

However, this is not a fait accompli, as our capacity for thinking, which is tied to our being, and hence its concomitant possibilities of development, suggests that we do have alternatives to that which is extant, in that which is inherent in our primordial visionary being, and that which is yet to disclose itself, an ontological dimension. In other words, we are not ineluctably tied to the displacement of our sociality and as such our humanity by the modality of modern technological being, in so far as it ‘destines’ us to a reconfiguration as ‘standing reserve or resource, fit only in that we are offered up to be ‘ready-at-hand’ or used as required. What this alternative is though, involves how it relates to the primordiality of vision, which is yet to be articulated. In the interim however, as a lead up to the latter eventuality, we need to give an account of the ontical constitution of our being, which involves the immediacy of our socialized and acculturated selves, in a word, what might be called our, ‘sociality’ that is our capacity to comport to the world, things and others. Exactly how we do differs according to the
cultural sociabilities that emerge to inure our social being in our contexts of involvements and thus make sense of being, in general.

The question of a primordial vision is, then, also grounded socially, albeit seemingly paradoxical: consider that Heidegger’s concept of “das Ma”, that is, the socialized and normalized social subject who is a product of his or her cultural milieu and thus rendered sociable, is argued herein to be a superimposition on the ‘sociality-of-being’ which inheres in a particular predisposition, as such. And furthermore, that this level of superimposition, or sedimentation is met with another form of social mediation, in the technological modality which is operant as the imperative of ‘enframing’, and thus responsible for further blocking off access to the primordiality of, what we argue is, the ‘sociality-of-being’, in as much as it relates to the primordiality of the existential structures of “being-in-the-world” and “being-with-others”.

In seeking to establish the primordiality of our visionary being, it is both for Heidegger and Levin and indeed for our thesis a matter of establishing the basis of a corrective, which may be able to ‘open’ up vision such that we may be able to free ourselves from the restricted horizon of a socialized and technologised vision estranging us from an authentic relation to being, for a ontological horizon that puts us back in touch with the existentiality of our sociality which as stated is tied existentially to our ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-with-others’. More directly, it offers us a hermeneutic with which to understand modalities of vision in contemporary society such as television, for example, in such a way that it reconnects us to our existential or embodied sociality with its
concomitant vision and predisposition; that in short amounts to a de-technologisation of vision and redress of the instrumentalisation and rationalization of vision as such.

The questions that beg are, whether this concept of ontological or primordial vision -as having developed earliest in the socialization process where an agreement of shared practices, a normative order was reached in socialization and which serves as basis of an understanding of what it means to be Dasein or being-, returns one to a metaphysical origin that presents a modality of vision, which is in its final form, and therefore, one that is reified from both history and society. And moreover, what form this Heideggerean primordiality takes, and how is it related to Levin’s primordial and embodied vision with regard to the specificities of its concept and application.

What the conceptualization of a primordial ontological vision opens up is a relation to historicity in as much as one is concerned to establish earlier forms of the instantiation of vision in relation to its rudimentary beginnings and how this emerges in history and society. And secondly in as much one sets up a primordial vision against an average everyday day, common sense vision in the socialization and acculturation processes one encounters a sociological question by raising the role of society into the foreground. Thus, in the former a diachronic dimension is opened, and in relation to the latter a synchronic understanding obtains, both of which raises the temporality of vision in as much as a relation is opened between the past, present and for that matter a future, in as much as one is oriented to an existing crisis, the present, (nihilism) and thus a possible alternate state of affairs, a future. This relation to temporality (past, present and future) is
concretized by Levin in relation to how he understands the relationships involved in our visionary beings as it relates to history, society and the individual and is thus paradoxically a relativistic primordiality. The question thus begs and Levin asks to reiterate 1988: 10):

If, in our adulthood, vision is ruled over by an ego-logical subject, what could vision become when it committed to overcoming this rule? “

To this end, the task at hand to which we now turn is to establish, accordingly, a perspective which draws a relation between primordiality, history, biology and society, which is mindful of the metaphysical propensity for reification though seeks to anchor social being in an existential totality.

4.4.1.1 Primordiality and vision: mutual determinations of biology, society and history

The perspective which is at issue and tasked with providing a framework for bringing the primordiality of vision into a non-metaphysical relationship with biology, society and history is Heidegger’s concept of human existence, and its attendant existential logic. It is precisely his particular phenomenological understanding of existentiality that enables us to make sense of his notion of primordiality and thus to paradoxically open up vision such that we are able to see what lies fallow and hidden from view. We begin Heidegger’s (1996: 10) analysis in this regard with his concept of the essence of human existence for which he has specifically developed the term “Da-sein”.

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Da-sein itself is distinctly different from other beings. … Da-sein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being. Thus it is constitutive of the being of Da-sein to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being. And this in turn means that Da-sein understands itself in its being in some way and with some explicitness. It is proper with this being that it be disclosed to itself with and through its being. Understanding of being is itself a determination of being of Da-sein. The ontic distinction of Da-sein lies in the fact that it is ontological.

At its core, Heidegger’s conception, of what the being of human existence entails, is at odds with the metaphysical ontological tradition, which accepts humans as fully formed in their essence. In this regard we have already made reference to Plato and Aristotle and their primordial understanding of the being of humans as essentially epistemic, however, in Heidegger we have the conception that the mode of being of humans is a capacity, or potentiality that is decided and determined through the process of existence. In other words, the being of human existence presents itself as a potentiality, though one would be incorrect in thinking that Heidegger is replicating Locke’s notion of a “tabula rasa”. For Heidegger we do not enter the world as a blank slate as such, but rather, as we will expand on later, are imbued with the primordial existential structures of ‘being-in-the-world and ‘being-with-others’.
The point is that these existential structures are the primordial elements that prefigure in our predispositions and is what he captures in the “da” of “da-sein”. Quite literally “da” translates as ‘there’ as in place (here and there) and it is this quality of “thereness” that Heidegger understands to be the “thrownness” of humans into a pre-existing time and space or history and society. There is thus no tabula rasa in play but a potentiality which is informed by a predisposition or “moodedness” that is explicit and borne of the “facticity” of always being ‘there’ in the world with others. It is this primordial quality of “being-in-the-world” and “being-with-others” that we have seized upon as being essentially that which predisposes our ontological capacity for sociality: in the case of the former, in socially producing and reproducing the worlds we live or ‘dwell’ in, and in the latter, in producing and reproducing the social relations, the sociabilities that ensue in our interactions and associations with other human beings.

Thus, the lived reality or ontic state of human existence is never decided at the outset as in through some bio-programme mapped in our genes, but rather our distinction rests in the fact that our being is such that we are always in a state of becoming, it is a life’s project the meaning of which is never fully and finally resolved and it is in this sense that it is ontological. The actual life being lived is what is referred to as ontical and is the immediate domain of existence that either comes into conflict or is in harmony with the primordial self in its various vestiges biologically (as endowment), socially (as sociality) and historically (as relative primordiality). This existential complex with its attendant tensions is evident in Heidegger’s (1996: 10-11) brief analysis. Thus:
Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibilities to be itself or not to be itself. Da-sein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already grown up in them. Existence is decided only by each Da-sein itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities. We come to terms with the question of existence always only through existence itself. We shall call this kind of understanding of itself *existentiell* understanding. The question of existence is an ontic “affair” of Da-sein. For this the theoretical transparency of the ontological structure of existence is not necessary. The question of structure aims at the analysis of what constitutes existence. We shall call the coherence of these structures *existentiality*. Its analysis does not have the character of an existentiell understanding but rather an *existential* one. The task of an existential analysis of Da-sein is prescribed with regard to its possibility and necessity in the ontic constitution of Da-sein.

There are accordingly two possibilities for self-realization which are somewhat precariously balanced in as much as one either connects with one’s primordial sociality (a pre-ontological dimension) as an act of deliberation or one accidentally stumbles onto it per chance. Alternately one may be consumed by one’s immediate existence (existentiell –peculiar to one self and ontical dimension) and as such reproduce the sensibilities of ‘anyone and everyone’, that is the commonsense view and thus be far removed from that primordial being that receives its predispositions from ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-with-others’ (existential structures). With respect to the former state of ‘harmony’ with
the ‘world’ and ‘others’ one would be dealing with a primordial coherence in the structure of being and as such it refers to Heidegger’s notion of existentiality.

However, in as much as one is caught within the moment of the socialized, that is, being one of ‘them’, ‘anyone’ and ‘everyone’, or the herd as such, then one would be existing on the plane of the existentiell. What makes for the distinction between the two is the particular relation of distance or contiguity to the primordial existential structures of ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-with-others’. Within this existential schema the act of becoming is not determined or pre-given in the sense that the ontological outcome is in anyway guaranteed. Thus this opens up the way for a dynamic relationship with primordiality itself as something relative to our ontological being, and society as something that is relative to our ontical constitution both of which holds consequences for our visionary being (ways of seeing). We have outlined and discussed the different modalities of vision and their relation to existential being as ontological vision, to socialization as end in itself and as far as it involves the individual and his or her being it was alluded to as existential vision and as much as it refers to a common-sense vision or quotidian order it was referred to as an ontical vision.

And furthermore, beyond the existential order we have made the argument that the movement to a sociological vision, or theoretical seeing directed towards society is conditional upon an authentic relation to being, and as such, if not of an existential – ontological understanding it leaves a sociological vision with a spurious starting point and socially disembodied. And finally, that we need to have one ‘eye’ firmly in-society
and only in this way would be socially anchored such that our horizon of intelligibility
would carry our social be-ing into our theorization of society, sociality and sociabilities.

We now move onto what the constitution of our ontological – existential social being is
as Dasein and its relation to vision and the technological imperatives as the basis upon
which we will proceed to anchor ourselves in-society by way of the Archimedean levers
we have suggested in the visual releasement contained in the perceptual structure and that
counterpoise contained in our relation to being-amidst-things as equipmentality, in order
to stem the displacement of our social being in the nihilism of the standing reserve of
modern technology.
Chapter Five

Existential-Ontological understanding of Being: Dasein

as horizon of intelligibility of be-ing and vision

What kind of vision would we need to develop in order to see through the sociability of being, that is our practices, into the sociality of being that is our social be-ing in the comportments of ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-amidst-things’? We ask this question as a way to into the very ground that makes for the very possibility of our human way of being as existence or what Heidegger calls Dasein. To probe this fundamental question of our social be-ing in its visile dimension we came up against what we have called a sociological vision insofar as it is but a form of theoretical vision and is thus one that comes after the facticity of our ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘being-with-others’ which as such does not comport with social being as such and moreover falls within the subject-object distanciation and a theoretical re-contextualization taking us our of our existential modality of primary social be-ing.

To be clear what is being suggested is not that one may dispense with theoretical vision or that it has no value, but rather that it needs to be grounded within the horizon of intelligibility of social be-ing and its existential structures. Moreover as we have identified in vision as far as its perceptual intentional comportment is concerned it potential as counterpoise to the nihilistic danger posed by the essence of modern technology we need to bring vision to bear in the grounding of our existential –
ontological understanding of social being. Thus we open up and draw a relationship between vision and Dasein to be reversed later as our concern moves further into the province or field of Dasein to ultimately into the latter itself and its dimensionality as a field of disclosure of being, in general and social being, in particular.

5.1 Modalities of Vision

In “Being and Time” Heidegger (1996) develops three different conceptions of vision that correspond similarly to the three different modalities of being-in-the-world and their respective temporalities. These different concepts of vision or seeing will accordingly be discussed below in order to develop later on a nuanced and inflected approach to vision that will be used to facilitate our existential–ontological understanding of social being and sociality. The three modes of vision or rather seeing of Heidegger’s as taken up by Gelven (1989: 63) comprise what he refers to as “circumspection” (Umsicht), “considerateness” (Rucksicht) and “transparency” (Durchsichtigkeit). Each of these forms of “seeing” Gelven (1989: 63-64) points out entails a particular relation in so far as it respectively relates to the way one ‘looks’ at the surrounding world as environment; secondly, the world of other Daseins or human beings and; thirdly, how one looks at oneself. It is to these modes of vision that we now turn to ground an understanding of vision or how we look at the world, each other and ourselves in order to take up how it articulates in the context of a technologically informed modality of being.

The structure of the ensuing discussion ‘gathers’ the three elements of Heidegger’s existential analytic though in this instance it is specific to the three modes of vision as it relates to the world of things and its categorical distinction between that which is “ready-
to-hand” as a function of utility and that which is “present-at-hand” as function of theory. Thus, in the world of things this involves three modalities of vision which are related similarly to three concomitant ways of being-in-the-world which Heidegger refers to as an engagement which is oriented in general towards what he abstracts as “for-the-sake-of” something yet to occur, secondly, “in-the-face-of” something that has occurred and finally “in-order-to” allow something to occur (Gelven, 1989: 196). Each of these states of being-in-the-world, particularly in the context of things, in the aforementioned has as alluded to a given temporal dimension which to make explicit deals respectively with the future, past and present. Our first port of call is with that modality of vision, circumspection, which predisposes us in a particular way to the ‘world as environment’, or for that matter that we may be estranged from.

5.1.1 Horizon of intelligibility of vision

What does it mean to say that one sees something or the other, that ones recognizes or perceives the existence of an entity before us? If one is merely referring to the physical or material form before us in what way do we mean that this thing before us exists as something meaningful or intelligible? The point is that we do make such references or assertions that such and such a thing lies before us and is rendered present by our visual capacity. There are two fundamental issues that Heidegger teases out for our introspection, and in so doing challenges some basic taken for granted notions that we operate with. Firstly in recognizing or asserting the presence of something before us, we are in fact inadvertently disclosing some familiarity or understanding of what it means for something to be or exist, in the non-existential sense. Secondly, in being able to
recognize and identify something before us presupposes that we have some background knowledge of said thing.

Taken together, the vague understanding of being and the identification of said thing refer to Heidegger’s distinction between ontology and ontic. However to offer his nuanced thinking further the reference to ontological is in fact preontological as the understanding of the meaning of Being is tacit rather than explicit and thus precedes an ontological understanding proper. The significance of this is that vision as such is predicated not upon the senses in its primary relation to being but according to Heidegger it is informed by the shared background practices and norms we are socialized into shortly after entering the world. This is not to say that we don’t see with our eyes, but rather that what we comprehend with our eyes, are not a function of immaculate perception or an innocent eye.

In other words, it is not the eye that makes sense of what it perceives, nor is it the quality of the mind as function of internal representation, but rather what Heidegger is arguing is that vision is ultimately at the level of its primary relation, a function of existence. By existence is meant the self-interpretations that are concomitant in the social practices carried by the cultures we are socialized into, not taught as in lessons of an explicit set of rules of conduct. The normative pattern as compiled in guidebooks or rule books of etiquette and appropriate behaviors are a second order reality, in as much as it is derived from the primary form of social practices acquired though socialization, or imitative
behavior, and later contemplated, when there is a breakdown in the normal concerned coping practices and involvement-in-the-social world.

5.2 Dasein and the modality of vision

The said vision we are primarily directed towards understanding is that of an existential order and its modalities of being, however, in order to come to terms with its form(s) we need to open up a discussion on the different ways we experience our visionary being. Not only do we need an explication of our visionary beings as a way to access what effect technology has on our modalities of social being, but we also need it to break out of a concept of vision that presents this being as detached, decontextualised and deworlded. This reification of social being though the particular implicate of vision is not only a function of what we find in Virilio’s (1994) “vision machine”, but it is moreover a function of a Cartesian philosophical orientation as taken up here particularly in relation to Jay (1993) Levin (1988) and Dreyfus (1991).

Thus, what we are exercising discursive vigilance against is an analysis that merely serves to confirm that the vision extant of a technological modality of being is some version of a Cartesian modality; and thus so remain once removed in theoretical vein; when our concern is to probe an understanding that speaks to the first order existential modalities of social being, which emerges in the context of an involvement with technology as equipment and its sociabilities such as ‘transparent vision’, in what Dreyfus (1991) has inferred from his perspicuous reading of Heidegger, as the “hermeneutics of everyday averageness”.
In short, what is aimed at is an analysis of the modalities of social being from the vantage point of a hermeneutic phenomenological view of technology and vision in so far as it leads to an existential – ontological analytic of our human ‘existence’ in the light of Heidegger’s notion of “Dasein”. In order to set up the basic understanding informing our approach to vision in the light of Heidegger’s “Being and Time” we shall by and large limit scholarly intervention of an exegetical nature to the generally acknowledged authoritative account of Dreyfus (1994). In this way we are better able to probe the dense thought of Heidegger in a way that does not make of our approach a polemic, or a hagiography, but instead offers an understanding that moves us in the direction of firming up an interpretive framework or hermeneutic which is tied to a phenomenological account.

5.2.1 Dasein as sine qua non for the understanding being and vision

To be clear the fundamental question that Heidegger (1996) is concerned with in “Being and Time” is with being and “Dasein’s” relation to it and not with vision. However, in explicating this fundamental question of “Being” which Dreyfus (1994) and Gelven (1989) translate as “what it means to be” it touches on vision in various ways. Thus, the question of being, or what it means to be, interests us in two respects: firstly, as already stated, it deals directly with understanding vision and its different modalities; and secondly, it deals with “Dasein” that is ways of being human and how this ‘comports’ with things, objects, people and the world. Of course in the most directed sense it is Heidegger’s analysis of the existential structures of “Dasein” and Dreyfus reading of this and our interpretation of both that is to serve an analysis of social being in terms of what
it means to be in its dimensionality as sociality and sociability. Though, the ontological question of being or what it means to be still begs a starting point and a relation to vision.

With respect to the latter the relation of vision to being comes to the fore as that which is intimately connected to being and yet at the same time offers itself as site for the obfuscation of the very understanding of being that is sought after. Heidegger (1996: 5) probes the question of being thus:

> Everything we talk about, mean, and are related to is in being in one way or another. What and how we ourselves are is also in being. Being is found in thatness and whatness, reality, the objective presence of things [Vorhandenheit], subsistence, validity, existence [Dasein], and in the “there is” [es gidt].

What we can infer from the above quote in support of our objective of probing vision is that in ‘realist vein’ as far as one refers to the independence of things that lie before us being is too apprehended by vision. But to say that being refers to things, or that being is a function of vision, or that it is related to some aspect of vision would be patently false, and a complete misunderstanding of being, in so far as it refers to what it means to be. In fact the conflation of being and vision where the former is subsumed under the latter bears testimony to the tendency of vision towards hegemony referred to earlier in discussion on the Greek attitude towards vision and its occularcentric bias. It is precisely this tendency towards occularcentrism in Western philosophy or traditional ontology that Heidegger rails against which is given extensive treatment in Jay (1993) and Levin (1993,
1988). For the sake of clarity it should be stated that Heidegger is not anti-vision as such in general but against a particular way of seeing which is tied to a particular way of being and that is its reduction to a technological modality evidenced in modernity but particularly late modernity or post modernity.

The strong point that emerges in relation to vision above is that our relation to things, objects, people etc involves much more that just seeing them for in vision what is supposed is that we are not only seeing things as they present themselves to our senses, but that in apprehending what we see we are also relating to what it means for such and such a thing to be, that is, its mode of intelligibility. This is not only something beyond vision but more importantly as Heidegger claims it is prior to vision, and it is what is connoted in being, that is, what it means to be. And thus to restate Heidegger’s fundamental question we refer to Dreyfus’s (1994: 10) account that:

Heidegger’s primary concern is to raise the question of being- to make sense of our ability to make sense of things-and to awaken in people a feeling for the importance of this very obscure question.

If, being is the basis upon which all intelligibility hinges, and vision as such does not have a place as its modal expression, and if, furthermore it is held that being is “no ordinary predicate”, and that it is “misleading” to think of being as “entity, or process, or event” Dreyfus (1993: 10-11), then, it seems we have traversed the continuum from everything to nothing. We seem to have the paradoxical situation of being, which is in
everything, but yet it cannot be pinned down to anything, in particular. Consider still as Dreyfus points out (1993: 11) that throughout this ‘obscurity’ there is the ‘self-evidence’ that according to Heidegger (ibid), “we already live in an understanding of being”. The paradox that emerges is that even though as Heidegger claims (cited in, ibid: 11), “we always conduct our activities in an understanding of being” (self-evidence) it “is still veiled in darkness” (obscurity), thus necessitating “in principle to raise the question [of being] again”. Notwithstanding the latter what remains clear for Heidegger (cited in, ibid: 11), is that “this vague understanding of being is still a fact”, and moreover that this understanding of being is derived socially from our immersion in the “background practices” of quotidian life. What makes it obscure is that we are immersed in it, and as such cannot ‘see’ the ‘woods of being for the ‘trees’ of background practices’, though we are clear that we are indeed ‘in’ the ‘woods’

The concern as to the starting point of an analysis of being in the sense of our understanding of what it means for anything to be, would then seem to hinge on an explication of our “vague understanding of being”, as an emergent property of our “background practices” derived from our quotidian or ordinary everyday practices or activities. This means that it is in the ways of being human that an understanding of what it means to be, or being in general, is to be arrived at. And furthermore, that in exploring these ways of being human we concomitantly establish the different related modalities of vision and their conditionalities and how these relate to social being and thus to technology.
Thus, we have arrived at the indispensable role that human existence, or “Dasein” plays in coming to terms with an understanding of the intelligibility of all beings and the modalities of their visibility. The critical issues to be taken up hereunder are what the role of “Dasein” entails, and what the structure of Dasein comprises as a prelude to taking up the specificity of its characteristics.

With respect to the claim of the indispensable role that “Dasein” plays in the question of what is required to come to an understanding of being or what it means to be Dreyfus (1993: 28) isolates three elements making up Heidegger’s basic argument.

…it is Dasein who is trying to make sense of being … and that in order to raise the question, Dasein must have in its “average understanding” a premonition of the answer.

Heidegger’s ontological logic in starting with Dasein or human existence seems relatively basic in as much as he isolates in this being its distinctive capacity for questioning the meaning of being. Thus, by extension if there is such a being that is able to raise the question of the meaning of being, and that in every question as such there lies embedded some anticipation of an answer, albeit vague and incipient, it follows that in Dasein’s premonition of a vague understanding, or answer to the question of being there lies in fact a jump-start to the fundamental question at hand. Similarly, if one were to ask, as we are in fact doing, as to how we make sense of the modalities of being, of what it is we see, in terms of the emergent modes of intelligibility that ensue in the intersections of being and
vision, then the significance of setting up an interrogative of the latter falls into place with respect to its role in probing the visionary dimension of social being. In other words the aim is to make sense of the different modalities of vision, such as, in the different ways we look at and see that which is associated with Dasein, as in interalia people, cultures, publics, institutions, societies and their social distinctions, and by contrast the meaning of what we see, when we look at and encounter that which is other than Dasein such as technology, equipment, objects, things and the like with their categorial distinctions.

The salient point is that being and vision intersect at that point where the modes of intelligibility of things and Dasein devolve to that point at which an ‘average understanding’ though ‘translucent’ brings itself to bear upon a rudimentary understanding of being. Thus, in both instances from the vantage point of being and that of vision we are brought to Dasein to make sense thereof, and moreover it is the latter’s ability for sense-making that we need to come to terms with and thus Dreyfus (1991: 28) points out that

…this average understanding belongs to the essential make-up of Dasein. … that is, it is definitive of Dasein to take a stand on its being: Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence.

Here we are made aware of the very basis from which Dasein’s sense making ability arises, which is the understanding of being in general (ontological) that derives from
‘shared background practices’, but more importantly it is how this average understanding is linked to human existence, and what this in turn means in terms of its existential dynamics that needs to be uncovered. In this regard we move into the provenance of the social (that which is shared) and the sociological (the role of norms) in order to come to terms with the fundamental ways of being and becoming human and how this in turn serves as a ‘horizon of intelligibility. In as much as there is thus a social basis to understanding what it means for Dasein to be, and for being in general, there is simultaneously the same basis that underlies our visual sensibilities, and thus for the intelligibility of that which enters our purview, as in our physical range of vision. Therefore, in short, in uncovering the very essence of existence or Dasein and its specificities for understanding being we set the basis for also probing the existential complex of vision and its implicate in social being. It is for these reasons that we have seized upon social being as the basis for our hermeneutic or horizon of intelligibility and thus for our understanding of being, in general. But are we in fact smuggling sociology into Heidegger’s thinking through the back door: we certainly may but in reality we are seeking the existential – ontological grounding of a concept of social being in Dasein to anchor sociology, it is a prior task not a ‘logic of ontological substitution’ (Thaver, 2001). In Dasein lays the very ontological conditionality for an understanding of being as that which is a priori as Dreyfus (1991: 28) sum up:

... Dasein’s understanding of being implies an understanding of all modes of being. Dasein has therefore a third priority as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies. ... Thus by carrying out the
existential analytic of Dasein we are to arrive at a fundamental ontology. We shall understand how every mode of intelligibility—the being of equipment, of objects, of institutions, of people, etc.—depends upon a fundamental way of being, namely, existence.

Lastly the matter of Dasein’s, or human beings existential complex, is not only cause for it to make sense of its own being and other beings in terms of its dimensionality as in an anthropocentric understanding, but rather the point being made here is of a generality that far exceeds such delimitation. In Dasein’s distinct capacity to make sense of its own being and other beings lies its ontic conditioning, that is, its comportment or sociability, while the claim that it can ipso facto also make sense of all modes of being lies the more general claim of not only understanding beings, but the way of being of beings and thus is an ontological conditioning, a hermeneutic in social being. If this understanding of the ontology of being lies within the reach of Dasein, that is, the way of being or existence of human beings, then the matter of understanding the meaning of being is reduced to an existential analytic; of that being in which the sense-making capacity rests, in a word, in human beings, Dasein. It then stands to reason that our objective in this chapter of coming to terms with what vision means existentially is tied to the existential analytic of Dasein, as it serves as the sine qua non for the mode of intelligibility of that which we encounter in the ‘world’, and thus of technology, equipment, objects, people, institutions and so on. Dasein is thus unequivocally our starting point from which to proceed in order to establish, at the primary level, the existential, and secondarily the theoretical
conditionality of vision, that is, its subject-object distanciation and its relation to the de-contextualization of social being.

5.2.2 What is Dasein?

Thus far we have considered Heidegger’s argument for the primacy of Dasein in understanding the meaning of being and the being of all beings, but have not offered an understanding of what Dasein means. In this regard we similarly track into the interpretation of Dreyfus (1993) on this most fundamental issue and refer directly to Heidegger (1996) to gain insight into the notion of Dasein and its implications for our specific purpose of setting up a way to understand vision and visuality. To this end we find in Dreyfus (1993: 13-14) both the ontic and ontological dimensions of Dasein:

“Dasein” in colloquial German can mean “everyday human experience,” and so Heidegger uses the term to refer to human being. …[But] The best way to understand what Heidegger means by Dasein is to think of our term “human being,” which can refer to a way of being that is characteristic of all people or to a specific person—a human being. Roughly in Division I Heidegger is interested in the human way of being, which he calls “being there” or Dasein.

Whilst it is clear that Heidegger uses the term Dasein to designate a human being or human beings in general these two terms are not conflatable as such. For it is not human beings as subject or object that is at issue for Dasein but rather its way of being. Thus, the principle issue around which Dasein revolves is what it is that distinguishes human everyday experience or what it is that is encompassed in the idea of a human way of
being. What we can come to terms with at this point is that in order to establish what this way of being is that is distinctive of Dasein we have to turn to human beings in their generality, that is, their ontology (existential) and their specificity that is their ontical condition (existentiell) in order to fix what it means. If, as seems to be the case that Heidegger is at great pains to avoid conflating Dasein with a human being singular or plural, then what else is at stake in the terminology of Dasein, that is, what else does it refer to in the ‘order of things’. It is in addressing this latter question that the discursive range of Dasein as well as its content becomes clear. Dreyfus (1993: 14-15) puts this matter into perspective:

The whole question of whether Dasein is a general term or the name for a specific entity is undercut by Heidegger’s more basic interest in the way of being that human cultures, and institutions share.

First to the question of the content of Dasein that is its denotation what Dreyfus makes clear is that the term not only refers to human beings, but their cultures and institutions on the basis of what they have in common. It is this commonality as will become evident that takes us to the heart of what Dasein is, and thus firstly, Dreyfus (1993: 14-15) offers us his interpretation and the words of secondly, “Heidegger” (1962:67) to illustrate the essence of the meaning of Dasein.

Human beings, it will turn out, are special kinds of being in that their way of being embodies an understanding of what it is to be.
These beings in their being comport themselves towards their being (67) [41]

It is thus this understanding of what it means to be that we human beings collectively share with culture and society which orients us in a particular way with the specific and far reaching consequence that makes us special. This understanding of being is such that in Heidegger’s (1962: 36, 32) words cited in Dreyfus (1993: 15) its implications for being human is that:

Its ownmost being is such that it has an understanding of that being, and already maintains itself in each case in a certain interpretedness of its being. That kind of being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow, we call ‘existence’.

There are two key elements and their relation to each other in the make-up of Dasein that we need to isolate for discussion as this is key to understanding how being relates to the general issue of making sense of beings, that is, their mode of intelligibility and thus at the level that concerns us directly viz. their visuality. In this regard it is in interpretation and existence and their relation to Dasein that the key rests. With respect to interpretation what is especially important is that the understanding of being is not some homologous form that is present in all human beings and thus bears upon the interpretation of being in some uniform manner. This would suggest that the relationship between interpretation and existence is a tight one. But as can be gleaned above it is that Dasein can relate to its
understanding of being in one way or another that suggests that there is no singular outcome nor is it unproblematic as somehow (since it is vague and we dwell in it) above also suggests.

There are in fact three different outcomes that Heidegger designates in this relationship of Dasein to its own being which we will outline shortly. The salient point at this juncture is that this relationship and its outcome is undecided in as much as it is not a foregone conclusion, but arises as a matter of Dasein having to take a stand on how it comports or relates to its understanding of being. Now as developed in the above quotation this relationship between Dasein and its being undecided as it is at the outset or primordially constitutes the basis of the dynamic that is existence in as much as the way this relationship unfolds in Dasein is contingent upon the interpretation that ensues in relation to its understanding of being. Dreyfus (1993:15) drives this point home by suggesting that “Only self-interpreting being exist”. There is of course the issue of this apriori understanding of being that needs to be accounted for and it is not being overlooked as such but will be dealt with in due course. What is at issue now, now that we have specified albeit briefly the essential characteristic or content of Dasein namely its self interpretation is that we need to consider how this feature of existence relates to culture and institutions etc. and what its significant difference is if Dasein is to be restricted to human beings and their way of being. In this regard Dreyfus (1993: 15) extends his analysis of Dasein to cultures thus:
Cultures as well as human beings exist; their practices contain an interpretation of what it means to be a culture. Heidegger tells us that institutions such as science have existence as their way of being too.

The issue of culture raises an interesting question in relation to being since culture is that most general expression of what it means to be. Taken as such may one infer that at its broadest that culture might be a way of speaking about being or what it means to be ontologically speaking? In this regard we would be inverting the relation of being and culture in that culture is that which we humans need in order to be such and such a social being. Similarly, if we took society to be Dasein-like which it is in that it too exists in the sense that it contains an interpretation of what it means to be a society, we would be engaging in a reduction ad absurdum. For we need society as human beings in order to be, and thus being cannot be reduced to society for even though primordially it precedes Dasein and is in fact the provenance of becoming a Dasein, or social being of the human kind. The point is that Dasein’s relation to social existence is such that the latter offers the basis for self-interpretation and as such facilitates an understanding of being which sets in motion the dynamic of existence and the openness of social being as contingent upon whatever stances society or culture proffers Dasein. And moreover, in an even more fundamental way society through its modality of sociality as socialization is the basis upon which an implicit ontology comes into being as that vague understanding of being that is co-simultaneously linked to the shared agreement of background practices acquired in the reproduction of a normative order. So in as much as cultures, science, institutions, societies and the like generate practices that embody interpretations of what
they must be like to be, they are respectively like Dasein in that they have ‘existence’ as their point of equivalence and as their modality or specificity of being. However, Heidegger (1996: 11) draws a clear point of differentiation between Dasein and Dasein-like entities in that:

Sciences and disciplines are ways of being of Da-sein in which Dasein also relates to beings that it need not itself be. But being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Da-sein. Thus the understanding of being that belongs to Da-sein just as originally implies the understanding of something like “world” and the understanding of the being of beings accessible within the world. Ontologies which have their being unlike Da-sein as their theme are accordingly founded and motivated in the ontic structure of Da-sein itself. This structure included in itself the determination of a pre-ontological understanding of being.

We can note that whilst existence is a necessary condition of Dasein it is not a sufficient condition and as such can best be described as Dasein-like but not Dasein proper or what is above marked as Da-sein. What distinguishes Dasein and its association with a human way of being from that which shares existence as its modality of being is what Heidegger refers to as the “thrownness” or the “thereness” of human beings in the world. In other words human beings find themselves thrust in a world neither of their own choosing nor of their own making, but of which they have some pre-ontological understanding of their social being. This vaguely familiarity or pre-ontological understanding of being is the basis for discerning the intelligibility of beings and stems from the sociality embedded in
being-in and being-with, in general and being-in-the-world, in particular. This is not the place to take up discussion of this crucial existential structure viz. being-in-the-world except to point out that in as much as society and culture share existence with Dasein there is this fundamental way in which it is differentiated. Before taking up the latter matter of being-in-the-world and worldliness we need to take issue in league with Dreyfus (1993) with certain key characteristics of Dasein that have thus far been raised. Key amongst them is Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding of being, interpretation and the three modes of existence of Dasein.

To close off the discussion on Dasein and existence and its shared relation with cultures, institutions and human beings we turn to Dreyfus (1993:15-16) who cites Heidegger (1962: 26-27) to mark the theoretical and methodological import for understanding being in general and vision in particular which we seize upon in relation to the different activities of Dasein.

Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing access to it-all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves.

Here we see Heidegger attending in a direct manner to the question of vision and its relation to ways of behaving and thus ways of being of Dasein. And in this regard the matter of vision invites deep-seated theoretical and methodological issues that were inadvertently raised in thinking through the modalities of technological being. At
bottom the world in which modern technology is extant and amidst which we find ourselves has surfaced fundamental questions about the nature of our social being, being in general, the world and the entities within and the relational nexus amongst these phenomena. Thus the question then of what the modalities of vision are that are entailed in the different modalities of being and social being that is equipment, objects and things and involving human beings that is Dasein presupposes too much to approach the inquiry in a superficial and naïve minded manner as has become customary with very few exceptions. There are critical issues that remain in constituting the problematic, such as, what is Dasein; and how is its constitution related to the matter of understanding the modalities of vision, such that we may enable the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger to surface and make visible those ways of our social being that is implicated in technology and its visionary beings. It is to this end that we pursue clarity on Dasein’s capacity for understanding, interpretation and its modes of being as grounding for a conception of the different ways of being that is anchored in our sociality, our being-in-the-world and our sociabilities the specific ways we cope with and relate to our cares and concerns.

5.2.2.1 Dasein, pre-ontological understanding and Interpretations

Following on the conception that human existence entails an understanding of what it means to be, taken up above, we now ask how this understanding itself comes into being in both senses, as that which is and as that which is present in a Dasein. What emerges from Dreyfus’s (1993: 17) reading of Heidegger (1962) translation of Being and Time is that
…the understanding of being human in an individual’s activity is the result of being socialized into practices that contain an interpretation not exhaustively contained in the mental states of individuals.

In other words what Dreyfus (1993: 16) is driving at is that Heidegger’s strong point is that “our social practices embody an ontology” or what it means to be human. To firm up this point Dreyfus refers to the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu in respect of the non-mental aspect involved in the socialization process, and its ontological relationship, that is, in relation to the understanding of what we have called our social being. What Bourdieu (1977: 87) notes, cited in Dreyfus (1993: 17), is that:

A whole group and a whole symbolically structured environment … exerts an anonymous, pervasive pedagogical action. The essential part of the modus operandi which defines practical mastery is transmitted in practice, in its practical state, without attaining the level of discourse. … in all societies children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures which, in their eyes, express everything that goes to make an accomplished adult—a way of talking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech, and (how could it be otherwise?) a certain subjective experience.

The point that Bourdieu seems to be making is that the teaching and learning of practical skills does not take place in any explicit lesson as in the transmission of knowledge
which is internalized and then translated into action. Instead, children acquire an understanding of social being through their attentive observation of and listening to adults, on the basis of whom they are able to interpret what it means to be a human being, and a thing, object or implement as cases in point. What is thus at issue here is that succinctly put “an ontology need not be represented in a mind” Dreyfus (1993: 17). For our purposes, though not the explicit intent of Dreyfus or Heidegger, the visionary aspect involved in the pre-ontological or pre-theoretical understanding of being is particularly strong but also instructive of the circle in which a hermeneutical understanding moves. Consider as in Bourdieu above that vision plays an important though not an exhaustive role in the process of socialization, and that this socialization embodies an implicit ontology, and that this understanding of social being having been imbibed in its turn serves as the basis upon which the intelligibility of beings can be established.

In other words the seeing that takes place at the primordial level, that is, at the level of children being socialized is by this account an ontological vision in as much as it contains the seeds of the interpretation of what it means to be a human being, a Dasein. This primordial seeing which is so intimately tied to social being in its initial making would seem to be subsumed in the seeing that ensues once that being or Dasein firms up. What then becomes of this ontological vision is that it is replaced by the ontical constitution of Dasein, that is, in the quotidian order of the everyday and the interpretations of cultural or social conformity or convention. It would seem to be the case that in as much as a pre-ontological understanding of social being seems to underlie and give intelligibility to the being of beings that this is similarly the case with the vision that accompanies
internalization of social practices and its concomitant ontology. And if this be the case would we not be in the same position that our understanding of being like vision would also be partial.

The challenge here is clearly that we need to separate being and vision so that we have clear blue water between them and consequently can treat them as ontologically and epistemologically distinct. However, not to lose ‘sight’ of the point which is that there is a close relation between the social practices we imbibe and our understanding of social being and thus our modality of vision. It is in this respect that Heidegger speaks of the social practices of technology which informs a particular understanding of being as that which is ‘enframed’ and thus reconstitutes everything as standing reserve or resources to be used and disposed of. To sum up as Dreyfus (1993:18) does; our pre-ontological understanding of being is that:

The practices containing an interpretation of what it is to be a person, an object and a society fit together. They are all aspects of what Heidegger calls an understanding of being. Such an understanding is contained in our knowing-how-to-cope in various domains rather than in a set of beliefs that such and such is the case. Thus we embody an understanding of being that no one has in mind. We have an ontology without knowing it.

What then are the implications of holding on to a position that displaces the beliefs and mind primordially from what is involved in an understanding of social being and
substitutes for it knowing-how-to-cope? Furthermore what must be in place in order for the social practices of coping in the world to take the form of an ontology? And yet again what is the basis of the intelligibility of the being of beings such that they are discernible to begin with? In this regard Dreyfus (1993: 19) is once again of immeasurable value in distilling what is at the heart of Heidegger’s thinking.

Heidegger calls the shared agreement in our practices as to what entities can show up as a preontological or pretheoretical understanding of being. … Thanks to our preontological understanding of being, what shows up for us shows up as something. … But when we try to make the preontological understanding we in fact posses explicit, we find that it is by means obvious…. The more important some aspect of our understanding of being is, the less we can get at it.

The crux of the matter here is that the intelligibility of being is not the preserve of a conscious mind guided by beliefs as this would make of it a subjective experience and thus individuate what is otherwise a public or collective reality. Secondly, it would elevate the role of beliefs and knowledge when the argument has already been made that it is social practices and perception thereof and its internalization through socialization that an understanding of social being is fundamentally effected. However, what now comes to the fore is that it is not the practices in themselves as important as these are in themselves, but the shared agreement in such practices that gives us a prior understanding of being. In fact it is this agreement of shared practices that renders it possible to make a determination of the intelligibility of that which is encountered. In other words we do not
make sense of what we see simply because it is within our range of physical vision but rather the intelligibility of what we see is derived from the shared agreement in our practices, which is our social being.

Thus, to understand our visionary being we need to connect with the shared agreement in our social practices, but this is not unproblematic as we are in the ‘trees’ of our social practices or sociabilities so much so that we are unable to determine the woods of our shared agreement or sociality. What then is within our capacity to determine and what are the epistemological limits on what it is that we can know about our preontological understanding of being and to what extent does this limitation truncate our understanding of our visionary being, if at all.

For Dreyfus (1993: 22) Heidegger has a radical reason for supposing that we cannot transcend the ‘woods’ of the understanding we have of being and its concomitant constraints.

There are no beliefs to get clear about; there are only skills and practices. These practices do not arise from beliefs, rules or principles, and so there is nothing to make explicit or spell out. We can only give an interpretation of the interpretation already in the practices. … since phenomenology deals with our understanding of being, it must be hermeneutic. To sum up, an explication of our understanding of being can never be complete because we dwell in it—that is, it is so pervasive as to
be both nearest to us and farthest away—and so because there are no beliefs to get clear about.

At this primary level of engagement in the world we find that Dreyfus makes us aware that Heidegger decenters the ideational aspect of human experience and foregrounds its existential being. Thus, in lieu of beliefs and ideas we have skills and practices as the latter are implicated in our “knowing how to cope” in our “concernful dealings” with the world. In this regard it is skills and practices our sociabilities that inform how we cope in the world and not our beliefs as such but rather what orients us in this practical world is the shared agreement we have of our practices, our social being. It is thus this pre-ontological or pre-theoretical understanding of being that we are dimly aware of that is the basis of our understanding of the intelligibility of the being of beings or the mode of existence of all entities.

And since we dwell in our world of social practices it is to the implicit ontology that we need to turn and not abstract ideas or beliefs as such in order to gain an understanding of being as first order reality. But whilst we may be in a position to gain an understanding of the modality of being with a high degree of clarity the same cannot be said of the understanding of social being contained in the background practices in which we dwell. And thus the epistemological limits that are inevitable with respect to paradoxically that which makes possible the intelligibility of being to begin with. However, while the preontological understanding of social being may in fact be vague, and the ontological understanding of being, our sociality may be farthest from our reach, the ontical nature of
being, our sociabilities is closest and it is here that Dasein’s existence comes into its clearest focus. Now in order to spell out what is entailed in this regard we consider what Dreyfus defines as Dasein’s capacity for self-interpretation and its relation to its special way of being, that is, existence.

5.2.2.2 Dasein, self-interpretation and misinterpretation

What we come to terms with here in addressing the relationship of Dasein to interpretation deals with the qualified understanding of what constitutes the ‘essence’ of human existence. Previously we distinguished the Dasein-like quality to rest in existence in terms of its extension to entities such as cultures, institutions and societies on the basis that it contained in its practices what it entailed to be a culture or an institution etc. Now in league with Dreyfus (1993: 23) we bring Dasein to bear on interpretation by way of existence and thereby surface the qualified sense in which one may speak of a human essence, sociality of being and its existential scope.

To exist is to take a stand on what is essential about one’s being and to be defined by that stand. Thus Dasein is what, in its social activity, it interprets itself to be. Human beings do not already have some specific nature. It makes no sense to ask whether we are essentially rational animals, creatures of God, organisms with built-in needs, sexual beings, or complex computers. Human beings can interpret themselves in any of these ways and many more, and they can, in varying degrees, become any of these, but to be human is not to be essentially [sic] any of them. Human being is essentially simply self-interpreting.
The strong point here is that we are ontically relative but ontologically fundamental in as much as how we come to interpret ourselves depends upon the society and cultures we are socialized or acculturated within. That is in our particularity as ontic beings and in our understanding of our own existences that is existentially this devolves to the self-interpretations on offer in our culture. However, ontologically in terms of what it means to be, in general, as a human social being, that is, existentially, the analytic holds equally for all of us. Thus, in the latter existential understanding what it means for all human beings to be is a matter of self-interpretation that is tied to our modality of existence which means that whatever we become or are as human beings is matter of our existences and the stand that we may take on such an existence. In short as social beings as Dasein, existence precedes essence

By contrast the content of existence and the particular stand taken by an individual Dasein is a relative matter and devolves to the parochial lives of individuals and their specific contexts. Caution should however be exercised in this regard as one is not constructing the neo-liberal social subject as self contained individual, but rather what is at work here is a communitarian subject, a social being, that is one who shares an understanding of what it means to be with-others of the same cultural ilk and therefore has a public understanding of each others particular stands and the self-interpretations that may have been adopted. This latter understanding of social being is that we are all in our own milieus relative and arbitrary and thus at one with cultural relativism but definitely not essentialist. So in answer to the question what is the nature or essence of Dasein or human beings it is quite baldly that we have none we are open-ended in this
respect and come to possess a nature through socialization and as such are social being with the capacity for sociality but indeterminate, that is, without a determined content. Notwithstanding as stated earlier the point bears reiteration thus Dreyfus (1993: 23) cites the words of Heidegger (1962: 67) to echo the claim that:

The “essence” of Dasein lies in its existence.

If one is tied to this cultural relativism does one then shrug one’s shoulders and yield to the notion that well anything goes and settle for a moral and epistemic relativity and leave it at that. Well in respect of technology and vision there is arguably a global phenomenon at work which cuts across the different social and cultural formations in such a way as to enable a transverse effect. Moreover that in technology per se we have an ontic orientation that is socially and culturally specific but that does not mean that it is somehow immune from the ontological dimension of modern technology at the level of its generality as existential analytic that is in its “destining as enframing” and the transformation of social being and our sociality into a “standing reserve”.

In other words one may see the same distinction of the ontical (sociability) that is the particular and the ontological (social being) the general at work such that the particular way in which the standing reserve is made manifest across social formations differs in content (kith) but not in form (kin) in the wake of modern technology. This open-ended sensibility with its contingent self-interpretations and cultural specificities is to be seized
upon similarly in respect of the complex of vision in as much as it is being argued that there is an intersection between modalities of being and related modalities of vision.

In addition to the distinction opened up between the particular and the general evidenced in the distinction between the ontical and the ontological self-interpretation also begs consideration of the distinction between what is subjective and objective. In other words the cultural as subjective and say the biological as objective as regards Dasein’s relationship to itself. If existence is characterized by the stand an individual Dasein has to take vis-à-vis its open ended possibilities are there objective conditions which limit these or around which such self-interpretation revolve or do these possibilities multiply themselves out ad infinitum. Dreyfus (1993: 24) thinks through what we have termed the relation between subjective and objective vis-à-vis self-interpretation by making use of the example of gender and sex.

In Heidegger’s terminology, we can say that homo sapiens can be characterized by factuality (e.g. male or female), like any object but that, because human beings exist, have Dasein in them, they must be understood in their facticity as a gendered way of behaving, e.g., as masculine or feminine.

Given Dasein’s special way of being, that is that its existence is an issue for it means that the factuality or objective categories of male and female merely sets the parameters of its being which is the same for all human beings. However, how this is interpreted and what kind of stand eventuates is a matter of cultural determination and how a particular Dasein
interprets the cultural assignation of gender roles and how that in turn articulates with the individual’s understanding thereof. Thus whilst the factuality of sex is given objectively the cultural determination of how that role is to be understood and taken up by the individual Dasein is based on the self-interpretations proffered in that culture and the particular stand in relation thereto.

Thus, even though the individual Dasein is involved, the matter of subjective is not be understood in the context used above as an individuated and atomistic sense, but rather in the sense that it refers to the understanding of subjection that it is culturally determined. With respect to vision we can objectively recognize that our sensory capacity predisposes us to see that which is before us, but how we understand it and the kind of interpretation that may be attached to that which is seen, or how it shows up for the individual Dasein is similarly a cultural and social construct from the vantage point of an existential involvement, or the know-how that comes through coping in-the-world.

What is the position of Dasein, then, if it is ontologically open in as much as its existence is such that the issue or meaning of what it means to be, is undecided in and of itself, and relative to the stand one takes in one existence and how one lives out that choice. But, on the other hand, the stand taken is delimited to the choices that are on offer within a given culture. There is no point beyond which Dasein can act that is not already offered as a possibility within its socio-cultural setting or social being. In other words Dasein is ontically determined that its lived reality is what is closest to its being and from which there is no escape. What then can Dasein do if hypothetically he or she is encircled by a
culture and social practices that may be unjust as in patriarchy or racism? What does Dasein do if there is the realization that the understanding of being of which it is vaguely familiar preontologically or pretheoretically contradicts the sociality that is inherent in existential being, that is being-with others-in-the-world? Precisely because we are bound within a cultural formation Dreyfus (1993: 24):

The most a Dasein can do is “raise its consciousness,” that is, clarify the interpretation in the culture. For example, feminists try to become conscious of what it means to be feminine in our culture in order to modify our practices. … [but] … Heidegger would, disagree however, with people … who think we should get clear about our sex roles and thus get over them and simply be persons.

Since our background practices in which we are socialized and acculturated is the grounding upon which our understanding and the intelligibility of being is based, as in say the example of gender, it makes it somewhat meaningless to expect then to make sense of gender beyond the social practices from which such understanding albeit flawed essentially derives. The key issue and its overdetermination seems then not to rest with the cultural formation and its articulation with gender per se, but rather with Dasein’s way of being and that is the self-interpretation that comes with existence understood existentially. In other words we can intervene at the level of self-interpretation in as much as it involves taking a stand on how a given culture understands its practices in say what it means to be masculine and feminine, and thereby modify our own practices and thus
offer in such practices railed as it might be against the conventional understanding another interpretation of gendered being.

There is another point to be made in that the socialization process involved in the assignation and acceptance of gender roles has been the subject of much discussion and theoretical contemplation and its planes of differentiation have been catalogued to the point that we have become self-conscious of its practices and thus sensitive about its effects and its undesirable outcomes. But when we ask what does it mean to be a man or a woman in terms of our gender identities it becomes less obvious in the light of what it entails and thus Dreyfus (1993: 21-22) takes up Heidegger’s sensibilities in this regard when he points out that our:

most pervasive interpretations” of gender are in “our bodies, our perceptions, our language, and in our skills for dealing with the same and opposite sex.

In relation to our visionary being and the matter of its pervasiveness we have increased this relationship many times over as the socialization and acculturation into the ways of seeing of a given culture is for the most part imperceptible. Our immersion in a culture’s way of seeing is such that we do not ask questions as to the nature of the way we see and how things show up thus in respect of the example of television the vision involved therein is taken for granted. In other words we have generalized this capacity of vision such that we have not considered the different ways of seeing and their relation to being and vice versa the different modalities of being and the kind of vision that ensue in
relation thereto. Similarly when it comes to technology we are also immersed in it to such an extent that we do not question its nature and extent but absorb its sensibility through our involvement in the social practices that it generates and the modalities of vision it instantiates. We thus see our task as opening up the question of being following Heidegger though more attuned to its sociological potential for surfacing the social dimension in considering the different modalities of sociality and sociabilities that seem to lie fallow therein.

5.2.2.3 Dasein as Self-misinterpreting

The fact that we are culturally and socially bound through socialization and inured in these practices comes to be as will be argued the site of a spurious understanding of what it means to be a human being. This apparently hinges on the contradiction between existence and essence. Informed by his reading of Heidegger, Dreyfus (1993: 25) brings this into sharp relief:

Being essentially self-interpreting, Dasein has no nature. Yet Dasein always understands itself as having some specific essential nature. It grounds its actions in its understanding of human nature, and feels at home in belonging to a certain nation or a certain race.

What is at work here is that what comes to be, that is, the cultural and social understanding of ourselves covers up what we essentially are in our ‘unsettled’ and ‘open-ended’, still to be decided, selves. There is thus a contradiction in accepting and fixing our identities to the socio-cultural understanding proffered as if it were some
naturalized and predestined essentialised being. Furthermore, and of profound significance for our being with each other is that there is no preserve on such and such a people with such and such a cultural formation and their mutual affinities as these are not naturally given but socially acquired and as such is equally accessible to any other Dasein since it is simply a sociological matter that is a question of socialization and acculturation as far as it relates to a particular understanding of what it means to be such and such a social being.

However, given the preontological understanding involved in the shared agreement of social practices one can gain an insight into how it is that people operating from this vague, but primordial understanding come to think of themselves intuitively as innately belonging to some nation or ethnicity and even a ‘race’. This understanding seems to take root precisely because our preontological understanding cannot be made explicit in its entirety because we dwell in it and its presence is pervasive, suffusing everything we encounter and behold.

If, perhaps, one can come to understand that in the vagueness and dimness of a preontological understanding a spurious understanding of Dasein comes into play one is still left with trying to figure out why there is this seeming trade-off between the open-endedness of existence (preontological understanding) for the foreclosure of a fixed cultural essence (preontological misunderstanding). Dreyfus (1993: 25) understands the logic behind what he calls a “preontological misunderstanding” to rest in Heidegger’s concept of existence as stated.
Understanding itself thus as an object with a fixed essence covers up Dasein’s unsettledness and calms the anxiety occasioned by recognizing that Dasein is interpretation all the way down. Dasein’s tendency to cover up its own preontological understanding accounts for the traditional misinterpretations of Dasein as some sort of object with a fixed nature. Heidegger calls this motivated understanding “fleeing” and sees the “falling” it produces as an essential structure of human being.

What emerges in this preontological understanding of being as far as our understanding is concerned is a paradoxical relationship to Dasein. Consider that on the one hand that this very preontological understanding of the being of Dasein as unsettled and open serves as the basis upon which an understanding or intelligibility of the being of beings is made possible. But simultaneously on the other hand that this selfsame preontological understanding this openness and unsettledness which lights up our relation to being and beings is also unnerving and the site of anxiety. Granted that the openness of Dasein’s existence, its unsettledness is viable as the source of anxiety, then surely, should it not also be the case that this very anxiety is reproduced in relation to Dasein’s encounter with being and beings as such. And if this in indeed the case then we may equally infer that as far as the visionary being of Dasein is concerned, there is too the need for a covering up or assuaging of anxiety, and this is precisely the motivation behind the relationship between social being and vision. In other words what emerges within the purview of Dasein, in so far as its visibility is concerned, is rendered intelligible in virtue of the
particular social and cultural horizon, as a way of fixing the openness of being as it relates to Dasein’s, that is its self-interpreting modality of existence, and accounts for the different fields of vision of cultures, people see differently.

Are we then saying that what is ultimately visible and seen as such is that which is fear and anxiety inducing and that which does not invoke the latter is somehow invisible? The answer would be yes but not as physical presence per se, but rather only in so far as it relates to the relationship between being and vision. In other words not all that is seen or visually perceived necessarily relates to Dasein’s being as disclosure as such, but all that produces anxiety is related to being as revealing of Dasein. There is thus the seeing that ensues by way of its sensory dynamics and there is the seeing that is connected to being that needs to be distinguished, and will be taken up later. For now we seek to mark vision as it relates to our preontological understanding of being. And here the strong point is that the preontological understanding of social being, that is, the shared agreement of social practices serves not only as a mode of intelligibility of being, but in as much as it relates to vision it serves as a field of visibility, it allows things to show up. In this sense our vision is tied to the unsettled and openness of being and is suggestive of the primacy of existence over essence for unlike other sentient beings vision is not open but structured into their genetic programming such that what shows up is what is they are wired to see as an extension of their essential make-up.

In closing in as much as there is a ‘fleeing’ from the unsettledness and openness of Dasein’s being and a ‘falling’ into the spuriousness of a fixed essence; there is too a
‘fleeing’ from the unsettledness of vision and a ‘falling’ into the ocular conventions and conformity of the field of vision correlative with the socio-cultural order of the day. The question that begs unpacking in this instance from what has been said, thus far, is that at the very least Dasein is in a position to take up in its self-interpretation a true relation to its preontological understanding and accept its unsettledness or it can fall for a spurious fixed essence in its cultural and social milieu. It turns out that there is a third possibility as well and thus we now consider Dasein’s three modes of being and explore its implication for our visionary beings.

5.3 Dasein’s three modes of being

Before taking up the discussion on the three modes of being of Dasein Dreyfus (1993: 25) makes mention of another characteristic of the self-interpreting way of being (i.e. Dasein) or what we prefer to think about as sociability, in order to put the modalities of being human into perspective. What Dreyfus (ibid) is referring to is that according to Heidegger (1962) “Dasein always belongs to someone. It is owned.” Thus Heidegger’s (1962: 67) cited in Dreyfus (ibid) says that:

We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed. The being of any such entity is in each case mine.

There is however an important qualification to be made of sociological import in that what is critical in Heidegger’s understanding of the notion that Dasein is “owned” by the individual is that it is not an atomistic and isolated modality of being privy only to such a discrete entity. Rather as Dreyfus (1993: 26) makes abundantly clear
For Heidegger, Dasein’s mineness is the public stand it takes on itself-on what it is to be this Dasein-by way of its comportment.

What it is that Dasein comports itself to or what it is that the self-interpreting way of being human relates to by way of its stand or choice, or as it happens its lack thereof relates to the particular characteristic of human existence. In this regard it refers to the matter of the unsettled nature of human existence, and thus that it is open-ended and contingent upon how we relate to that which we have been socialized and acculturated into, as a matter of our everyday sociality. So what is the choices vis-à-vis the commonsense public understanding of what it means to be human, asocial being, that we inhabit and own primarily and initially as our distinctive way of being? Is this a fait accompli? Clearly not, since we have Dasein in us, which is the self-interpreting way of being, and moreover are unsettled, and therefore exist by way of becoming as an unresolved way of being. The possibilities not to further belabor the point and its related modalities of being are (Dreyfus, 1993: 26-27):

… Dasein can own up, disown, or fail to take a stand on its unsettling way of being. … Heidegger calls choosing itself or owning up Dasein’s authentic (eigentlich) way of being, and seeming to choose while disowning, Dasein’s inauthentic (uneigentlich) way of being. He calls the third mode, in which Dasein exists most of the time, the undifferentiated mode.
Each of these possibilities ultimately opens or closes off a relationship to oneself, and though they are not negatively described by Heidegger as Dreyfus point out they do bear consequences for the individual’s stand. Dreyfus (1993: 26-27) takes up the implications of each and how they bear on Dasein in reverse order to that above:

…first …every person… must be socialized into a particular cultural understanding of being. … since Dasein has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine (68) [42], its stand is just what it picks up from the collective way of not owning up to itself, of not covering up its unsettledness. Second … instead of simply accepting passively the social role it grew up in, it actively identifies with some social role such as lawyer, father, or lover or some socially sanctioned identity such as victim or sacrificing mother, which allows it to disown, or cover up, its true self-interpreting structure. The owned mode, the third way of relating to one’s own existence … Dasein finally achieves individuality by realizing it can never find meaning by identifying with a role. Dasein then “chooses” the social responsibilities available to it in such a way as to manifest in the style of its activity its understanding of the groundlessness of its own existence.

In the first instance it might be inferred that Dasein absconds from making a decision, and thus drifts along with the cultural and social flow and as such “fails to take a stand” on its groundlessness. This it is argued is tantamount to closing itself from the self, settling instead for being an undifferentiated Dasein, that is, being a part of ‘everyone’
and ‘anyone’, “Das Man”. The same holds for the stand described as disowning the unsettledness of Dasein and choosing a social role from the cultural inventory on offer, though this time as a means to cover up and close off the existing self thus manifesting Dasein’s way of being, as inauthentic. Finally, in recognizing the unsettled and open-ended nature of Dasein and living its life accordingly Dasein opens a path to the self such that “it wins itself” and thus takes on the mantle of an authentic way of being. In accepting groundlessness as one’s social condition and being and thus one’s modality of sociality means that one is not wedded to any particular identity as an uber identity with all that it entails in what is sociologically conceptualized as ethnocentric and its prejudicial bearing. Thus, one may be passionate about one’s choices and the way one lives out that way of being but since it is not regarded as one’s essence as such one can be passionate and yet be committed to a way of being that manifests the sociability of a practice towards cultural relativism.

The question to which we now turn is how this might relate to vision since we have tied the latter to Dasein. In the undifferentiated mode of being where a stand in relation being is one by default that is not being explicit one way or the other in respect of Dasein’s groundlessness we could accept the concomitant modality of vision as an everyday seeing or a an undifferentiated vision that reproduces the commonsense modality of quotidian living. The field of vision is analogous to the cultural horizon of what Heidegger (1962: 69; 1996: 41) calls “Dasein’s everydayness or its averageness.. Secondly, in as much as the latter is also considered an inauthentic way of being it is rather in the act of choosing as a cover-up of the groundlessness of human existence that the inauthentic proper is
regarded as such. In this respect the concomitant mode of intelligibility of vision would be in-authenticity in so far as it relates not to the everyday viewing and a cultural horizon of averageness, but rather to a sub-cultural horizon in the specific role that is chosen and thus from which its visionary intelligibility would arise.

Thus, in seeing the self, the undifferentiated vision is limited to the quotidian order of averageness and in the inauthentic modality of sociality, its vision is role-defined both truncated, though in the authentic mode, vision takes the form of a ‘seeing which discloses and makes the self apparent to the self. In other words we might refer to the seeing of the authentic self as an ‘ontological vision’ ‘clear-sighted’ on an understanding of its social being. Whereas the previous two might be more akin to gradations of an ontic vision that is undifferentiated from the “one”, the conventional, while the inauthentic though differentiated is still hooked into the normative of a specific role and its delimited horizon of intelligibility. And thus in this respect these are delimited to a sociality and a field of vision which unable to extricate itself from its parochiality and thus tied to a fragmented understanding of being and a spurious understanding of its social being as somehow essentialised.

We have thus far covered some of the essential ground concerning the make-up of Dasein and discussed how it is made manifest in the human way of being and articulated its commonality with culture, institutions and society in particular. But most importantly we differentiated Dasein from Dasein-like entities as stated on the basis that the former viz. social beings as Dasein are ‘beings-in-the-world. What we focus on now is to put

5.4 Being-in-the-world: Dasein and the intelligibility of being and beings

Previously we have accounted for the understanding of the intelligibility of beings as deriving from a preontological understanding of being and that this was acquired through the shared agreement contained in the social practices in which we are socialized and engage normatively. What is required now is to unpack what is meant by the immersion ‘in’ social practices and its relation to the world and Dasein; and of course our added concern for vision which is both implicit and explicit in Heidegger. However, in order to come to terms with Heidegger’s existential analysis of ‘being-in’ it is necessary to follow Dreyfus (1993: 40) on his discussion of the key distinction being made. The importance of this rests in the conceptual distinctions necessitated in drawing attention to how being-in-the-world’ relates to Dasein’s being and thus the intelligibility of all beings. What we need to do now is to dispel any notion that the preontological understanding of social being is located in Dasein, which is a property of human beings, in virtue of its self-interpretational abilities. Here the issue of note is that as stated previously this understanding of being is in the social practices or sociabilities of a given cultural formation. What is thus at issue now is what that existential characteristic is that makes it possible to relate to social practices in such a way as to emerge with an understanding of social being albeit a ‘vague and dim’ take on sociality.
Heidegger calls the activity of existing, “being-in-the-world.” … “being-in” in Dasein’s “being-in-the-world” is not to be thought of as a characteristic of objects spatially with respect to other objects. The way of being of objects, understood as isolated, determinate, substances Heidegger calls Voorhandenheit … usually translated as “presence-at-hand” … I shall use “occurrentness”.

Let’s recall that existence was described as that state in which an interpretation of what it meant to be Dasein or Dasein-like was contained in the social practices that are emergent in the acculturation and socialization process. Following on this we note in Heidegger’s conflation of existing and being-in-the-world above that it means that there is a point of equivalence between the two, and that this rests in the self-contained interpretation of what it means to be Dasein and thus a being-in—the-world. There is an understanding of being that comes with having Dasein in ourselves and there is an understanding of being that comes with the structure of the social world. Before the issue of worldliness is dealt with we need to come to grips with a particular understanding of the relationship between Dasein and the world. To what end is Dasein a being-in-the-world and that which precedes the latter what does it mean to be in-the-world existentially speaking? Dealing with this matter brings us to the point where we can appreciate the conceptual distinction Heidegger introduces above between Dasein and objects which are present as things in themselves. Dreyfus (1993: 41) puts the case thus:

When someone calls our attention to the fact that “in” also has an existential sense which expresses involvement, as in being in love, being in business, or being in
the theater, we tend to think of this as a metaphorical derivation from physical inclusion. This is just what one would expect if Heidegger is right that Dasein always (mis)interprets itself in terms of the objects with which it deals.

If objects described above are viewed as isolated and determinate, in a word detached, and it is held that Dasein has a tendency to conflate the human way of being with objects, then the spatial concept of something being inside something else as an ‘object in a box’ is rendered analogous to humans being in the world. This is fundamentally a misinterpretation as it overlooks the existential concept of what it means to be involved such that one can be in-love without any spatial connotations whatsoever. The mistake here is that our reference to being in-love is not involvement, an existential state, but rather the physical and spatial sense of being contained. What makes Heidegger radical in his existential analysis of being-in is that our conventional understanding of the isomorphic relationship of space and our concept of being in is reversed. Instead of ‘in’ taking its cue from its physical concept, that is, of containment the opposite is accepted, viz., that it is considered primordially or originally, thus Heidegger claims that the physical conception of spatially being in derives from existential involvement, which is being-in. But moreover that this existential concept of being-in Dreyfus (1993: 43) shows stems from Dasein’s make-up:
Being-in (with a hyphen) is essentially distinguished from being in because Dasein takes a stand on itself by way of being occupied with things. Being-in as being involved is definitive of Dasein.

Since what characterizes being human is that one is groundless, unsettled and open in one’s nature means that what defines Dasein at any given point in its existence is the self-interpretations that arise out of particular practices engaged in. Thus, in the sociabilities of being in-business Dasein might be led to interpret its being in relation to such involvement, or if it be being in-love then similarly this would be the basis of Dasein’s view of itself. So, if, we now consider what being-in-the-world is supposed to mean from the point of view of an existential understanding, then it would take the form of a meaning that sees Dasein’s relation to the world as one of many involvements and not a spatial concept as such. The question that begs here is how one would describe this particular type of relationship to the world and what is it that orients such a predisposition.

To be sure Dreyfus is not saying that Heidegger rejects the idea of a spatial or physical concept of what it means to be in something else that is contained, but rather that it is not the primordial or original concept, in other words being in is derived from the existential concept of being-in. But that we have bodies and that these bodies have organs in it as occurrent, that is isolated and determinate objects is without question. Notwithstanding, however, as primordial as this involved state of being-in-the-world is it is still predicated on a groundlessness and unsettledness, that is, a social being of homelessness.
Paradoxically Dasein or the human way of being is not at home in the world as a given
state at all, it is ultimately strived for in the socio-cultural practices that Dasein throws
itself into as a way of covering up what is at bottom an affective state that is never quite
at-home in the world. Put another way being-in-the-world is Dasein’s way of coming to
be a social being in relation to whatever ontology (understanding of being) is contained in
its social activities and practices, and as such is never at home but always working to
wards it. But since this way of being is a working towards a sense of belonging and being
at home it is tied to the contingency of self-interpretations and hence Dasein home is of a
protean nature. How then is this being-in-the-world to be understood and what defines its
characteristic nature?

In considering the existential understanding of being-in it was noted that Dasein conflates
its condition with that of objects and thus the question arises as to how one should
consider being-in-the-world in the presence of other objects and equipment. Be mindful
that we are not including other Dasein or human beings which Heidegger reserves for the
existential category being-with or mitsein. To distinguish the latter from being-in-the-
world with objects and yet capture what that mode of being might be like Dreyfus
(1993: 45) offers a different translation to the convention of Heidegger’s notion of sein-
bei

… which is very badly translated as “being alongside.” … Heidegger says
directly: “There is no such thing as ‘side-by-side-ness’ of an entity called ‘Dasein’
with another entity called world’ (81) [55] … I shall therefore translate sein-bei as being-amidst.

What is at issue for Dreyfus is not to attenuate Heidegger’s existential concept of being-in such that it becomes indistinguishable from the spatial concept entailed in objects and their being in as containment. Thus the idea of being alongside just does not cut it as an existential understanding of what it means to be involved in the world such that one is immersed in one’s activities, and thus there is in such a condition no space between the world and its activities. Using ‘being-amidst’ seems to capture that sense that one is amongst objects in such a way that one is defined by a relationship to these things. The point is that the kind of relationship to things and the world that is at issue here for Heidegger is captured by Dreyfus (1993: 45) accordingly:

What Heidegger is getting at is a mode of being-in we might call “inhabiting.” When we inhabit something, it is no longer an object for us but becomes part of us and pervades our relation to other objects in the world. … Heidegger … calls this way of being-in “dwelling.” … Dwelling is Dasein’s basic way of being-in-the-world. The relation between me and what I inhabit cannot be understood on the model of the relation between subject and object.

In ‘dwelling’ and ‘inhabiting’ the world it is no longer opposed to us it becomes that with which we share a relationship akin to a marriage which reconstitutes two entities for one
(married couple) even though two (husband and wife) are still discernible it is as a unitary whole (marital unit) that they now function and that in turn informs a reconfigured relation to social being, in general. The analogy of marriage is not made as much in relation to the communion between two beings in as much as it suggests a physical union, but rather because it is indicative of the modality of being that marriage connotes. If one considers a typical Christian marriage and the vows taken in such a union then what stands out is that each partner in the marriage pledges to take care of each other, and to preserve one another through all the existential crises one expects to encounter, as they set out to build a life together. It is in this sense of being-in-a-marriage that one may think of dwelling as it is not simply about staying in a marriage, but a way of being that involves a set of relations to each other and the union that is characterized by care, nurturing and self-sacrifice. With this in mind let’s consider Heidegger’s (1971: 146-147) concept of dwelling to capture its core and attempt without too much elaboration to enter into his discussion of what a thing is and its relation to the gathering of the fourfold (earth, sky, divinities and mortals) and its relation in turn to building (constructing and cultivating) at this point.

To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.* It pervades dwelling in its whole range. That range reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth.
To dwell as described by Heidegger above is simply to let things be that is to ‘live and let live’ and as such means to inhabit the world in such a way that humans are unobtrusive in their presence. This way of social being of Dasein as existence, that is, being-in-the-world exhibits its concern and care for being, and thus is of the character of sparing and preserving. However, to be sure this should not be taken to mean that in viewing that which shows up, it emerges in a vision of detached and objective contemplation, rather like theoretical or scientific vision. By contrast to the latter the former vision is the vision of wonder and comes from the sociality which is a modality of dwelling with the sociabilities of sparing and preserving. At bottom one is in fact dealing with an ontological vision, that is, it has an understanding of what it means to be and to let be (gelassenheit) from one whom temporally speaking is passing through and is of an ephemeral nature and thus is concerned and cares for its social being. The reference to dwelling and its whole range and mortality Heidegger (1971: 147-148) ties to his concept of the ‘gathering of the fourfold’ and a particular understanding of world or sociality and thus what it means to be for Dasein to be in-the-world.

But “on the earth” already means “under the sky.” Both of these also mean “remaining before the divinities” and include a “belonging to men’s being with one another.” By a primal oneness the four-earth and sky, divinities and mortals-belong together in one. … The mortals are the human beings. [The] simple oneness of the four we call the fourfold. Mortals are in the fourfold by dwelling.
But the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve. Mortals dwell in the way they preserve the fourfold in its essential being, its presencing. Accordingly, the preserving that dwells is fourfold.

We now have some concept of Heidegger’s (1971: 148-149) understanding of Dasein’s dwelling that is tied to a concept of world as expressed in the fourfold though how dwelling relates to each of the elements of the fourfold still begs. Thus:

Mortals dwell in that they save the earth- … To save really means to set something free into its own presencing- … Mortals dwell in that they receive the sky as sky. … they do not turn night into day nor day into harassed unrest. … Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities. … In the very depth of misfortune they wait for the weal that has been withdrawn. … Mortals dwell in that they initiate their own nature- their being capable of death as death-into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there may be a good death.

One may be tempted to think of Heidegger’s thinking as a call to the simplicity of the social being of a traditional peasant lifestyle to which his recourse to the example of a Black forest farmhouse seemingly lends credence, though such a petty-bourgeois hankering hardly seems appropriate and plausible in our contemporary age. What seems closer to his thinking is that dwelling, that is, sparing, preserving and caring need to be the guide to our practices and thinking and not some notion of a nostalgic return, for this may just the same miss the crucial point. This crucial point may act as a counterpoise to
our technological condition of transforming our world into an objectless standing reserve in which everything including human beings themselves are turned into resources and rendered available and disposable as modern technologies assault of our planet testifies. Notwithstanding within this technological trajectory and its enframing is the possibility of maintaining our dwelling as mortals and our connection to being-in-the-world as the preserving of the fourfold. To this end Heidegger (1971: 149) asks: and answers:

But if dwelling preserves the fourfold, where does it keep the fourfold’s nature?
How do mortals make their dwelling such a preserving?

He (ibid) answers his own questions and in so doing opens a path which may serve as site not only to maintain the sensibility of dwelling but possibly recast how one views that which is brought forth through technology and its relation to being as dwelling and being-in-the-world.

Mortals would never be capable of it if dwelling were merely a staying on earth under the sky, before the divinities, among mortals. Rather, dwelling itself is always a staying with things. Dwelling, as preserving, keeps the fourfold in that with which mortals stay: in things. … Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things. But things themselves secure the fourfold only when they themselves as things are let be in their presencing. How is this done? In this way, that mortals nurse and nurture the things that grow, and specially construct things that do not grow.
The fourfold or that sense of the sociality of the world as gathering in things does not inhere as preserve of Dasein, but does arise as an existential capacity borne out the fact that existence is an issue for Dasein; and hence from whence cometh the structure of care. It is this capacity for care and thus its connectedness with staying and preserving that Dasein brings to bear in its dealings with nature and techne (producing things) that allows the fourfold to presence itself. Thus, Dasein does not create the fourfold but enables it to be manifest in the being of things through its modality of being of dwelling that is the staying and preserving, or its way of social being that it presences in-the-world. Clearly not everything that is produced, or built qualifies as a thing with the gathering qualities of the fourfold, and certainly most technologically produced things are part of an equipmental nexus, and as such cannot be left to be in itself and allow for a gathering of the fourfold. In fact Heidegger goes as far as to suggest that technology is not capable of producing things as stated but only objects. There are alternate suggestions by Borgmann (1983) who makes something of an argument for an articulation of technology and focal practices which has the power of a fourfold gathering while Feenberg (1986, 1991) argues for a secondary level of technological gathering and Dreyfus and Spinosa (1991) take the position that technology does have the power to gather, and as such is capable of producing things. Dwelling, in the way Heidegger describes it, is an unobtrusive modality of being, in fact, it is contrasted with the technological modality in which nature is “challenged-forth” and all that comes within its purview is transformed into a standing reserve without so much as the status of an object remaining let alone a thing. This is its fate under the aegis of enframing and the technological imperative of the standing
reserve, which the transformation of things and objects and even Dasein itself into resources.

To return to the matter ‘at hand’: in the main our discussion sought clarity on what Heidegger meant by dwelling and how this related to the two modalities of being-in-the-world and being in the world. In closing this section on dwelling we make the inference that dwelling is related to being-in-the-world and thus engages being existentially such that the mode of vision that is relevant is circumspection as it is tied to staying, preserving and caring. What is seen in this modality of vision as a function of dwelling would be stand-alone ‘things’ appearing as natural products or as that which have been constructed with staying, preserving and caring in mind. Moreover, that dwelling instantiates a mode of vision which makes of the fourfold a field of vision in which what is rendered visible are ‘things’. The latter speaks to the modality being-in-the-world. By contrast a more truncated vision is instantiated in the presencing of that which arises out of the modality of being in the world and a visionary being that is detached and without context viz. curiosity. And finally furthermore in being in the world but from the context of a theoretical or scientific paradigm the vision is certainly richer than the latter though in both instances what emerges from the latter line of vision and the field of disciplinary vision are objects that is that which stands opposed to being in the duality of subject-object relations.
The question of how things relate to each other as discrete objects that are juxtaposed to each other does not presuppose a relationship as such; in other words it does not inform the way said objects relate to each other as these things do not exist as such, and thus are not in a position to take a stand on things or develop some self-interpretation thereto. Furthermore, the existential state of being-in-the-world is such that what is seen does not arise in relation to the duality of a subject and object, but, rather, is informed by a field of involvement. Thus what is encountered is disclosed as a function of dwelling or inhabiting the world and brings to the fore a practical involvement that is not predicated on intentionality with mental overtones as such. This is the same way one’s relationship to the world is de-distantiated by one’s involvement and as such is not opposed to us as in a subject-object duality, so too is vision a function of involvement where this is the mode of being in which one is relating to the world.

The point here is that this mode of vision about which we will expand later is deemed by Heidegger to be the primary modality stemming as it does from our relation to the world in terms of what it means for something to be used in one way or another and is translated from “Zuhandenheit” as a mode of intelligibility which presents things as “ready-to-hand” (Heidegger, 1962, 1996). To emphasise this modality of being conventionally translated as ready-to-hand for its utilitarian dimension Dreyfus (1993) retranslates Heidegger’s “Zuhandenheit” as “availableness”. We will use both terms interchangeably.

What we need to bear in mind is that there are two modes of being that are at issue in terms of how we relate to the world and thus how we encounter objects and thus how we
see things. With respect to being-in as the existential relation of involvement and its de-
distanciation Heidegger refers to the kind of vision that takes place in this regard as “circumspection” and is what arises in our “concernful dealings with the world” and what it entails in its mode as “ready-to-hand” or availableness as tools or equipment. By contrast being in as a physical and spatial concept arises as a derived modality of being from the latter which as we will discover later emerges when there is a breakdown or disturbance in our circumspect involvement and thus what was available becomes unavailable. When this occurs, objects take on a discrete and detached mode of being from their contexts, that is Dasein no longer relates to the latter as being-in-the-world but instead as earlier stated objects assume a mode of intelligibility as “present-at-hand” or as Dreyfus translates it as “occurrent”, that is, that it just occurs before us. It is in this manner that one’s vision loses its involvement in its context and takes the form of a detached viewing we associate with a theoretical vision though it does not discount a pre-ontological understanding only that it is decontextualised and de-worlded as taken out of an equipmental whole.

And it is in this mode of things being occurrent or present-at-hand that we encounter the world in the modality of a subject-object duality and are thus able to encounter objects in the mode of intelligibility of the disinterested and objective observer, the way of being of theory and science, and only thus is the derived vision of presence-at-hand made manifest. It is only then that we may speak of being in the world as a physical space in which there are objects that we are alongside and able to see in a detached and decontextualised manner as things in themselves.
There is, however, an important distinction that needs to be brought to bear on the detached viewing at issue here and that is that Heidegger does not view theoretical vision as a context-free seeing, but rather that such viewing is recontextualised in relation to the disciplinary parameters of the theory or science that informs such a vision. Unlike the latter there is the vision with its own modality of being that comes with a ‘staring’ and ‘not tarrying’ which Heidegger (1996) associates with “curiosity” and what Dreyfus (1993) calls a “pure occurrence”. What need concern us here as the latter will be taken up extensively later is that theoretical vision and the vision associated with curiosity are modalities of being and vision that take over from our involvements and circumspect vision associated with readiness-to-hand.

With the shift to the modality of being of presence-at-hand vision is extricated from its modality as circumspection and becomes one of theoretical reflection. However, in dealing with the subject – object juxtaposition and the cognitive centering of representation we need to put into Heideggerian perspective what is entailed in perception and how this relates to our sociality as being-in-the-word and our related sociabilities as intentional comportments, that is, how we relate to that which we encounter and how these are rendered intelligible. And finally what does this say about our existential – ontological understanding of social being from the vantage point of the usability of equipment and its context worldliness and circumspection or readiness-to-hand and in the breakdown of the latter and its recontextualisation in theory and science
and reflective observation and finally in the decontextualisation of curiosity and its staring distractedly.
Chapter Six

Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Perception: perceptual intentional comportment as counterpoise

We have previously taken up ontological and epistemological import of the modality of vision in Greek thinking and here again this theme comes up, but this time with the added dimension of its role in constituting the very ground of some abiding philosophical problems. The central problem that was addressed previously was that associated with the subject object distanciation, which set up as a ‘vision condition’ and as such expressed together with the ‘technological condition’ something of a detachment from our social being and existential involvement in-the-world.

To set the scene for this chapter we ad that it is this very problem that we are engage in, in methodology, in Sociology, and that grounds our very understanding of the epistemological dualism separating subject and object in research practice. What we claim, here, is missing in this epistemological encounter and our understanding thereof, is that the prior moment in which such a virtual ‘calculus of observation’ is seen to be derived from, is not taken cognizance of, in the very ocular domain that is simultaneously its raison d’etre. In other words the dualities of subject and object, perceiver and perceived and appearance and essence are not derived from epistemology as such, but rather from the stance initiated by an ocular subject under the sway of a particular modality of vision. It is in this regard that we can speak of occularcentrism and the
hegemony of vision in so far as its presence is concerned in theory per se, and the subject – object distanciation and objective detachment from social being.

What is at issue here as far as the latter model of vision is concerned is that the primordiality of being-in and its existential dimension of spatial compression is inverted and subsumed in the derivative mode of being in, as spatial distanciation of the theoretical dimension of being. Thus, an existential vision of the first order comes under the adumbration of a theoretical vision of the second order, and worst still under the tarrying vision of curiosity (see 7.3.1) of the third order. In making the claim that vision and its practices lie at the heart of the epistemological dualities does not detract from the fact that the latter is entrenched in our very modalities of thinking, and institutionalized as such in our academies.

In this chapter we engage with vision insofar as it constituted in our perceptual structure and set up an alternative to the subject – object distanciation of vision, in the intentional comportment of perception and as such reorient vision in an existential – ontological understanding of being and thus offer it up as corrective and counterpoise to the interpolation of social being by modern technology and its way of potentially revealing ‘everything’, that is, be-ing as standing reserve. Thus, in taking this Heideggerian line of thinking we are moving towards the question of how we redress the nihilistic project attached to the way of revealing of the standing reserve as the imperative of modern technology and its ‘enframing’. And to this end we turn to the intentional comportment of the perceptual structure with vision as our case in point.
6.1 Theoretical knowledge, intentionality, perception, comportment and being-in-the-world

In the relegation of theoretical knowledge beneath practical knowledge, in Heidegger, according primacy to the mode of being of ‘ready-to-hand’ (see 7.1.1) over that which is “present-at-hand” (see 7.1.2.3 and 7.1.1), does he in fact simultaneously reject the epistemological value of theory and science. And if so, is the casualty similarly the visionary being thereto attached. This is what we address in this chapter in relation to its encounter and concern with being and Dasein. To jumpstart this discussion, the response to our introductory question is an unequivocal no in as much as the issue rests in a particular understanding of how the two modalities of being of objects are related to each other and their import for being-in-the-world, that is, social being. However, there is a more fundamental issue at hand for Heidegger which Dreyfus (1993: 45) takes up accordingly:

Traditional philosophy has, since the time of Plato, maintained that knowledge is gained by means of detached, disinterested inquiry. … The whole array of philosophical distinctions between inner subjective experience and the outer object of experience, between perceiving and the perceived, and between appearance and reality arise at this point, and “it becomes the evident point of departure for problems of epistemology or the metaphysics of knowledge” (86) [59] and outer
Given this state of affairs that we have previously taken up in the subject – object distanciation, the question that is now of concern is, how does Heidegger propose to break us out of what has become an intuitive way of thinking for his counter-intuitive understanding? Dreyfus captures (1993: 45) the thrust as

Only by exposing the derivative character of the detached, reflective stance, Heidegger holds, can we see the limits of subjective consciousness and the objects it knows. … To break out of the epistemological tradition, we must begin with everyday involved phenomena and then see where consciousness and its intentional content fit in.

This bears out the successive and derivative order of the practical and existential, socially contextualized domain and the theoretical and detached, socially de-contextualized, but theoretically recontextualised domain, though its counterintuitive nature is that (ibid):

Heidegger holds that human experience (Erfahrung) discloses the world and discovers entities in it-and yet this does not entail the traditional conclusion that human beings relate to objects by means of their experiences (Erlebnisse), that is, by way of mental states. This view defies common sense and a long philosophical tradition.

What we have here is an understanding of the recessive role of vision or perception in the encounter of entities in as much as it is deemed a function of experience, that is, what we
in fact do rather than what we see. The field of visibility as mode of intelligibility emerges through the domain of the practical and not the theoretical as its primary and initial encounter. Thus the crux of the problem, for Heidegger as Dreyfus (ibid: 46) points out holds equally for Polanyi (1962) and Kuhn (1970), is

That the theoretical, disinterested knowledge that is correctly described in subject/object terms has been held up as the best example of knowledge for the last 2,500 years presupposes practical knowledge and involved “know-how” that cannot be accounted for in terms of theoretical knowledge. According to these thinkers theoretical knowledge depends on practical skills.

What we have, in the triad of Polanyi, Kuhn and Heidegger, as presented by Dreyfus (1993) above, is an inversion of the traditional understanding that theory is the primary mode and practical knowledge its derivative. However, the issue at hand, and its pertinence for an existential concept of being-in-the-world, and its relation to vision, does not revolve around the debate, as to whether mental content or representation in the mind precedes the relation with the world, or the primary act of vision, or whether there is no mediation between the subject and object of the world or perception. And, if there is no mediation between subject and object in the existential sense of being-in-the-world, then how does Heidegger understand Dasein’s particular involvement in the world. Put differently, what is the nature of Dasein’s dealings with the world such that in its primordial modality it is free of mental overtones? This does not hinge as Dreyfus
(1993:49-51) makes clear in Heidegger (1962) privileging the practical over the theoretical, but rather

… he wants to show … that neither practical activity nor contemplative knowing [theory] can be understood as a relation between a self-sufficient mind and an independent world.

For, if Heidegger sought merely to reverse the order giving priority to the practical, he would still for all intents and purposes be caught within the traditional view, which posited a “self-sufficient” mind at work, and thus would be found wanting as regards his existential concept of Dasein, as unsettled and groundless. More than this; his notion of an involved being-in-the-world would be replaced by a detached contemplative spatially located being in the world. And finally, he would be strained to maintain a derivative order that prioritizes the practical over the theoretical as self-sufficient mind. To obviate these obvious contradictions, Heidegger is required to take a more radical position, and to this end Dreyfus (1993: 49-50) gives us the benefit of his insightful analysis by pointing out that.

The focal problem is thus not what kind of intelligibility- theoretical or practical- is more basic, but how to get beyond the traditional account of intentionality altogether.
But to get beyond the traditional account of intentionality means having to reckon with Husserl and his conception which Dreyfus (1993: 50-51) summarizes for us, thus, immeasurably simplifying our task of coming to terms with Heidegger’s particular view.

Speaking of intentional content is meant to capture the fact that perceptions, beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on can all be directed toward the same object under the same aspect. … Heidegger sees, however, that such an account already introduces the subject/object distinction. It allows the separation of an intentional content that is mental from an objective world that may or may not be the way the mind takes it to be. Husserl defined phenomenology as the study of the intentional content remaining in the mind after the bracketing of the world. Heidegger accepts intentional directedness as essential to human activity, but he denies that intentionality is mental, that is, as Husserl (following Brentano) claimed, the distinguishing characteristic of mental states.

It would seem that Heidegger agrees with the phenomenological understanding of intentionality, but only in so far as it captures its essence as that which is “directed towards” something. However, in so far as Husserl albeit minimally attributes to intentionality a mental content he loses Heidegger who emphatically denies any such mental association. This means that in as much as one is dealing with an existential concept of Dasein as ‘being-in-the-world, that is, social be-ing, we have an intentionality, that is as such, directed toward the world or the social. But what leaves one gasping, somewhat, is that this directedness is not held to be in any ‘shape or form’ of mental
origin. And, in so far as it relates to its original or primordial engagement with the world, and entities therein it is not of a cognitive centering but of a social bearing. And, because Heidegger’s intentionality is neither as said related to any mental shape or form, nor is it deemed to be directed towards the world, on the basis of a perceptual or visionary being constructed traditionally in the duality of subject and object. The fact that Heidegger seeks to and does step beyond the mode of intentionality of the practical, and the theoretical requires from him an epistemological leap into a new inventory of concepts. To this end the concept that he formulates to take account of his particular concerns, and his critique for and of the mental bias in intentional content, Dreyfus (1993: 51) relates his innovation accordingly:

To get the ontology right Heidegger introduces his own term for the way human beings relate to things, Verhalten, translated as “comportment.”

To give an account of what comportment means, Dreyfus (1993: 51) refers us directly to Heidegger (1975: 58) who though specific in his conception, is also seen to be somewhat guarded:

Comportments have the structure of directing-oneself-toward, of being-directed-toward. Annexing a term from Scholasticism, phenomenology calls this structure intentionality. … this enigmatic phenomenon of intentionality is far from having been adequately comprehended philosophically.
The reference, to the matter of adequacy, at the level of the conceptualization of intentionality, has been included to add weight to the critique of the traditional view of intentionality, as far as its mental overtones are concerned. However, the focus here is of a positive order in so far as we seek clarity on Heidegger’s concept of comportment, in relation to the primordial relation of being-in-the-world, and our own immediate concern for its articulation with perception, or vision more narrowly, to be taken up a little later. What distinguishes Heidegger’s adoption of the concept comportment and its meaning is that as Dreyfus contends he:

… uses “comportment” to refer to our directed activity, precisely because the term has no mentalistic overtones. He points out that the whole machinery of the mental is a construction of the theorist, not the result of phenomenological description. He thus takes comportment or intentionality as characteristic not merely of acts of consciousness, but of human activity in general. Intentionality is attributed not to consciousness but to Dasein.

In other words, comportment, or that directed activity towards something, arises from Dasein’s relationship to itself, in so far as it involves a concern and a care for the stand that it takes with regard to its own existence and the self-interpretations that arise from this concrete existence. That is that Dasein’s relation to itself and its self-concept arises in relation to the stand that Dasein takes on its existence, that is, its social being, as concrete phenomenon located in the cultural formation, in which Dasein finds itself or is thrown in by ‘dint of circumstance’. The directedness of intentional comportment issues in the self-
interpretations and that understanding of being contained therein and the stances it takes vis-à-vis the concerns it takes up in its social be-ing.

We have already gone over the ground, in which it was shown, that Heidegger’s fundamental question of being, and the understanding thereof albeit ‘vague and dim’, is acquired through the process of socialization. And furthermore, that this latter process is not an exercise of the intellect, but one of involvement and immersion, a domain of practice. Thus, by relating comportment to Dasein’s existential structure Heidegger is able to keep the directed sense of intentionality, but dislodge himself from its mentalistic overtones. In considering vision, or as Heidegger deals with it as perception, we seek similarly to establish what the nature and structure is of the intentionality and the comportment that accompanies it. And it is primarily for this reason that we enter into this discussion on intentionality and comportment and its relation to the existential complex or Dasein as such. To arrive at such sought after clarity we need to ‘see’ how Heidegger is able to move beyond the issue of practical and theoretical intentionality; for as already stated one is dealing with more than a case of substituting the former for the latter. The scope of this analytical task that befalls Heidegger, Dreyfus (1993: 52) puts into the following perspective.

Heidegger is thus clear that the priority of knowing in Husserl cannot simply be supplemented by action. Rather, the whole idea of transcending from the inner to the outer must be revised. Heidegger criticizes the traditional account of everyday
We have variously discussed the implications of the epistemological duality of subject-object distanciation and the matter of transcendence implicated, in such a construction, in relation to the de-distanciation encompassed in, being-in-the-world as opposed to being in, as spatial concept. What is at issue here is to show that being-in-the-world does not entail an intentionality that is predicated on “ontic transcendence”, that is, a relation of exteriority that resides in a comportment with beings, but rather its apposite. In other words from whence cometh this capacity for relating to what Heidegger calls “intraworldly beings”, or put in the language above what enables our capacity to relate to objects in our everyday world, for ontic transcendence or comportment with objects. Of direct significance our capacity to fall into a technological milieu of gadgets and gizmos which in one moment is not around and in the next find it almost impossible to have managed life without it such personal computers, cellular phones and the like. The crux Dreyfus (1993: 52) points us to is found in Heidegger’s (1984: 134) conceptualization of the relation of intentionality and ontic transcendence and what in fact lies beneath this relationship:

Intentionality is indeed related to beings themselves and, in this sense, is an ontic transcending comportment, but it does not primordially constitute this relating-to but is founded in a being-amidst beings. This being-amidst is, in its intrinsic
possibility, in turn grounded in existence. In this way the limitations of the earlier interpretation and function of the concept of intentionality become clear, as does its fundamental significance.

Proceeding from the traditional epistemological duality of subject-object relations one is bound to an understanding of knowing as residing within the epistemic subject and thus the problem of transcendence arises in that one needs to show how we move from the inside of the subject’s mind to the outside to reach objects. This problem of transcendence, that is, leaving the provenance of the knowing subject Heidegger takes up and we will deal with it momentarily; the issue at hand here is the problem of transcendence from the vantage point of intentionality as comportment, in as much as it relates to the directedness that is located in the beings themselves, that is, ontically.

If, this intentionality which is comportment is not hooked into an epistemic subject and neither is it to be located in a pragmatic subject, then how is the transcendence of intentional comportment, that is, sans mentalistic overtones to be achieved, but in being-amidst-things. This being-amidst-beings presupposes a being-in, which in turn is another way that Heidegger speaks about existence and which has sociability involves a particular kind of sociality. And this existence, or being-in, in turn is another way that Heidegger speaks about a human way of being or Dasein which we take as a field of sociality, a social be-ing. Thus, this capacity for “relating-to” that is prior to knowing is made possible by the ‘Da’ of Dasein, that is, the “thrownness” or “thereness” of the human
condition, as a being that is always cast or thrust in-the-world, without ‘rhyme or reason’ amongst objects and with-people. It is this being outside itself that is being-in-the-world and the two modes of transcendence its entails that is now in need of being tied to the constitution of Dasein and the structure of being-in. What this comes down to for Heidegger as Dreyfus (1993: 52) makes abundantly clear is:

that all relations of mental states to their objects presuppose a more basic form of being-with-things which does not involve mental activity

The crux to understanding ontic transcending comportment as a particular modality of intentionality such that it is free of mental activity we might find in Heidegger (1975: 157) where he holds that:

Intentionality belongs to the existence of Dasein. For the Dasein, with its existence, there is always a being and an interconnection with a being already somehow unveiled, without its being expressly made into an object. To exist then means, among other things, to be as comporting with beings… It belongs to the nature of the Dasein to exist in such a way that it is always already with other beings.

Previously we referred to Heidegger, by way of Dreyfus, in which an account was given of the Dasein as emergent only after an initial socialization, that is, that to be human is not innate, but acquired in the socialization and acculturation that takes place in our
comportment with being-in (things, objects, Dasein or people and the Dasein-like or society, culture, institutions). That precisely because the human condition is unsettled and groundless its existence is an issue for it and thus is of concern and care and involves taking a stand on that which is socially and culturally proffered and as such involves a self-interpretation which defines said Dasein or individual human. It is in this entire complex that is implicated in existence, in being-in-the-world, and which involves a directedness towards an understanding of being and beings that is emergent in said comportment that intentionality is given, and hence it’s ontic transcendence the ability to be amidst-things or to relate to things. In other words intentionality in as much as it involves the individual Dasein is directed towards a specific and concrete socio-cultural formation and thus is ontic, however in as much as it is transcendent it refers to the extent to which it cuts across and holds for other Dasein equally, within the same formation and lies externally in beings. But to address the matter of its transcendence is to simultaneously identify as Heidegger has done an aporia in traditional thinking on intentionality. More than this in accounting for the ground of ontic transcendence Heidegger (1984: 135) gets to the most basic way of being:

Underneath the entire problem of the “relation” of “subject” to “object” is the undisclosed problem of transcience... The problem of transcience as such is not at all identical with the problem of intentionality. As ontic transcience, the latter is itself only possible on the basis of originary transcience, on the basis of being-in-the-world. This primal transcience makes possible every intentional relation to beings. … The relation is based on a preliminary understanding of the
being of beings. This understanding-of-being first secures the possibility of beings manifesting themselves as beings.

The question of how we relate to beings in our everyday quotidian order of being and make sense of that which we encounter is what is at the heart of ontic transcendence. Though not in the sense that it is contained in this order of intentionality but rather that it is held in its very condition of possibility is what Heidegger seems to be saying immediately above. Simply put we cannot make sense of beings if we do not have a sense of what it means to be. What is at issue here is, then, that which constitutes the sine qua non of an understanding of being, and that which in turn renders beings intelligible such that they are as such made manifest, seen and encountered, as such. The fact that Heidegger holds this primal relationship to be constitutive of the very intelligibility of being and beings he refers to it as an originary transcendence. Thus as primal, being-in-the-world, and the understanding of being that it instantiates, is ipso facto prior to ‘every intentional relation to beings’. It is the basis through which we make sense of that which we encounter and deal with and thus it lies at the very basis of how we can come to be seized in a technological modality of being and a concomitant mode of intelligibility and perceptual order including vision.

What this gives credence to is that Heidegger’s counter-intuitive claim that a theoretical way of knowing is not our most basic relation to being, neither does it account for the basic modality of being-in-the-world and thus our social being, its sociality and the sociabilities thereto attached as one of existential involvement only as detached objective
phenomena. In this regard the existential concept of being-in as an involved state in which no separation from the world is presupposed and which in turn presupposes all forms of knowing makes apparent that the model of perception and vision in particular which is constitutive of the epistemological duality is not the primary modality of being but a secondary one. We will show through Heidegger and Dreyfus in which ways the modality of theoretical, detached being is derived from the practical modality of involvement as it relates to our equipmental nexus (see chapter seven). And moreover, that it is not only a deficient mode (cannot account for existential involvement, which is, being-in), but also that it is not a normal state of knowing or being, that is, it arises out of a disturbance or breakdown in our practical and everyday coping-in-the-world.

Now that we have shown how ontic transcendence relating to things, or intentional comportment is derived from originary transcendence or being-in-the-world, and that the latter presupposes an understanding of being and renders beings intelligible; we now move onto showing how this relationship of intentionality and comportment relates to perception and vision.

6.2. Perception/Vision, intentionality and comportment

The isomorphic relation between intentionality and transcendence is such that it is held by Heidegger (1975) that the former is derived from the latter. In other words intentionality is a function of Dasein’s originary transcendence, that is, social being and thus only possible because Dasein is predicated on existence as being-in-the-world and is comported to the world as such. For this reason Dasein’s being-in-the-world cannot be explained in terms of an intentional content, but rather, because being-in-the-world
involves a comportment, as such, it serves as basis for intentionality and not vice versa. However, if there is no intentional content by way of mental overtones in the comportment of originary transcendence does it mean that the same would hold for perception? Can one assume likewise that there is no self-referentiality in the primary visual relationship that occurs in the modalities of existential vision, that is the everyday quotidian order of ‘socialised vision’ and what has been called ‘ontical vision’ and ‘ontological vision’ in which Dasein exists? In other words in the quotidian order of social being and everyday living as such what might the modalities of vision be, that is at work here. In order to put ourselves in a position to answer this question we need to contextualize vision and perception in the light of the ontic and originary transcendence just laid bare.

Firstly the issue arises as to how perception relates to the intentional comportment of ontic transcendence in so far as it too is considered to be free of mental states in the quotidian order of being. In this regard Dreyfus (1993: 58) draws a parallel between Heidegger’s concept of everyday action and perception and its critique of traditional views such that:

Heidegger holds that the commonsense concept of action and consciousness misses the structure of our most basic mode of comportment. In opposition to the tradition, Heidegger wants to show that we are not normally thematically conscious of our ongoing everyday activity, and that where thematic self-
referential consciousness does arise, it presupposes a non-thematic, non-self-referential mode of awareness.

We will consider the derivative relation between these two modes of being, when we engage, for explanatory purposes the difference between what Heidegger calls Zuhandenhheit (ready-to-hand or availableness-see 7.1.1) and Vorhandenheit (present-at-hand or occurrentness-see 7.1.3) and how this relates to vision. What is relevant here in terms of the development of a Heideggerian understanding of everyday vision is that this ‘mindless’ ontic transcendence or intentional comportment relates similarly to perception. Dreyfus (1993: 58) opens up the discussion by laying out Heidegger’s terms of engagement which we will take up in greater detail as it lies at the hub of our visionary concerns:

Heidegger suggests … that perception too is not self-referential … but is based on a non-self-referential openness to the world. Just as action absorbed in the world does not involve an experience of acting, a mental state self-referentially causing a bodily movement so, perception does not involve a visual experience: I am simply fascinated by and drawn into the spectacle of the world. … [He] seeks to show how... everyday activity can disclose the world and discover things in it without containing any explicit or implicit experience of the separation from the world of bodies and things.
Here it is made explicit that Heidegger’s existential concept of being-in-the-world, as the originary modality, of Dasein does not require recourse to the epistemological duality, albeit paradoxically modeled on precisely the visionary stance, of subject-object distanciation for rendering things visibly intelligible. One need only make reference to one’s experience of deep involvement and immersion in some or other activity that absorbs our attention to such an extent that one becomes oblivious of everything else; even that which we are proximally involved with, to come to terms with what Heidegger is referring to by everyday activity and its lack of self-referentiality. In short one becomes oblivious of everything including the self and thus in this respect there is no cognitive centre directing us towards things in our involvement therewith, but rather it is the thing and its related activities to which we are comported.

Though, it should be added that it does strain the bounds of incredulity to accept that what one sees in one’s involvement in-the-world is not the function of a visionary experience as such, but the field of visibility associated with one’s utilitarian relation to an existential world. In other words what one sees is a function of our understanding or relation to our understanding of the mode of being-in-the-world as existential involvement and serves as the horizon of intelligibility of what we encounter or perceive. We will explore this relation between our understandings of being (disclosure) and its bearing on the perceived (discovery). In particular how this perceptual complex as structure of vision is organized in relation to our intentional comportment that is our ontic transcendence and how this turn relates to our originary transcendence or being-in-the-world and its social being, is what we seek in Heidegger’s thinking to ground our
understanding of vision per se and thus set up the ontological basis as Archimedeans lever to dislodge us from the technological modality of revealing, the standing reserve.

6.3 Perceiving, perceived and the perceivedness of the perceived

We will now track into Heidegger’s (1982) analysis of the triadic perceptual complex and seek to distill the crux of his understanding, whilst scrupulously steering clear of his engagement with Kant, even though admittedly it is this encounter that informs the formers thinking. Dealing with Heidegger’s thinking is exacting enough that to add Kant to the fray would tend to complicate matters further and act to obscure rather than clarify what this concept of perception is about for the former and which is central in this chapter on vision. So at the risk of such philosophical decontextualisation and its attendant issues we proceed to the hub of Heidegger’s concept of perception. At bottom Heidegger (1975: 57) takes the ‘view’ that:

What we concisely call perception is, more explicitly formulated, the perceptual directing of oneself toward what is perceived, in such a way indeed that the perceived is itself always understood as perceived in its perceivedness. … In speaking of perceptual directedness-toward or of directing-oneself-toward we are saying that the belonging together of the three moments of perception is in each case a character of this directedness- toward. This directedness-toward constitutes, as it were, the framework of the whole phenomenon “perception”.

The question that begs is why Heidegger (ibid) does, by his own admission, indulge in what is clearly quite tautological in its formulation such that we have “the perceived is …
understood as perceived in its perceivedness.” To arrive at a clear perspective on this ‘tautology’ we need to recall that Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysical tradition and western philosophy rests on a reversal of the theoretical and practical comportments to being. Thus, whereas the tradition has held that the theoretical is the primary basis upon which knowledge of being is generated Heidegger by contrast hold that it is our practical and existential involvement that is primary. And, moreover that the theoretical in fact derives from the practical. In short, Heidegger seeks to challenge the view that we are first and foremost cognitively centered in the world and as such makes sense of being and beings.

By contrast, Heidegger claims that we relate to the world primarily through our involvement with things and each other in such a way that we are existentially centered and cognitively decentered. In fact our minds come to the fore only when there is a rupture or interruption in our quotidian everyday involvement in-the-world, which is ‘mindless, so to speak. If, this is Heidegger’s take on our primary engagement in-the-world, then what is at stake in his conception of perception is precisely to disengage the mind and the senses, as that which directs our awareness to things. It is after all our common understanding of perception that it is the “action by which the mind refers its senses to external objects as its cause” (Concise Oxford Dictionary). Heidegger in a move which counters the latter purges both the mind and sensations as fundamental to perception from the vantage point of his existential understanding of primary everyday day coping and dealing with the world circumspectively.
The tautology in Heidegger’s formulation evident in the relation between “perceiving, the perceived and the perceivedness of the perceived” now appears as a necessary discursive strategy to combat the cognitive centering and the epistemological privileging embedded in conventional philosophical and even scientific accounts of perception. In effect, then, Heidegger can be seen to be shifting the intentionality ostensibly behind perception from the mind to the structure of perception itself. The question, then, is what is to take the place of the mind as the active or intentional dimension of perception, or what is it that is responsible for the “directedness towards”, which Heidegger claims is evidenced in the perceptual complex and in the orientation of the self.

In this regard we need to refer back to the originary transcendence of our human way of being, namely, Dasein as being-in-the-world, so to speak, outside of ourselves as the basis of our intentional comportment or ontic transcendence, that is, our relation to things. It is ‘here’ or ‘there’ as beings-in-the-world that our capacity for, or intentionality as “directedness towards”, what is perceived arises, and thus being-amidst-things emerges as a specific comportment. Hence, in relation to the latter, Heidegger (1975) refers to the “pleonasm of intentional comportment”. The significance of this ontic transcendence, that is, how we relate to things, or our “intentional comportment and its concomitant redundancy, is what we are attempting to draw into the structure of perception, in so far as it involves how it is that we come to perceive things.

Put differently what is the conditionality for the perceivedness of the perceived. In order to allow for greater clarity we will refer to Heidegger’s (1975: 48) treatment of the
equivalence of “perceivedness” as “uncoveredness”, and try to unhook the tautology of the ‘perceivedness of the perceived’. In this way we can reformulate, and hone in on, what Heidegger is probing for, by asking what is it that the uncoveredness of the perceived is attributed to, if we are not involving the intentionality of a conscious mind as that which is responsible, firstly for steering the “perceptual directedness towards” whatever is to be perceived. And secondly, that this conscious mind is not where the uncovering of that which is rendered perceivable is taking place for this would contradict Heidegger’s claim that it is in the existential order of everyday quotidian involvement that our primary engagement with the world and what we come to know occurs. And lest we forget we need to note that in the uncoveredness of the perceived, is presupposed a certain coveredness which perception is able to lift so that, that which is encountered may become intelligible.

The key, then, to the perceivedness (uncoverability) of the perceived and that which is perceived (uncovered), lies at the heart of a conception of vision and the visible that we are seeking to develop in this chapter, which is one that is able to account for the everyday quotidian order of an ‘involved seeing’ (circumspection) and its derivative a ‘detached seeing’ (theoretical projection or curiosity). The move towards what we might describe as ‘ontological and ontic vision’, or the vision that enables a ‘seeing’ of what it means to be and a vision, and enables that which has thus been freed to be encountered in its visibility as thing, or equipment or object, hinges on linking the logic of comportment to the essence of the phenomenon of perception, through the kind of intentionality vested in both. This means showing what it is that they have in common, and secondly how the
latter is informed by the former in terms of its relation to the “subject” of perception namely, Dasein.

Firstly, as regards their point of equivalence: Heidegger makes the case thus

Comportments have the structure of directing-oneself-toward, of being directed-toward. … Every comportment is a comporting-toward; Perception is a perceiving-of. We call this comporting-toward … the intentio. Every comporting-toward and every being-directed-toward has its specific whereto of the comporting and the toward-which of the directedness. This whereto of the comporting and toward-which of directedness belonging to the intentio we call the intentum. Intentionality comprises both moments, the intentio and the intentum, within its unity, thus far still obscure.

In both comportment and perception what is common is that the self is being directed-toward something. What is noteworthy in Heidegger’s precise formulation is that it is not the self that is doing the directing, but rather like an actor in a play he or she is directed and as such falls into line with the ‘direction of the directing’. However, unlike the play where the directing is done by a director, in the form of a person, the comporting or perception is not directed by some social agent, but, and here we encounter the tautological structure again, by comportment and perceiving. This raises an interesting addition to sociological conceptions of agency in as much as social action and the rational minded actor is fully mindful of his comportments and as such in Weberian fashion as
“motivational explanation” (Keat and Urry, 1975: 146 and Freund, 1966: 96) is able to interpret his actions and define his motivations accordingly. Paradigmatically Ritzer (1983) describes Weber’s sociology the social definition kind as distinct from the social facts and social behaviorism.

Thus, we have the basis albeit somewhat oversimplified for a “Sociology of Action” or an “Interpretive Sociology”. Though what has Heideggerian overtones for us is that it is through the socio-cultural framework, “verstehen” (Ibid) that the action makes sense for the actor and indeed for anyone who seeks to understand the motivation behind the act but because it carries mental overtones, is cognitively centered, it falls outside the ambit of a non-thematic circumspective absorption. By contrast in a behaviorist understanding of “action” we have what amount to a reaction in as much as it is precipitated by some stimulus or set of stimuli external to the individual, and as such bereft of rational mindedness. The second is a form of socially programmed behavior. Here we have in various forms what may be associated with a Positivist Sociology, Empiricist Sociology or even a “Behaviorist Sociology”. However, the fact that the latter does not involve consciousness as such does not mean that it is in any way like that associated with a Heideggerian comportment. Considered in relation to action, which is putatively rational, the comportment we have in mind differs in as much as it does not operate with a centered consciousness as its primary relation to the world. Similarly, considered in relation to behavior the absence of consciousness is a superficial likeness in as much as the latter is completely mindless, a sort of tabula rasa, whereas comportment in Heidegger’s conception involves an understanding of being albeit ‘dim and ‘vague’ and
with it is thus an interpretive dimension, a social hermeneutic without which nothing meaningful is intelligible.

And in this regard his hermeneutic phenomenology as chosen method is arrived at. Phenomenology is invoked by Heidegger though significantly altered to allow for an understanding of the being of beings to emerge in its fullness and thus encounter things in themselves. And the interpretive aspect attests to hermeneutics as that which is made possible through that prior understanding of being that is present though rudimentary in Dasein and which allows for the intelligibility of that which is perceived; conjointly they serve to disclose the existential structure of Dasein or the way of being human and thus the way of being of beings in general. Similarly as such hermeneutic phenomenology discloses the way of revealing that is a challenging-forth and uncovers its essence as the enframing of the standing reserve.

Given the preceding we are pressed to ask. Do we have the condition of possibility of a “Hermeneutic Phenomenological Sociology” or a Heideggerian Existential - Ontological Sociology with the former its methodology? At this point, contradictions, notwithstanding, we are merely signaling the direction we intend heading towards vis-à-vis the sociological ramifications that emerge as distinct possibility for attending to how we are shaping up to view the contemporaneous relationship between technology, vision and social being. In short we are asking in this thesis what type of sociology might be appropriate for us human beings who are existentially engaged in ‘being-in-a-technological-world. These questions are anticipating the outcome of this theoretical
endeavor and is consistent with Heidegger’s claim that as ‘beings-in-the-world’ that is thrust beyond ourselves we have the tendency to get-ahead of ourselves. In having thus raised said questions of a disciplinary nature, and satisfied the tendency to get ahead of oneself, we can now return to the matter at hand, namely, how intentionality relates to perception and our constitution as Dasein.

What we are hedging towards in Heideggerian vein is that intentionality, or the purpose and directedness of comportment which in our case is limited to perception, is of such a nature that it is not held to be the preserve of a conscious mind as its primary reality; but rather that its provenance is in the very structure of comportment. By extension it is also not in the object towards which it is directed that intentionality, or the purpose of perceiving is to be found; since as stated above it belongs to the structure of intentionality, which in turn is intrinsic to perception, or comportment in general. Having said this we are still not sufficiently in the know as to the nature of the intentionality Heidegger has in mind, in order to pinpoint its locus except to say that it is neither in the consciousness of the subject of perception, nor is it in the object as such, as this reproduces the subject-object duality, which is the target of his critique and contradicts his existential model of involvement. Even though we have been minimally able to state that intentionality is of the order of perception or generally of comportment we do so as a matter of deductive logic in that as far as it involves directedness, it shares this quality with perception and comportment. So what begs now though not necessarily in the order of appearance is how this comportment, perception in particular, and the intentionality contained therein are related to transcendence. Secondly, what the structure of
intentionality is and how is it related to the being of humans i.e. Dasein. And third what
does intentionality mean for the structure of perception and how does this feature in an
understanding of vision and its modalities of being, and what does it hold for modern
technology and its modality of being and finally what does this all hold for our social
being and our humanity.

Heidegger’s (1975) strategy for dealing with these matters is to first displace by way of
critique the misinterpretations that run interference in coming to terms with a clear and
true understanding of perception. Thus he dispenses with two misinterpretations of
intentionality bifurcated on the bases of objectification and subjectification respectively
as it relates firstly to the “ naïve, natural vision of things” (Heidegger, 1982: 59-60) and
secondly to the “subjective in sensations, representations …” (ibid: 62). We begin our
discussion with former.

We shall first attempt to characterize one misinterpretation of intentionality that is
based exactly in the naive, natural vision of things. Here we shall orient ourselves
again in connection with the intentional character of perception. “Perception has
an intentional character” means first of all that perceiving, its intentio, relates to
the perceived, intentum. I perceive the window over there. … The relation of the
perception of the window manifestly expresses the relation in which the window,
estant over there, stands to me as the human being, the subject, extant here. …
The intentional relation can, it appears, be extant as a relation only if both the
relational members are extant, and the relation subsists only so long as these
relational members are themselves extant. … The intentional relation belongs to
the subject by virtue of the object’s being extant and conversely. All of this seems obvious.

The basic argument is clear enough in as much as what obtains is that perception understood as “naïve natural vision of things” is a relationship that is based on a bilateral contingency. In other words perception comes into play only when a subject encounters an object, or an object is encountered by a subject and is as such made manifest in the relation so established between the latter and former. What renders this perceptual relation as intentional is that the perceiving subject is directed towards the object to be perceived. Simply put the ‘seeing’ subject intends the object e.g. the window to which it is directed to be ‘seen’. Taken to its logical conclusion the perceptual relation between subject (perceiving) and object (perceived) is in fact the intentional relation. Without either subject or object the perceptual relation does not obtain and thus no perceptual intentionality. We see here the subject – object distanciation discussed in the previous chapter and thus an expression of the vision condition as detaching us from social being and our existential involvement in society, our social being. This is in sum what the “naïve natural vision of things” amounts to and is in Heidegger’s estimation (1982) a misinterpretation of intentionality because:

… in this characterization of intentionality as an extant relation between two things extant, a psychical subject and a physical object, the nature as well as the mode of intentionality is missed.
This is evident since, as presented above, intentionality is that relation which takes place between a subject and object and as such is once removed from the act of perceiving itself. Thus, if, as has been maintained that Heidegger locates intentionality in comportment, and perception is but one example of the latter, then intentionality is surely being overlooked in the perceptual structure. This happens to the case since as it is now been objectified in the transcendent relation that ensues between subject and object, that is, it is neither in the subject, nor in the object, but ‘between and betwixt’ the two in the relation of distanciation, as implied in the commonsense view of ‘natural vision’. In this objectified understanding of intentionality the subject is oriented by the object and thus directs the former accordingly. However, as Heidegger’s recourse to hallucinations taken up below to different effect has shown it is not in the object that intentionality resides for it is not extant. The matter of perception is then patently not as simple as accepting that what comes into the purview of vision is something natural, a consequence of an ‘immaculate perception’. Taken at face value such a naïve conception of vision is mistaken, carrying with it a grave implication that has consequences for how we understand the visual experience existentially. In fact vision understood as natural, forecloses on an existential understanding of vision, and with it the possibility of understanding how it may relate to a technological modality of being and thus elide an understanding of how social being is engaged in-the-technological-world. To obviate this discursive foreclosure we take up Heidegger’s (1975: 60) phenomenological thinking on perception which opens up his ‘existential – ontological’ ‘perspective’ for us:
The mistake lies in the fact that this interpretation takes the intentional relation to be something that at each time accrues to the subject due to the extantness of an object. Implied in this is the notion that in itself, as an isolated psychical subject, this subject is without intentionality.

What seems to emerge as at issue for a true understanding of intentionality as far as the structure of perception is concerned is to turn inwards, that is, towards the subject, though how we proceed in this regard is the critical matter at hand. To recall we have already established that Heidegger does not support the notion of a self-referential subject that is cognitively or theoretically centered in its primary and usual relationship in-the-world; thus we have to proceed cautiously on this issue. In order to elucidate his particular understanding of the nature and mode of intentionality Heidegger (1975: 60-62) uses the example of someone hallucinating that a room is full of elephants.

We have here a directedness towards objects without their being extant. … - because perceiving is intrinsically a comporting-toward, a relationship to the object, whether the object is extant actually or only in imagination. Only because the hallucinative perceiving has within itself qua perception the character of being-directed-toward can the hallucinator intend something in an imaginary way. I can apprehend something imaginarily only if, as apprehender, I intend in general. Only then can intending assume the modification of imaginariness. The intentional relation does not arise first through the actual extantness of objects but lies in the perceiving itself, whether illusionless or illusory. Perceiving must be
perception-of something in order for me to be able to be deceived about something.

What this example of said hallucination illustrates is that the implication above that the “subject is without intentionality” does not hold as what is shown is that an object does not have to be extant, in the real sense in order for a perceptual relation to be instantiated. This means that it is not the object that precipitates the intentional relation as it is a hallucination. And if it is not the object then surely the subject has something to do with the intentionality that ensues in the perceptual relation in so far as it is ‘directedness-towards-something’. It is after all the subject that is the one doing the perceiving and comporting, thus intentionality must at some level putatively rest in this subject. In any event there has to be at the very least an affinity if not symmetry between the constitution of the subject and perception or comportment, in general. This requires that we reconsider what is to be meant by the notion of a “subject” that is not of the self-referential type and yet capable of intentionality in the way he or she is able to comport with things and accordingly perceive.

In this regard Heidegger makes the general leap towards an existential claim in holding that we as human beings “intend in general”. The claim itself is consistent with the basic existential constitution of human beings and which is held to be of the nature of ‘originary transcendence’ namely that we are a being-in-the-world and as such a social being. For this is the link between the subject and perceiving in as much as it held that the latter with its “character of being-directed-toward” is self-intentioned, then we have in
perception a transcendence, which is unhooked from the subject as self-referential and cognitively centered. In other words it is perception which reaches out towards the external and connects with objects not as a quality of an individual, self-contained cognitive subject, but on the basis that it arises from the comportment that comes from being-in-the-world, itself transcendent and originary, in that it makes for the possibility of all intentional relations. This ‘subject’ that emerges in Heidegger’s (1975:61) conception of perception is then not self-referential nor self-contained, but “self-comporting”. Moreover, in relation to comportment, Heidegger (1975: 61) spells out the nature and mode of intentionality thus:

This relation, which we signify by intentionality, is the *a priori comportmental character* of what we call self-comporting. As structure of comportments, intentionality is itself a structure of the self-comporting subject. It is intrinsic to the manner of being of the self-comporting subject as the *comportmental character* of this comportmental relationship. It belongs to the essential nature of comportments, so that to speak of intentional comportment is already a pleonasm and is somewhat equivalent to me speaking of a spatial triangle.

Here we are left without doubt as to the nature and modality of intentionality as that which reaches deep into our very constitution as human beings, into Dasein. What makes for the a priori character of intentionality in the self-comporting subject is, that as Dasein we are directed to the self in as much as we are required to take a stand on our existence, which as such is undecided, unsettled, and thus we are directed to take care and show
concern for what we do. Secondly, though, not in this order, we are directed towards the
world in as much as we find ourselves with-others and amidst-things. In these senses
intentionality as directedness-towards is indeed a priori. In as much as we are directed
towards ourselves, in terms of our existence, we are self-comporting, and thus have
intentionality which expresses itself in the choices we make, in so far as it is in turn
directed towards social being as “authentic”, “inauthentic” or “undifferentiated”. Thus,
intentionality is at the heart of our self-comportment. And finally, in as much as
comportment is a directedness towards the world, self, others and things it is
simultaneously an intentionality, and as such to speak of intentional comportment is
tantamount to a redundancy. As to be human is already to be intentioned in one way or
another to the self et al and as such is to be within the structure of comportment itself.

In clarifying that intentionality is not an objective relation, but rather constituted in the
self-comorting subject closes off one misinterpretation, but as Heidegger (1975) claims
opens another, and that is the error associated with subjectifying intentionality. We will
allow ourselves a brief explication as the analysis by Heidegger is conducted along the
same lines as that which deals with the misinterpretation associated with the
objectification of intentionality just taken up above. To move the discussion towards the
real objective which is to establish the provenance of intentionality and thus arrive at the
mode of being of perception, we will focus on Heidegger’s (1982: 63-64) discussion
where he shows the intersection of intentionality with the way of being human, that is,
Dasein while simultaneously dispensing with the second misinterpretation.
That toward which perception is directed in conformity with its sense is the perceived itself. It is this that is intended. What is implied... I do not first need to ask how the immanent intentional experience acquires transcendent validity; rather, what has to be seen is that it is precisely intentionality and nothing else in which transcendence consists. ... This misinterpretation lies in an erroneous subjectivizing of intentionality. An ego or subject is supposed, to whose so-called sphere intentional experiences are then supposed to belong. ... we shall in the future no longer speak of a subject, a subjective sphere, but shall understand the being to whom intentional comportment belong as Dasein, ..., properly understood, ... one of Dasein’s basic constitutions.

What Heidegger debunks here is that intentionality operates at the behest of an ego centered subject who in turn directs the comportment of perception towards what is being perceived. In relocating the site of intentionality away from the subject he leap-frogs the problem of transcendence, that is, in how intentionality is able to leave the province of the subjective sphere and reach out and connect with the object. This is achieved in locating intentionality as he does in the comportment of perception itself, but this by all means is not sufficient as perceiving, as we well know, is carried by a being, in this case of the human kind. Now if this being is not of the ego centered kind, as this instantiates, as Heidegger contends, the Cartesian subject-object duality, and with it all manner of such like dualities, and thus misinterprets the provenance of intentionality, then we are left somewhat paradoxically with what one might call a ‘de-subjectified’ subject. And it is precisely this paradoxical construct that Heidegger has in mind when he attributes
intentional comportment to Dasein. It is not so much that we have, so to speak, a de-subjectified subject, but rather that it is in existence that we become a human subject, that we become Dasein. This means that our starting point as such is not a subject as such but the field of possibilities for becoming an existential subject.

It is in our constitution as Dasein, that is, beings for whom existence is a care and concern that our intentional comportment arises from, and not an internalized subjective experiential sphere. To clarify this fundamental nature Heidegger (1975: 64) specifies the logic of Dasein’s intentional comportment and in so doing offers an ontological distinction between Dasein and things in relation to their mode of social being:

The statement that the comportments of the Dasein are intentional means that the mode of being of our own self, the Dasein, is essentially such that this being, so far that it is, is always dwelling with the extant. When … we give the concise name “existence” to the Dasein’s mode of being, this is to say that the Dasein exists and is not extant like a thing.

We have previously given an account of dwelling (see 5.4), thus will not reiterate it here suffice to say that in relation to things as extant Dasein’s comportment to the latter is one of inhabiting the same space, and as such it is much like being-amidst unlike the subject-object distanciation implied in the Cartesian concept of perception it by contrast entails the de-distanciation, de-severing or de-territorialisation implicated in involvement. Furthermore, at the level of originary transcendence, that is, being-in-the-world Dasein is
always with things and others, that is, already in a transcendent state of being, or in that ready state of intentional comportment, as directed-towards. The fact that Dasein is a being among beings does not mean that it is as such indistinguishable in its modality of being from other beings. As already discussed Dasein and Dasein-like beings differ from non-Dasein-like entities in the manner of the presence or absence of a hermeneutic, that is, an interpretation of what it means to be. Now at the level of intentionality we are also witness to a distinction that Heidegger (ibid) points out between Dasein and things, and speaks to the social being as a general comportment including how we relate to things.

A distinguishing feature between the existent and extant is found precisely in intentionality. “The Dasein exists” means among other things, that the Dasein is in such a way that in being it comports towards what is extant but not toward it as toward something subjective. A window, a chair, in general anything extant in the broadest sense, does not exist, because it cannot comport toward extant entities in the manner of intentional self-directedness toward them. An extant being is simply one among others also extant.

The distinguishing feature of Dasein is thus that it relates to extant things in the manner of an intentional comportment, that is, that it is always directed towards things, as things in themselves. This means that Dasein does not relate to things as sensations, or representational images that are mediated, but instead that things are encountered directly. However this relationship to extant things based upon self-directedness is of an
all encompassing nature, such that Heidegger (1982:66) finds in this intentional comportment or ontic transcendence that:

The Dasein has this natural tendency to start by taking every being whether something extant in the sense of a natural thing or something with the mode of being of the subject- as an extant entity and to understand it in the sense of being extant. This is the basic tendency of ancient ontology and one that has not yet been overcome down to the present day because it belongs with Dasein’s understanding of being and its mode of understanding being.

What we have here is not only an ontological distinction but an ontological misinterpretation as well. If it is not only a mistaken view of ancient ontology to mistake other Dasein that is existent subjects for extant objects, one remediable methodologically through Heidegger’s “destructuring” or Derrida’s “deconstruction”, but also in Dasein’s natural tendency and in its understanding of being, then how is it corrected. One can accept that with respect to the perception of extant things this generalization of the latter understanding of being poses no direct problem as such, but it certainly does not bode well for how we understand fellow beings and other Dasein-like beings. This brings us too close to collapsing the distinction between Dasein and things such that the issue of how we comport is absorbed into a modality reminiscent of the standing reserve’s way of revealing of modern technology.
Thus for clarity, that is, to obviate erroneous confluations what we turn to now is to the heart of the perceptual complex, which we see is neither objective nor subjective. In other words it not extant as stated in the relation between subject and object, nor is it inherent in the subjective sphere in the ego, but is inherent in the Dasein, that is, the existential structure of our human way of being-in-the-world as social being with its concomitant transcendence which is originary (basis for understanding being, in general). The issue at stake now for the matter of perception is how being-in the-world and its originary transcendence (social being) and being-amidst-things and its ontic transcendence (sociality) relates to the encounter of things in themselves, as that which is respectively rendered intelligible, and thus perceivable. Or, to put it in Heidegger’s tautological modality, what is it that enables the perceivedness of the perceived.

6.3.1 Perception as unveiling and uncovering of being and beings

We have unraveled the relation of perception to things extant in so far as we have established through Heidegger that intentionality is related to comportment in an much as the latter is premised in a directedness towards something. Thus, in perception it was shown that as modality of comportment it likewise held intentionality in its very structure. In this way it could be said that perception is always directed towards or intends the perceived with no reference to the conscious mind or the object or the relation between the subject and object. However, in having said that and shown that the nature of intentionality understood as such is tied to a subject and is not of a subjective type, but of the kind of Dasein, and that its constitution as existent is ultimately of a self-directed comportment; it remains to be shown what makes this encounter between the self-directed intentional comportment possible, given its structural make-up, and that which is
perceived. What is it about Dasein and its existential complex that makes it possible for us to encounter things in themselves? What is it that reveals things to us in and of themselves, in such a way that we see them for what they are, is to be our central concern.

In coming to terms with what Heidegger understands by the intentionality of perception we are confronted with the claim that things as they are, or in their extant form are covered, that is, that they are not immediately apparent in and of themselves, apparent as such to the naked eye. There is thus no "bare perception" Heidegger (1987), no "immaculate perception" (Jenks, 1995) and no "innocent eye" (Mitchell, 1986). Instead in raising the matter of the ‘perceivedness of the perceived’, or perhaps with more clarity, the ‘uncoveredness of the perceived’ we are expected to conceptualize perception as involving an uncovering of that which exists, before it can, so to speak, be seen or enter the purview of vision, that is, become intelligible. What this then suggests is that how we relate to things, that is, our comportment to things involves an intentionality, which is directed to how something enters our perception. In other words embedded in the act of perceiving there has of necessity to be some understanding of the thing and its extantness in order for there to be any perception of it as such at all.

Put negatively, if we have absolutely no idea of what lies before us, then we cannot perceive it as something for which we have some awareness., that is that it is this or that thing. In fact, Heidegger claims more than this, if we have no understanding of what a
thing is, then, we are not in a position to even perceive what lies before us as a thing. We are, in the latter, in such a situation, that we are confronted with a physical extension in space that is quite meaningless. If, we for the moment consider that certain species are programmed to pick out certain shapes that take on the form of food, or that present themselves as a threat to their being and do not register anything else, then we can understand what it is that their perception is directed toward and thus what is outside their field of visibility.

Human beings by contrast as Dasein are of such a type that we can perceive all manner of forms that come into our purview or field of vision, and thus represent something like a field of disclosure emanating from our understanding of social being, that is, that ontological facility of understanding what it means to be, since this existential aspect is one that is unsettled that is not fixed as in most if not all other species beings. The point is that it is our comprehension of being, at the level of its generality, that opens up our perception to what is extant and what is existent. How do these two aspects sit in the structure of perception; and how does intentionality in perception sit when it is given the specificity of being directed towards uncovering that which is perceived; and what is it that is directed towards this uncovering are our concerns here. Put differently, what is the intentionality in perception, which lies prior to the uncovering of the perceived, and that, in other words, intends the perceivedness or uncoveredness and presupposes the latter.

This takes us to the mode of being of perception. What lies at the heart of perception, or what is referred to as the ‘perceivedness of the perceived’ is the intentionality that is
contained in the directedness towards “uncovering” that which is to be perceived, and “unveiling” that which is simultaneously disclosed. We first take up the matter of uncovering as intentional modality in perception, as Heidegger (1975) does, even though it in a manner of speaking ‘succeeds’ the latter. If, there is an uncovering, of that which is perceived, in what way does Heidegger mean that things are covered, and, should this be so, how does it inform the structure of perception? Firstly, in relation to the mode of intentionality of uncovering it is necessitated Heidegger (1982: 68) claims because

We can cover over the instrumental characteristics that in the first instance confront us in our natural commerce with such a thing as a window, constituting its utilitarian character, and consider the window merely as a natural thing.

We will suspend for the moment that in covering over something, whether it be the matter of its instrumental character or whatever else, that it presupposes that there is in fact in place already an understanding of the mode of being of what is being perceived, as we are concerned presently with the matter of the nature of covering, and hence its uncovering. The primary level of covering over things that emerges above is that it occurs in our primary engagement or involvement in the world in terms of its use value or utilitarian character. Through this primary coping or dealing with things, our sociabilities, they are uncovered as a function of their usability. This suggests that in its primary modality things take on a utilitarian character, but that subsequent to this primordial or original comportment to things uncovered as such, these thing can in turn be covered up by different understandings of their modality of being. For instance, the window as
utilitarian thing, covered or understood as such in terms of its functionality, can also be considered as a natural thing and thus be covered or understood as such, and thus entails a different set of properties to those aspects yielded in use.

The intentional comportment of perception thus understood in the aforementioned reveals an intentionality that is directed towards the uncovering of that which is perceived in terms of a particular mode of understanding of its being, about which more a little later. Therefore, from Heidegger’s understanding of the intentionality of perception as involving an uncovering of that which is perceived, one is able to debunk the idea of an innocent eye or immaculate perception. The implications of this understanding that perception is not some natural vision empty of understanding, but that from the vantage point of Dasein involves at its very centre an understanding of what it means to be, that is, in a word, of being.

6.3.2 Perceivedness as counterpoise

With this notion of perceivedness as an uncovering we now turn to Heidegger’s (1982: 69-70) on how this relates to the structure of perception, and whether it is possible at all to encounter or deal with things, as they are in themselves. What appears to one as something of a seeming phenomenological contradiction is that, if perception is always mediated, then under what conditions is it held that its intentional comportment is one of uncovering or uncoveredness, where such a condition is always situated in an understanding of being. Heidegger (ibid) states emphatically that
Perceivedness belongs to perceptual intentional comportment. This makes it possible that the extant should be encountered in its own self. Perceiving uncovers the extant and lets it be encountered in the manner of a specific uncovering. Perception takes from the extant coveredness and releases it so that it can show itself in its own self. That is the sense of every natural self-circumspection and every natural self-orientation about something, and indeed because this mode of uncovering is implicit in perceiving, corresponding to its own intentional sense.

What emerges is that, If it is in fact held that the mode of intentionality of perception is uncoveredness, then it is precisely this capacity which frees up that which is perceived from its covering, such that it is able to be in and of itself sans what happens to be covering its essence, that is what it is in its usability. In other words perception and its intentional comportment directed as it is towards uncoveredness is able, as such, to draw a distinction between what something is, namely it, essence (in use) from its modality of being, as presence, or that it is simply extant.. And rather than Dasein’s understanding of being facilitating another covering over of the being of something its task is in the order of demystification or a deconstruction, such that the cover recognized as such is lifted and in so doing the things being is able to emerge in its phenomenological essence as something in itself. Phenomenologically, then, one is involved in enabling something to be, or returning to the phenomena themselves, so to speak, by uncovering it so that it can be released for perception, and hermeneutically speaking one is disclosing the thing in terms of one’s understanding of being, the ‘horizon of intelligibility’, as in what makes a
thing a thing, an object an object, equipment, equipment. Unveiled as such we can turn to its aspects in use, or its theoretical properties when merely present before us. With respect to the window, as instrument, it is precisely this instrumentality which is lifted; or with it as natural thing, it is this modality of being, its ‘thingness’, which is uncovered, and thus in respect of both modalities of being, these are so to speak deconstructed such that the window, as example, emerges in its own self. However, this release is not an end in itself as something owing to the integrity of the perceived, rather the intentionality of perception relates more fundamentally to perception is so far as it bears on its very condition of possibility. Thus Heidegger (1982: 70) states that

Perceiving is a \textit{release} of extant things which \textit{lets them be encountered}. Transcending is an uncovering. The \textit{Dasein} exists as uncovering. The uncoveredness of the extant is what makes possible its release as something encountered. \textit{Perceivedness}, that is, the specific release of a being in perceiving, is a \textit{mode of uncoveredness in general}. Uncoveredness is also the determination of the release of something in production or in judgment about ....

What is important for us is to gain a perspective on vision such that we are clear about its constitutive nature. In other words it is not that things or objects are given as such, but that it is through the structure of perception and what it is that is brought to bear on that which is perceived, that we are able to encounter things in a meaningful way, even at the simplest determination of a natural thing. It is clear as already stated that we need to establish what lies so to speak prior to the possibility of something being uncovered so
that it may be encountered as such. What we are concerned with now is uncovering and uncoveredness as a mode of intentionality intrinsic to the perceptual structure as such. It is this facility in perception for ‘release’ that we seize upon as a means to engage the modern technological modality of revealing of enframing as ‘standing reserve’.

Thus, in the logic of the uncoveredness which is contained in the intentional comportment of the perceptual structure, we have a vantage point, an Archimedean lever, so to speak, that can potentially dislodge and release ‘things’ to be encountered and dealt with in themselves, rather than as standing reserve. We can in a manner of speaking restore to things their dignity and integrity by retrieving them from the ‘thinglessness’ and objectlessness of the standing reserve, but only insofar as the field of disclosure which is Dasein, that is, our way of being human does not lose its sociality and sociability as social be-ing.

The technological condition, and its danger, as understood from within the logic of the perceptual structure, is that should we surrender to its modality of being, and thus substitute thereby our Dasein, as social being, its hermeneutic as horizon of intelligibility and therewith its understanding of being, we will have cut off any recourse to the sociality and sociabilities of our social being and consequently left bereft of the way of revealing that comes with the perceivedness and its disclosure that is steeped in being-in-the-world and Dasein. In other words should our social being be replaced with a technological modality of being our horizon of intelligibility and with it our understanding of being will be nothing more than the way of revealing which is an
enframing and which as such would show everything up as standing reserve. Our socialization and normative order would be ensconced in the modality of a technological-being-in-the-technological-world, the outcome somewhat eschatological, would be the end of social be-ing and the advent of ‘homo technologicus’. This seem a tad too fatalistic and alarmist, however, notwithstanding, the latter discursive excesses, we are confronted with a social being that is being eroded in a contemporary age that seems to be losing its footing in-the-world and being-with-others’ such that our care and concern for being is somewhat precariously balanced and directed-towards an insatiable consumptive drive. We seem to be covering our being with gadgets and gizmos in a perpetual loop of disposability and replacement which makes one wonder how we are presently comported to the world, and when in our increasing distanciation from our social being we will finally reach a critical mass. What we have in mind is the dialectic of the transformation of quantity into quality; a critical mass where technological plenitude yield to a qualitative change in social being for technological being. One manifestation of this which bear relevance for perception as visuality is Debord’s conceptualization of the contemporary age which is variously present as “society of the spectacle” in which he holds that the latter is characterized by “separation [which] is the alpha and omega of spectacle” and it is as far as we are concerned most manifest and most disturbing in the distanciation from our selves, each other and the world, in short from our social be-ing that this thesis is first and foremost pre-occupied with that matters most. It is in this regard that we are drawing attention to the need to center our social being in our concerns for the well being of society and the fate of our humanity and thus we are steeped in an
existential ontological understanding of social being as a means of returning us analytically back towards-sociality and in-society.

Returning to the matter at hand, we address the claim, that transcendence is in fact an uncovering is clear, when we consider the compounds that Heidegger formulates of the existential structure of our way of being human, that is, Dasein. With respect to originary transcendence, that is, being-in-the-world and social be-ing, what is uncovered is our “thrownness” or “thereness” in the world, the ‘da’, so to speak. That as ‘thrown’ beings, who are thrust or cast into a world in a particular society and culture without choice and without meaning, what is uncovered is that human beings are groundless, unsettled and homeless. And it is only in being-in-the-world, our social be-ing that we carve out a home, though always contingent, and as such impute meaning into once life derived as such from the socialization and acculturation on offer in the society and culture we happen to find ourselves in and thus become human. Furthermore, in our ontic transcendence, that is, being-amidst-things our intentional comportment what is uncovered are extant things and what is derived from our comportment to said things is the meaning of the being of beings. And finally in being-with-others, that is other Dasein we uncover what it means to be an authentic, inauthentic or undifferentiated being and thus what it means to be one’s “ownmost” self, a being-towards-self.

And since, all uncovering is made possible through the intentional comportment of the Dasein, it follows that we human beings because of our open ended structure of existence, which is unsettled and groundless, but is transcendent in that we are outside
ourselves, as existent in-the-world deriving our very natures from the social and cultural world’s we happen to find ourselves in, means that we are in fact, as the Dasein, a field of uncovering. It is, then, in the region of the way of being human, that Heidegger, what we have referred to as, ‘de-subjectifies’ as the Dasein, that the very condition of possibility of uncovering or perceivedness emanates from and is thus located as part of its constitution. But it is not a structure, as in some endowment of the Dasein, a part of the human constitution as such, but rather it is in the intentional comportment, that is, in the transcendence that comes with being-in, being-amidst and being-with. And as such this transcendence shares with the perceptual structure its mode of intentionality, directed as it is towards the perceived, but made possible by the self-circumspection and self-orientation of our existential structure, that is, in our concern and care for our existence, and the self-interpretations that accompanies the stances we take in relation thereto.

Heidegger clearly is not falling for an anthropocentric rendition of uncoveredness as somehow the property of a human condition albeit in the mode of the Dasein as he makes it clear that it is also a function of production and judgment though not understood in subjective terms. For instance with respect to the latter and central to our thesis he attributes uncoveredness to the modality of technology (see chapter two) and as such decenters it; and similarly with respect to judgment this can be seen to be the function of theory, and as such is of disciplinary and paradigmatic dimension rather than human subjectivity as such.
We can now turn to second task as indicated which is to tie the mode of intentionality of perception, namely, the directedness towards uncovering into the perceptual structure, that is, with respect to its intentio (perceiving of -directedness) and the intentum (perceived-towards which) and thereby complete the analysis by leading into the deferred matter of how this ‘uncovering’ is itself rendered possible. In fact what we arrive at in Heidegger’s (1982: 70-71) phenomenological conception of perception and conclude with is its very condition of possibility. Thus

In the intentio of the perceiving something like an *understanding of extantness* must already be antecedently present. ... In accord with its directional sense, perceiving intends the extant in its extantness. The extant in its extantness belongs to the directional sense-that is to say, the intentio is directed towards uncovering the extant in its extantness. The intentio itself includes an understanding of extantness, even if it is only pre-conceptual. In this understanding, what extantness means is unveiled, laid open, or, as we say disclosed. We speak of the disclosedness given in the understanding of extantness.

In order to unpack the above we will make reference to Heidegger’s example of the window, as it concretizes the analysis of perception and anchors one’s, understanding in a palpable manner. Firstly, in considering extantness we need to be aware that this refers to the mode of being of the window, as case in point, or how it presences itself. In this regard the window’s mode of being can be either as natural thing, or its presence can be utilitarian in character. Unlike the conception of a positivistic perception where the
presence of something is given in its appearance Heidegger questions this naïve view of the natural presence of things. In what strikes one as counter-intuitive he offers a complex view of the mode of being of things, and problematises what lies before us as present, in a way that ‘views’ that which is present as not visible in its appearance or occurrence, what we may consider as positivist vision, but rather, as what we think of, as translucent, that is, as covered and veiled.

What the latter opens as possibility, nay necessity, if it is to be perceived as such, is perhaps a concept of phenomenological vision that which enables the window to be seen after it has been unveiled and thus uncovered as something in and of itself. Towards this end what Heidegger’s phenomenological vision lays bare, is to return to a previous that is, that in order for something to be uncovered in its extantness, or to refer to our example, for the window to be encountered as natural thing, there must already be in place a concept of what it means for something or anything to be a thing. If, we do not have a sense of what it means for something to be a thing, then surely the window cannot for all intents and purposes assume the modality of a natural thing. To be sure, the eye and the optic centre of the brain registers some physicality in its purview, but what it is, that is, the mode of its intelligibility, which if not being present, renders what is optically present, without definition and thus meaningless.

However, there is another element in the perceptual structure that needs to be overcome or uncovered if the window is to be disclosed as natural thing, as uncovered in perception as such. This refers to the primary and initial comportment of the Dasein, that is, that we
human beings engage the world in our quotidian everyday order by being involved in our coping and dealing with things and objects, in terms of their functionality, as part of an equipmental nexus and thus something like a world appears. This means that in order for us to be able to encounter objects as natural things, we need, first and foremost, to unveil their extantness as instrumentality, and having uncovered the window as such we are then able to move onto other modalities of being of the window.

In other words, the window has to be released from its extantness, as instrumentality or functionality, in order to be released to be perceived as natural thing. When we take up the matter of the perception of that which is “present-at-hand”, a little later, we will see that it is when there is a breakdown or disruption in the utilitarian modality of being that the modality of a natural vision, or theoretical vision is then derived. In the case of our window it is when our involvement with usability is disrupted or breaks down that our perception is directed towards other modalities of being, and thus it is released to uncover different properties such as everyday and theoretical and scientific observation and their concomitant modalities of vision (thinking and seeing).

The issue of where one locates this moment of sense-making is critical for Heidegger as he discounts that a conscious mind or self-referential subject is at the heart of the perceptual process. Instead, he holds accordingly that it is in the intentional comportment and the self-directedness in the perceiving of the window, as case in point, that the specific meaning of extantness, that is, whether the window is extant as utilitarian thing or as natural thing. In other words, the intentio, as the directional sense of the perceiving
of the window, is directed to its mode of presencing as utilitarian thing in our natural commerce with the window (as in opening it to ventilate a stuffy room), or that when disrupted (as a broken pane letting in the rain) then it is directed to the window as natural thing say the fragility of a glass pane. The point is that the understanding of the modality of being of the thing is a function of the perceptual structure in particular the intentio, that is, the intentionality involved in the directedness towards the unveiling or disclosure of the understanding of extantness as conditional for the uncovering or release of the intentum, that which is perceived. Critically what is at stake here is that our horizon of intelligibility, that is our understanding of being arising as it does from our involvement-in-society (socialization and the normative order) and its sociality and sociabilities are what defines our social being. And is thus in the latter region that critical site sits where we need to be mindful of our dealings with technology and the extent to which we should admit it to, or surrender to it, the modality of our way of being human, that is, Dasein as the field of disclosure or intelligibility.

If, as presented the unveiling, or disclosure of extantness, what we might call our ‘hermeneutic vision’ occurs, before the uncovering or discovery, what we have called our ‘phenomenological vision’, so to speak, does it mean, therefore, that this is performed before perception can, in a manner of speaking, uncover that which is to be perceived. Heidegger seems very well aware that in introducing a temporal order to the perceptual structure, in the order of succession of an unveiling, which is followed by an uncovering, he would inadvertently bring into play sense-making as conscious activity, and thus center the cognitive or the theoretical in the perceptual process. Thus, to maintain the idea
of a conscious-free comportment, in the sense-making dimension involved in the perceptual process, Heidegger (1982: 71) refers to this as a field of disclosure, which is constitutive of the Dasein and its existential structure:

The antecedent understanding of extantness is not prior in the order of measured clocktime. ... it is implicit in the basic constitution of the Dasein itself that, in existing, the Dasein also already understands the mode of being of the extant, to which it comports existingly, regardless of how far this extant entity is uncovered and whether it is or is not adequately and suitably uncovered. Not only do intentio and intentum belong to the intentionality of perception but so also does the understanding of the mode of being of what is intended in the intentum.

Given that the understanding of being is present in Dasein (product of socialization and normative acculturation) means that the perceptual process understood as an unveiling and uncovering should be seen as co-simultaneous, rather than in the temporal order suggested in ‘clocktime’. But, what is striking for its import in dissuading an appeal to the conscious subject is that, whereas the latter would suggest, that some resolution in the understanding of being is likely to occur once the perceptual uncovering kicks in, even if it is incorrect, for Heidegger, however, such an eventuality is not conditional at all, in the perceptual structure, for something to be apprehended as intelligible. He suggests that this understanding of being is tied to the existential structure of the Dasein, and as such is proximate in the way of being human. Thus, whether, or not, something is not adequately or suitably uncovered does not reflect in any way on the extent of understanding of being.
that such a Dasein has, as part of its constitution. Moreover that this understanding of being constitutive of Dasein, as part of its existential structure, and thus part of the intentional comportment of the human way of being, that is, the ontic transcendence, that is, our relation to things or being-amidst-things, is also as such part of the intentionality of perception. Let me attempt to illustrate this understanding of the complex of perception as follows.

In order to probe this complex structure of perception of Heidegger we take as our example a cooking utensil of unusual bearing. Lets say that we encounter this thing which lies before us and that it is unfamiliar and of complex design. To be clear lets spell out what is happening. This thing before us comes across as unfamiliar and as such its intelligibility eludes us for the moment. What is thus at stake here is how we perceive this thing or that we can even begin to be clear about what we perceive as such. In seeking to apprehend what is being registered before us we are in fact attempting to uncover the entity or that which is to be perceived, the intentum as such. It is to the structure, its form and its particular function towards which we are being directed to uncover what it might be or in fact is used for, that is, its essence. And because we are struggling to make sense of it that is to identify it as such we are brought face to face with the intentionality of the perceptual structure. This entity is not available to us in a way which makes it intelligible and thus we are directed towards how we in fact go about perceiving that which is perceived in the quotidian order of our everyday lives.
When we begin to conjecture as to what this thing might be we begin to draw on our understanding of the different modes of being of things. We may ask whether it is a medical instrument, work of art, weapon of war, cooking instrument, mechanical part of some machine and so on and so forth. This perceiving of the thing as this or that possibility or the direction that the lines of enquiry are heading in is what is referred to as the intentio, the directional sense of the perceptual structure, and what we have called our ‘hermeneutic vision’ (understanding and interpreting being, making sense of). It is on the basis of this understanding that we can be intentionally comported to the thing in one way or another. That is how we relate to what is before us as thing, object, equipment or as entities.

The matter of whether we are to uncover said thing et al as weapon, medical instrument, cooking utensil etc is based on the understanding which we come to not because we have made some mental leap into the thing but because we have unveiled the modality of its being (i.e. thing, object, etc.) through our hermeneutic vision, so to speak. But most importantly it is because our existential experiences as being-in-the-world-with-others-amidst-things encompasses various involvements, dealings and copings in our everyday lives through which as a function of our socialization and acculturation that we acquire an ontological understanding, that is, of what it means to be (the being of beings) that the thing was unveiled as thing and that its mystery can be uncovered, as for example, a cooking utensil.
Let us for the sake of convenience say that something in the make-up of the thing ‘gives
the game away’ so to speak and we determine on the basis of this feature that it is an
elaborate design for boiling eggs. Having thus uncovered said example in the perceiving
of the thing as a utensil used in the cooking of eggs, we can say that it has been laid open
in its uncoveredness, and thus its perceivedness is determinable or specifiable. In being
directed to the thing as cooking utensil that is perceiving it as such we then say that it has
been unveiled because it derives from our understanding of what it means for something
to be a utensil not because we have a theory of utensils, which we might have, but rather
because we have been socialized into the milieu of cooking and all it entails, and it is as
such that we are directed in our vision of said object to its being as cooking utensil. In
other words whether we do or do not arrive conclusively at whether said object is in fact
a cooking utensil, or that it may be one in a doubtful way does not detract from an
understanding of the modality of being of a cooking utensil. Nor does it detract from the
visionary being entailed in the perceiving of something as cooking utensil in other words
that it ‘looks’ like a cooking utensil of some kind supposes that it is in the directional
sense of perception, that is, the intentio that the understanding of the being of the thing is
located.

However in saying that something looks’ like a cooking utensil one is not only coming
from the directional sense of the intentio in the perception of said object, but one is
simultaneously coming from the object as such, that is, what is being perceived, the
intentum. In other words it is the look of the thing, its form that is also suggestive and
thus the synthesis of the intentio, that one is directed towards the entity by understanding
its being or perceiving of it as for example a cooking utensil, and the intentum the object
itself and its perceivedness or uncoveredness as cooking utensil for boiling eggs, an
electrical egg-boiler that conjointly make up the intentional perceptual structure. Simply
put the “intentionality of perception” or the directedness of the perceptual complex comes
down to this structure; that which is unveiled is in the perceiving of, the intentio and that
which is uncovered is in the perceived, the intentum and that which makes perception
intelligible lies in the understanding of being all of which is contained in its complexity.

In what has been said thus far about the intentionality of perception and its very
possibility what is clear is that it all hinges on the disclosedness entailed in the
understanding of being. And that if we are to arrive at an understanding of how we
comport to things and their extantness we need to come to terms with what is entailed in
an understanding of extantness itself before we can move onto the matter of the specifics
of beings as such. In effect we are tracking into Heidegger’s (1982: 71) concern for
establishing in his ‘fundamental ontology’ the condition of possibility of the perception
of things and thus the relationship between disclosure, uncovering and Dasein’s
constitution.

… in general that uncovering comportment toward the extant maintains itself in
an understanding of extantness and that the disclosure of extantness belongs to
this comportment, to the Dasein’s existence. This is the condition of the
possibility of the uncoverability of extant things. Uncoverability, the perceptibility
of extant things, presupposes disclosedness of extantness. With respect to its
possibility, perceivedness is grounded in the understanding of extantness.
Since the Dasein is what exists rather than what is extant it means that the way of being human is to comport to things. We establish a relationship to things which is our intentional comportment and in doing so we uncover being in general and two types of being in particular (readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand). Because we have to take care of our own existences in the way we live out our lives in terms of what we do and how we interpret these practices for ourselves we acquire a foundational understanding of being and thus of two modalities of beings. On the one hand we uncover aspects of our own being or Dasein to ourselves in the things we comport to, take care of and show concern for and we similarly uncover things in our dealings with them. Both of which are made possible by the “disclosure” of being which belongs to the Dasein and as such its comportment is one of a field of disclosure. Dasein in virtue of its understanding of being is an opening or clearing in which the being of beings is rendered intelligible and thus as such Dasein as existent being is a function of a field of disclosure.

Dasein as field of disclosure enjoys an intentional comportment towards all beings that as field is a clearing of being in which all beings can emerge in and of themselves. In other words the intentional perceptual structure of Dasein that is directed towards uncovering beings stems from the very comportment in which as a field of disclosure, its intentional comportment is one of uncovering. And it is for this reason that Heidegger speaks in phenomenological vein of perceivedness or uncovering being grounded in the understanding or hermeneutic of extantness, meaning the being of things. Thus, things
emerge on the ground of disclosure as uncovered figures; they take their meaning from within the horizon of intelligibility of being. Put succinctly, the hermeneutic dimension establishes the ground of disclosure in the unveiling of the modality of be-ing while the perceivedness of things is the phenomenological uncovering or discovery of the figures, or things themselves as they emerge on the ground of intelligibility, which we hold is social be-ing. This sociality enables the comportment not only to being-with-others but with being-towards-self and it is not confined to Dasein but includes our relation to things as being-amidst-things all carrying the indelible stamp of the range of our sociabilities.

The distinction and connectedness of the intentional structure of perception in relation to what is involved in ‘uncoveredness’ and ‘disclosedness’ of beings and being respectively is what remains to be put in place, to close off this critical discussion on the nature of perception before moving onto being-amidst-things and their modalities of being and our relation to them as Dasein. Heidegger (1982: 72) approaches the distinction between uncoveredness and disclosedness to indicate that it is more than a matter of mere semantics:

We therefore distinguish not only terminologically but also for reasons of intrinsic content between the uncoveredness of a being and the disclosedness of its being. A being can be uncovered, whether by way of perception or some other mode of access, only if the being of this being is already disclosed—only if I already understand it. Only then can I ask whether it is actual or not and embark on some procedure to establish the actuality of the being.
The connection between uncoveredness and disclosedness devolves to the mode of intelligibility that necessitates that things first be understood in terms of its modality of being before it can as such be seen for what it truly is, rather than merely be groped or guessed at. Put differently, if one does not understand the nature of the being of something one is not in a position to see it for what it is, that is, it cannot be uncovered in perception and thus be apprehended as thing in itself. In showing, then, that there is an intimate connection or unity between ‘uncoveredness’ and ‘disclosedness’ Heidegger (Ibid) simultaneously draws our attention to the distinction between the being that is being uncovered and the being of the being that is being disclosed or unveiled. Thus

This involves at the same time the possibility of formulating the distinction between the being [Seienden] (sic) that is uncovered in the uncoveredness and the being [Sein] (sic) which is disclosed in the disclosedness, thus fixing the differentiation between being and beings, the ontological difference.

Whereas being is considered the ontological dimension, as it involves what it means for something to be, in other words, that it is, namely, its existence; beings by contrast in their specificity as this or that thing, refers us as such to its ontical constitution, in other words, what it is, namely, its essence. What Heidegger (1982: 74) alludes to then is that

In our phenomenological consideration …-to each being there belongs a what and a way-of –being.
The above refers to a fundamental distinction between being and beings which we counter posed as that and what, but moreover what it is that enables us human beings to not only make such a distinction, but more importantly to make of this distinction a unity. Heidegger (1982: 75) has this to say.

For it is only on the basis of the exposition of the basic ontological constitution of the Dasein that we put ourselves in a position to understand adequately the phenomenon correlated with the idea of being, the understanding of being which lies at the basis of all comportment to beings and guides it. Only if we understand the basic ontological constitution of the Dasein can we make clear to ourselves how an understanding of being is possible in the Dasein.

Thus we close in the unity of the perceptual structure in as much as it encompasses disclosure and discovery, that is, a hermeneutical and phenomenological vision respectively, and that it coalesces in Dasein, that is the field of social being as made manifest in the way of existence that is distinctively human. And since our existence predisposes us to a comportment with things such that being-amidst things means that we in fact develop a relationship not only with fellow human beings but with things as well opens us up to taking on a technological modality of being in as much as we are amidst-technological objects. To be sure it is not the object as such since Heidegger has made it clear that the essence of technology is not in anything technological but rather in the comportment and horizon of intelligibility that emanates from the sociabilities and
sociality concomitant with being socialized in a technological world. In other words the emergent generations and those who have been socialized in a technological milieu show an amazing awareness and adroitness at being-amidst-technological-things. And each generation marvels at the new generation and their sociability or functionality in such worlds.

The point is that it is no mystery that they have the ‘hermeneutic vision’ to make sense of their worlds, but rather what is clear is that they have been socialized and acculturated into the technological normative order of their time and space. Thus, they are able to disclose the different modalities of technological being, and as such phenomenologically uncover the technological artifacts that they live amidst, and the technological world they dwell in and inhabit, with much ease and aplomb by and large. What we are heading towards is the rallying cry of many parents who find themselves in such technological milieus and have to confront the technological miens of their progeny in that they more inclined to spend most of their time with technological things such personal computers surfing the World Wide Web, playing video games, electronic networking, gaming, and so on. By contrast the current generation has been socialized into a social modality that is ensconced in a social being that carries the socialization and normative order of sociality borne of a being-in-the-world, and being-with-others, being-amidst-things and being-towards-self all of which through our sociabilities (practices, functionality, and association) have inured us existentially in-society. We engage with technology but through the horizon of intelligibility of our social being and we are able to function in a world that is increasingly becoming technological without surrendering our being, our
Dasein as that field of disclosure as connective to our way of existing as humans concerned and caring for that which defines our humanity, that is the sociabilities or practices we instantiate. Through our intentional comportment as it articulates in the perceptual structure we are able to release technological things to be encountered as such but always within a social hermeneutic and thus maintain our social being and yet be amidst-technological things.

What happens when the next generation or the one following in some foreseeable future loses its footing in a social hermeneutic such that their horizon of intelligibility takes on the socialization and normative order of modern technology and its way of revealing as standing reserve. There would be no recourse to the perceptual structure as the very intentional comportment of disclosure in the directional sense towards technological things would be sated in a technological sensibility and thus what was previously released for a phenomenological vision surrenders to the spectacle of the standing reserve. We are not suggesting a technological dystopia as some inevitability and technological determinist scenario, but raising the sociological implications of a socialization and a normative pattern that when technologised to the point that it becomes an uncontested hermeneutic, then what other recourse do we have that can maintain our foot in-society and thus our social be-ing. It is to this possible saving grace that we now turn to bring our Heideggerian excursus to a close and raise the possibility of equipmentality and its ontology that is it way of revealing and disclosing being as a way out of the technological quagmire.
Chapter Seven

Being-amidst-things: equipmentality as counterpoise

We will now move on from the perceptual structure, and its modality of releasing things, to be encountered in themselves, though close with the point, that as an Archimedean lever, where such a perceptual comportment secures its social grounding, it is dependent on generational continuities for its reproduction of a social hermeneutic. Particularly, as far as the latter in its relation to the advent of Dasein early in the socialization process and its import for a social hermeneutic is concerned, though with each succeeding generation one may argue that such a link becomes increasingly tenuous. The likelihood is that unless it is made explicit and recognized as such, our social being arguably would increasingly give way to a technological modality of being.

Thus, if we are going to find an Archimedean lever or counterpoise to the technologisation of social being we would paradoxically have in dialectical vein to look to technology itself for our saving grace. And thus, it is precisely with such a development in mind that we turn to being-amidst-things, in as much as it involves an equipmental nexus and gestalt that we close in on, and open up the possibility of reining in the imperative of modern technology.
Now that we have followed through on Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology of technology and the intentional structure of perception similarly as an uncovering and an unveiling we can move onto what is entailed in an existential ontological understanding of social being. In this regard, firstly, we take up the specificities that reach into our involvement and encounter with equipment and things, that is, as ‘being-amidst-things, and how this relates to ourselves and what it means for the former to be, that is, their different modalities of being, in general and their concomitant modes of vision. And finally we consider how equipmentality from an ontological vantage point offers or does not offer itself as counterpoise to modern technology and its way of revealing nature as raw materials, being and all that is brought-forth or challenged-forth as standing reserve.

We have taken our cue from Verbeek (2005) who differs from Dreyfus (1992) on the intermediary role of Heidegger’s conception of equipmentality who holds that it finds a place between techne and modern technology. Dreyfus (1992: 175) offers a sociological analysis which locates handcraft production in the Greek modality of techne and cybernetic control in modern technology and equipment in industrial production. In doing so he elides the primary importance of equipmentality and furthermore effaces it from our contemporary modality of being when in our technological profligacy it seems to be embedded in such plenitude, if one looks beyond the gizmos and gadgets that obscure it. In this one respect our reading is closer to Verbeek (2005: 82) who holds that Dreyfus is wrong on this account because he overlooks the “innovative aspect in Heidegger’s analysis of tools and equipment”, which is to show its “constitutive role in the relation between human beings and world. Whereas Verbeek (2205) is concerned with developing a post-phenomenology of things, we find in Heidegger’s analysis of equipment the
existential - ontological grounding of social being and its dimensionality in sociality and sociabilities. And moreover, we find in said equipmentality a counterpoise to modern technology and its Nihilism.

7.1 Being-amidst-things: modalities of encountering things

The matter at hand is to arrive at an understanding of how the relationship to equipment things or being-amidst-things and dwelling with them reveals to us our being as Dasein, that is, it the modalities our being. In this regard Dreyfus (1991: 61) cites Heidegger (1982: 159, 157) to illustrate the point that:

In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of (159). To exist then means, among other things, relating to oneself by being with beings (157).

It is thus in this way what we have referred to as our sociabilities that we seek through an analysis of our relation to social being and technology what it means “to be as comportment with things …” Heidegger (1982: 157). Dreyfus translates Heidegger’s comportment with things as “relating to oneself by being with beings…” so as to arrive at an understanding of our being in relation to the technological modality that is prescient and how it relates to social being and sociality. Towards this end we track into Dreyfus (1991) and his exegesis of Heidegger’s phenomenological account of Dasein in terms of our relation to things and its comportment as it pertains to perception or vision to set the conceptual basis of our thinking in this regard on equipmentality as the site of the disclosure of social being and sociality. We are particularly interested in Dreyfus’s
(1991) account of Heidegger’s (1962) notions of the two modes of being of things referred to as “Zuhanden” and “Vorhanden”, which have been respectively translated as “ready-to-hand” and “present-at-hand” in the (1962) edition cited. Our concern is to take up the former as counterpoise to the essence of modern technology and the latter to show that the subject object duality of theory and science are not primary but derivative. We also seek in the latter the modality of the quotidian order and its modality as curiosity and how this sits with our existential constitution.

With regard to the two modalities of being of equipment Dreyfus (1991: 60) prefers instead to refer to these directly as “availableness” and “occurrentness” and their concomitant modes of comportment that reveal them as “dealing with” and cognition”. And finally to bring these introductory comments to a close the accompanying modalities of vision that in turn respectively correspond are ‘circumspection’ and ‘theoretical vision’. These are the issues that will be taken up immediately below to situate the relation between the primary modalities of being of equipment, things and vision and their derivation in the secondary and cursory modalities that arise in relation thereto such as “occurrentness” and “pure occurrence”. We will follow Dreyfus (1991: 124-125) in his summary of the different modes of being of entities which he lists as “availableness”, “unavailableness”, “occurrentness” and “pure occurrence” and their respective modalities of comportment and perception though will also engage directly with Heidegger (1962).
7.1.1 Zuhandenheit: equipment as ready-at-hand or availableness

With very slight modification to the translation of Heidegger’s “Being and Time” (1962: 95) Dreyfus (1991: 62) opens his discussion on the nature of our primary encounter with the “being of those beings” as distinct from the former reference to the “Being of those entities”. In both cases the reference is to that which is non-human or non-Dasein-like. Though as stated the critical issue is that in our comportment to said entities we reveal our being in the way we thus act towards these things or beings. What emerges is that the salient point is that one’s investigation into the latter encounter with the being of beings or entities can be “phenomenologically exhibited if we take as our clue our everyday being-in-the-world, which we call our “dealings” with the world and with intraworldly beings.

What Heidegger (1962: 95) reveals is that our quotidian order of being is such that what is closest to us in our everyday coping is not to be located, as noted by Dreyfus (1991: 62), in a:

… bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use

The point being made with respect to the negation of perception as such is not that we are somehow not able to see what lies before us, but, rather as previously taken up, with
respect to the intentional structure of perception, that in order for something to be uncovered in perception its being needs to be disclosed or unveiled, and in that moment is it, the entity, simultaneously released as uncovered in perception. Thus, the point is that our closest encounter with entities in our quotidian order of being, as far as perception is concerned, is that it is not immaculately perceived, but informed by an understanding of their mode of being. The issue of note for us here in this instance is what this understanding of being is that directs one’s perception such that the modality of the being of the entity in use takes on a definitive appearance, though not as discrete and isolated. The latter modality of the disclosedness of the structure of intentionality emergent in its directional sense (intentio) we established in Heidegger (1975). What is pertinent here is Dreyfus’s (1981: 62) analysis of our primary everyday being, and how it relates to Heidegger’s (1962) conception of the modality of being of those entities that emerge in the “concern, which manipulates things and puts them to use”, that is equipment.

Dreyfus (1991: 62) puts it succinctly thus:

Heidegger first notes that we do not usually encounter (use, talk about, deal with) “mere things,” but rather we use the things at hand to get something done. These things he calls “equipment” (Zeug), in a broad enough sense to include whatever is useful: tools, materials, toys, clothing, dwellings, etc.

Heidegger (1962: 97) is very specific about how he defines what he understands by equipment and its relation to Dasein’s utilitarian complex by saying that:
We shall call those entities which we encounter in concern “equipment”.

Thus in our human way of being there are many things that we need to take care of and that we show great concern for as in the basic satisfactions of food, clothes and shelter and the socialization entailed in ludic behavior all of which are accompanied by equipment of all sorts. In this we can understand how equipment comes to bear on Dasein though we do not as yet have any insight into what characterizes it. Dreyfus (1991: 62-63) gives us an outline of its main characteristics:

The basic characteristic of equipment is that it is used for something. “Equipment is essentially something ‘in-order-to’” (97) [68]. It is important to note that Heidegger is not defining equipment merely in terms of its in-order-to. A chimp uses a stick in order to reach a banana is not using equipment. Equipment always refers to other equipment. “In the ‘in-order-to’ as a structure there lies an assignment or reference of something to something” (97) [68]. An “item” of equipment is what it is only insofar as it refers to other equipment and so in a certain way fits into an “equipmental whole.”

Why it is that no ‘bare perception’ occurs, insofar as one is able to apprehend a ‘mere thing’ in our closest encounter with it as used in our dealings in everyday life, becomes apparent above in terms of the aspect of its being. Put directly what obtains above, firstly, is that the directional sense of perception is oriented towards the entity by a pre-
conceptual understanding of being, and thus disclosed or unveiled as equipment. However, what needs to be noted in addition is that this understanding of the modality of the being of the entity as equipment is necessary, but not sufficient for this entity towards which the intentionality of perception is directed, to be uncovered and so released in perception. In order for this entity or piece of equipment to be apprehended as such there is the also the related matter of an equipmental gestalt which needs to be in place.

In other words, as Heidegger (1975: 292), cited in Dreyfus (1991: 63) points out, that “what determines a piece of equipment as individuated is the “equipmental whole” and ‘equipmental nexus.” In this way we are referring to in so far as this whole resonates with Dasein a field of sociality. Thus, in view of the intentional structure of perception it is only under the aspect of the disclosedness of the ‘equipmental nexus’ (intentio) that perception is directed towards an individual piece of equipment (intentum), and it is thus able to co-simultaneously emerge as uncovered and is as such amenable to being perceived in itself. Therefore, in addition to the social hermeneutic which is tied to socialization and the normative order, we have a horizon of intelligibility that is tied to the equipmental nexus and its referential structure as an overlapping hermeneutic. Furthermore, the socialization that takes place in the equipmental whole of say a workshop or garage articulates with the socialization in which the horizon of intelligibility of being is involved. What we have here and why we have risked the tautology is to drive home the point that in equipmentality the counterpoise is this very sociality and the sociabilities that have become apparent.
The phenomenological point being made is that, what a specific piece of equipment may be, is not primarily a function of space and time and thus not open to bare perception as such, but is rather a function of an equipmental hermeneutic and gestalt first and foremost. What this comes down to is that for an individual piece of equipment to be, means that it has to be part of an equipmental whole and as such speaks to an ontological relation rather than a specific characteristic of its being or ontical constitution. Thus, in as much as one is dealing with the “way of being of entities which are defined by their use in the whole”, Dreyfus (1991:63) makes us aware that we are dealing with what he calls “availableness.”

It turns out that Dreyfus translates Heidegger’s original terminology of “Zuhandenheit”, employed in Being and Time, as “availableness”, which in turn differs from Macquarrie and Robinson who prefer “ready-to-hand”, in their translation in Heidegger (1962), and in turn differs from Stambaugh’s “handiness” in Heidegger (1996). What they all refer to, is that which is closest, handy and ‘available’ in our everyday day dealing with the concerns we have as Dasein, in terms of the equipment we need and use and thus have at our disposal in order to cope with our quotidian order of being. But already here what is emergent is that a rich milieu is available in which our social being is inured.

What we encounter in our involved dealings in-the-world and the field of visibility subsequently opened is the unveiling or disclosure of the modality of being of ‘availableness’ or “readiness-to-hand” and its uncoveredness, such that equipment, both in its presence as individual pieces can be apprehended as such’, as well as those which
in their absence are signaled in their relational nexus and equipmental whole. This is the ontological thesis referring to the general condition of what it means for something to be, and the way of revealing in what is present as “available”, “ready-to-hand” or “handy” as equipment. However, what we now turn to is the specific conditions under which we encounter that which has, so to speak, been released or uncovered for the comportment of perception with respect to that which is used and as such “available”. Our own preference would be to use the translations of ‘Zuhandenheit’ interchangeably especially where it is serves for ease of understanding and in so doing treat these terms similarly, that is as ‘available’, ‘handy’ or ready-to-hand’.

7.1.1.1 Dasein’s way of encountering equipment

What is noteworthy about Dasein’s way of encountering and understanding the mode of being of equipment variously referred to as “availableness”, “ready-to-hand” or “handiness” is that it can only be apprehended in a primordial or original way through its functioning or its use. In the terms we have established by way of our concern for social being it is as sociability though not as potential practice but as actual practice that we disclose what a given equipment is, in its being as handy.

Secondly, in its use or functioning what is furthermore of note is that both the equipment in use, and the person or Dasein using the equipment “disappear” so to speak in the ‘heat’ of involvement, or in being absorbed in the function, that is the ‘in-order-to and the end point, the ‘towards which’, as such. Dreyfus (1991: 64-66) understands these “disappearances” that ensue in the comportment of dealing-with, and what it reveals, that is, the being of ‘availableness”, as the transparency both of equipment and Dasein as
these are absorbed in the associated activity of use and function. In other words one is oblivious of the equipment and self when one is absorbed in the function and directed towards the goal of one’s activity and thus one’s encounter with the equipment and oneself assumes virtual transparency.

Quite clearly we are not dealing with actual disappearance and as such it may be better to speak of transparence as in looking through the equipment to what is being done and through self to what the end-point is of said activity. However, in being momentarily oblivious of self and equipment does not mean that one is clueless as to what is involved and entailed in the modality of being of practical involvement in equipment and its handiness. So in reflecting on the subject – object epistemological dualism of a theoretical or scientific modality of being we find that it is absorbed into the equipmental nexus and adumbrated by readiness-to-hand. It recedes into the sociabilities at hand and the sociality of its directedness in so far as it resonates with Dasein’s way of social being. This absorption of equipment and Dasein into equipmental nexus also differs from the absorption evident in modern technology’s way of revealing as standing reserve. Where being, in general and beings, in particular, in modern technology don’t become transparent while still being substantial, but rather disappear in a way that manifests a loss of their substantial nature, their sociality, in as much as Dasein is unable to comport, that is have a relationship with objects, things and equipment as the latter is not extant as such, and Dasein is not existent as such, either.
With respect to the matter of understanding the ‘handiness’ of equipment Heidegger (1962: 98) is clear that there are definite limits as to how we reach such knowledge:

Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own (hammering with a hammer for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not grasped thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about [um] the hammer’s character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable.

Firstly, it is clearly in the intended use connoted in “cut to its own” that the being of equipment is encountered in a ‘primordial’ or ‘original’ understanding. In other words if the hammer is used for anything other than hammering, that is, as paper-weight for example, its “handiness” or “availableness” as a hammer would not be accessed. Apart from this non-intended use the hammer can neither be understood nor cognitively grasped at the theoretical level in so far as its handiness is concerned. This level of cognition will be shown to be a derivative of the latter modality of being. But similarly the act of hammering is not an epistemological threshold for moving from the practical to the domain of knowledge of the equipmental nexus as such either. In its intended function as such, something of an essence emerges for Heidegger (1962: 98), though of a qualified nature as the following obtains

The hammering itself uncovers the specific ‘manipulability’ [“Handlichkeit”] of the hammer. The kind of being which equipment possesses-in which it manifests
itself in its own right—we call “readiness-to-hand” [Zuhandenheit]. Only because equipment has this ‘Being-in-itself’ and does not merely occur, is it manipulable in the broadest sense and at our disposal. No matter how sharply we just look at the ‘outward appearance’ of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand.

In the formulation of equipment as ‘Being-in-itself’ we must guard against assuming that Heidegger means that there is an essence inherent in equipment that one can discover simply thorough a phenomenological description. Far from it; rather, it is in the use or primary function of a piece of equipment and its relation to an equipmental whole that the former reveals a nature ‘in itself’ and it is furthermore in the act of use that the very possibility of its manipulability emerges and thus multiple usage. Accordingly, it is not in this sense that the piece of equipment by simply being present before us as such reveals its handiness and manipulability and can thus be accessed by ‘bare’ perception. Its ‘essence’, if one were to speak of it as such, is a function of its primary use, that is, its being as “ready-to-hand”, and not its being as something merely occurring, that is, as “present-at-hand”. It is with regard to the latter that one sees the merit in Dreyfus’s (1991) direct translation of “Vorhanden” as “occurrent” and thus the point that ‘essence’ is not to be found in ‘outward appearance’ but in a “non-thematic” and “non-self referential” use. It, then, becomes evident that Heidegger not only combines a hermeneutic to his phenomenology, but in relation to equipment we also have praxis involved in uncovering the ‘essence’, or function of given equipment. If it were left to consciousness as such it would simply devolve to a cognitively centered transcendental
subject and thus for our own slant towards social being it would undermine our claims that the horizon of intelligibility lays at the heart of our particular sociality as imbibed in our social be-ing.

If, in the absorbed coping of “readiness-to-hand”, there is as such a virtual transparency involved insofar as the equipment and the Dasein is concerned, then are we to think that we are dealing with a mindless and sightless phenomenon. What is particularly interesting is that the concerns raised as to the mental and visual content of our absorbed and “transparent” dealings with equipment, issues forth the matter of theory, in this modality of “readiness-to-hand”, which in turn ‘so happens’, to be a conjoining of sight and mind. Our commonsense English understanding of theory is that it, in the main, refers to a ‘system of ideas for explaining something’ and thus its mental content. However, what is also true of an understanding of theory (see Heidegger, 1962; Jenks, 1995; Mitchell, 19986 and many others) is that its root lies in the Greek ‘theoria’ meaning to look at, to see and thus its visual overtones. We have lost the latter root and with it the role of vision as it is embedded in thought, even though at another level we have sublimated this visionary aspect, in a visual condition described as occularcentrism and its subject – object distanciation. The point, however, is that in relation to equipment, and the mind and sight, which accompany its use and functionality, we have a distinct modality of vision and hence of mind that is at work. In teasing out this understanding Heidegger (1962: 98-99) simultaneously distinguishes it from theoretical understanding.
If we look at Things just ‘theoretically’, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character. Dealings with equipment subordinate themselves to the manifold assignments of the ‘in-order-to. And the sight with which they thus accommodate themselves is circumspection.

We will defer discussion on a ‘theoretical vision’ to the appropriate section dealing with ‘presence-at-hand shortly, but will focus here on the sight associated with circumspection deemed significant for our involvement with equipment and it ‘availableness’. Though, before engaging with circumspection an important point needs to be made with respect to the unity of vision and cognition. Whereas the point was made earlier as to the separation of vision from theory what is evident here with respect to sight is that it incorporates the element of thinking into its ‘horizon of intelligibility’, such that we have inter alia foresight, insight and hindsight as opposed to a kind of seeing as ‘bare’ perception. However, in as much as, this unitary view of sight and mind in ‘non-self-referential’ behavior, is being made explicit one finds this in Heidegger’s quote above, in that ‘seeing’ is imputed in the activity of using and manipulating, and ‘thinking’ in what is connoted in our ‘action’ being guided, as well as in our understanding of the essence of equipmentality (‘Thingly’ character). But, what kind of seeing is involved in circumspection and what state of mind or rather being, as the latter is not explicit, is proximate are our concerns below. In a footnote, in Heidegger (1962: 98-99) we are
given a definition by the translators of circumspection by way of the matter of its translation from the German term “Umsicht”:

The word ‘Umsicht’, which we translate by ‘circumspection’, is here presented as standing for a special kind of ‘Sicht’ (sight). … Heidegger is taking advantage of the fact that the prefix ‘um’ may mean either ‘around’ or ‘in order to’. Umsicht may accordingly be thought of as meaning ‘looking around’ or ‘looking around for something’ or ‘looking around for a way to get something done’. … ‘Umsicht’ seems to have much the same connotation as our ‘circumspection’-a kind of awareness in which one looks around before one decides just what one ought to do next. But Heidegger seems to be generalizing this notion as well as calling attention to the extent to which circumspection in the narrower sense occurs in our everyday seeing.

The semantic analysis of the German word ‘Umsicht” given above and circumspect as in circum- meaning round or about and spect from specere (Oxford Concise Dictionary) meaning look seem to coalesce in meaning. However probing these meanings for their significance suggests a deeper relation to the originary transcendence of ‘being-in-the-world and how that sits with the existential state of Dasein. In looking around is presupposed that one is situated in something of a world which surrounds us, and in which one seeks to find one’s bearings, so to speak, and moreover that these so-called bearings are found through the specific kind of looking understood of circumspection. Furthermore, that in looking around in order to find something or do something opens
itself to that which is available or ready-to-hand, that is, generally understood as being at hand. In this regard what is being singled out is that it is circumspection that enables one to find one’s bearings in relation to what we need to do, or find when we are in the act of manipulating and using equipment, and thus in the mode of being of ‘readiness-to-hand’.

Moreover, the awareness that accompanies circumspection as it relates to that which is ‘ready-to-hand’ and what one uses or is looking for momentarily is directly related to the ‘equipment whole’, and the ‘referential nexus’ or what we have dubbed an equipmental gestalt. In other words, and most importantly, what the equipmental gestalt is foregrounding is that circumspection does not involve a self awareness in its modality of comportment. And in this respect we come to understand Dreyfus’s (1991) reference to the “transparence of Dasein” even though it carries the risk of being conflated with what Heidegger (1962: 186) refers to as existential vision or transparency as existential awareness that involves the ‘seeing of self’ though not as subjective sight, hence its existential qualification. Dreyfus (1991: 66) concern is to make clear that for Heidegger circumspection “does not involve deliberate thematic awareness”, and thus:

The view in which the equipmental nexus stands at first, completely unobtrusive and unthought, is the view and sight of practical circumspection, of our practical everyday orientation. “Unthought” means that it is not thematically apprehended for deliberate thinking about things; instead, in circumspection, we find our bearings in relation to them.
Dasein and for that matter the equipmental specificities ‘disappear’ so to speak or becomes transparent in relation to an equipmental nexus insofar for example as when one enters a library, as case in point, one does not go about looking at each book, bookshelves, cataloging numbers and letters in order to establish that one is in fact in a library. Even less does one recount one’s ‘theory’ of what a library is and then tick off what one takes note of in a deliberate way so as to ascertain that what one has entered does conform to one’s theoretical construct thereof. Instead one encounters these specificities that make up a library in a non-obvious way, that is, unobtrusively because one has an understanding of what it means to be a library in terms of it as an equipmental nexus and it is with this circumspective gestalt, that is looking round and about that one orients oneself to such a thing called a library or whatever. Thus, in paradoxical vein, circumspective thought, as a gestalt, a visionary whole of the modality of availableness, is an unthought, and the seeing that ensues with respect to what one might associate with a detailed and fine-grained vision is in fact an unsighted or ‘sightless’.

We have previously referred to a socialized vision which given it quotidian order and hermeneutic structure seems in place. Indeed, the intentional structure of vision as in circumspection is directed to the aspect of a practical everyday orientation as regards its being as ‘ready-to-hand’ or ‘availableness’. Though the matter of the “transparency” of Dasein or rather its absorption into the equipmental nexus raises a more fundamental existential matter of how this bears upon the relationship of Dasein and the world. In particular our concern is for how this modality of self relates to Dasein’s ‘being-in-the-world’ The stark implication, then, of this ‘non-self-referential awareness’ in dealing
with equipment in its modality of ‘availableness’ is that, as Heidegger (1975: 297) puts it, cited in Dreyfus (1991: 67):

Self and world belong together in the single entity, Dasein. Self and world are not two entities, like subject and object, or like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world.

In other words it is in ‘being-there” if we regard the inversion of Da-sein (there-being) as it does not alter what is connoted insofar as what is being alluded to is that self is contained in being and ‘Sein’ and world is imputed in there and ‘Da’. To be human is always to be there in the world and it is in being in a particular socio-cultural world that we have the wherewithal to define what it means to be human in the stances and self-interpretations we take, and make in relation to what it means to be concerned with and to care for our existence per se. In other words our social being and the world we are in are inseparable from each other; they are a de-territorialized, de-spatialised and de-severed mutuality. It is precisely this ontological dimension to equipment that we seize upon to suggest it as counterpoise to the displacement of social being in modern technology for surely to speak of technological equipment carries with it concomitant sociabilities and as such keeps us rooted in social being. Or would we need to reconceptualise equipment and treat of it as already in the way of revealing of the standing reserve in which case we would need Heidegger’s recourse to art as a way out of the malady. This seems hardly viable a position since my very relation to the personal computer that I am using to write
this thesis has a transparency about it and my own being in relation to it is absorbed in its functionality and what this work is directed towards. Thus it would seem that one would need a conception of equipment that is able to differentiate that which opens it to social being and that which closes itself off from it rather than disregard equipmentality and its sociality and sociabilities.

Returning to the point at hand Heidegger (1962: 216) in his discussion on what it means to perceive in relation to curiosity as a particular modality of social being and ‘seeing’ concretizes the relation of circumspection and being-in-the-world. Even though this discussion is more appropriate to those modalities of being associated with “occurrentness” and “pure occurrence” (to follow shortly), it is relevant, as Heidegger brings it to bear on readiness-to-hand, as case in point. Thus Heidegger (1962: 216) draws circumspection into it’s implicate in being-in-the-world:

What is to be said about this tendency just to perceive? Which existential state of Dasein will become intelligible in the phenomenon of curiosity? Being-in-the-world is proximally absorbed in the world of concern. This concern is guided by circumspection, which discovers the ready-to-hand and preserves it as thus discovered. Whenever we have something to contribute or perform, circumspection gives us the route for proceeding with it, the means for carrying it out, the right opportunity, the appropriate moment. … In the world of work, circumspective discovering has de-severing as the character of its Being. When
circumspection has been set free, there is no longer anything ready-to-hand which we must concern ourselves with bringing close.

What is particularly profound in this understanding of Heidegger above where he conflates the notion of world with an equipmental nexus and thus world-view with an equipmental gestalt is that this speaks to the modality of being of readiness-to-hand as a primordial and original access to knowledge of the world. Furthermore, it is in the non-self-referential awareness and in the non-thematic awareness of circumspection and its intentional comportment that we access the world in our primary and usual way. Thus contradicting the dominant view and classical philosophical understanding that our knowledge of the world is derived primarily and originally thorough the theoretical vision of a detached self-referential observer. The mutuality of our being that is human beings and world and its unity is brought together in our absorption into that equipmental nexus which we disappear into such that we become that which is connoted and denoted in Heidegger’s discovery of that originary realization in the existential structure of being-in-the-world.

It is not theoretical vision which maps our being-in-the-world but circumspection which maps our being-in-availableness and thus it through being-amidst-things that is our equipmental gestalt that we arrive at a fundamental understanding of our way of being human, that is, that what it means to be human is to take a stand on existence and its contingent conditionalities, in other words its groundlessness, unsettledness, ‘foundationless-ness’. Thus, in closing being with things in the modality of availableness
or readiness-to-hand and our perception thereof in its mode of circumspection is no mere incidental matter as has been ‘disclosed’ but is revelatory of being and worldliness as a function of equipmentality. It is thus no simplistic thing that human comport to things, equipment, objects in a deeply meaningful way such that one cannot merely pass it off as crass materialism, which it sometimes truly is. Rather what Heidegger shows us is that our relationship to things is tied to our make-up as Dasein, that is, that it discloses and uncovers in our relation to our existence what it means for us to be. Simply put, equipment connects us to our being by de-severing our relationship to the world such that we are absorbed into our being-in-world and thus social being, through our concern with producing and reproducing our basic satisfactions and more. Through our dealings with and involvement in an equipmental whole, our imbrications in an equipmental nexus and disclosure in an equipmental gestalt we are the mutuality of self and world; in a word we are ‘being-in-the-world’ and inured in our sociality through the concomitant sociabilities that are tied to the practices involved in using equipment.

Lest it not be misunderstood Heidegger is not taking the position of being anti-theory, though he is taking a radical and literal point of epistemological departure, for what he has called “fundamental ontology”. In this context theory does not become transparent to disappear as such from view, rather it no longer assumes the prominence that it did and does in Western philosophy, as our primary and primordial access to knowledge of the world. What emerges and has been assumed in the aforementioned discussion on equipmentality and circumspection as our mode of access to its being as availableness and readiness-to-hand, is that this modality emerges in our smooth and uninterrupted
‘commerce’ or dealings and involvement with equipment, as we manipulate it and use it in order to satisfy that toward which such use is directed at or intended. The question that begs then is what happens when such manipulation or functionality associated with readiness-to-hand is temporarily interrupted at best or permanently interrupted at worst. These are the conditionalities that Heidegger takes up to show that the comportment of theoretical vision and cognition as such is derived from our dealing with and involvement that comes with the use, manipulation and functionality of equipment at work. We consider both Heidegger’s (1962) views directly and Dreyfus’s (1991) analysis and extension of the former’s views.

The point we want to leave this with is that it is in our involvement with equipment, the practical domain of activity that we are inured in our social being and sociality through the sociabilities we exercise. Thus in the modality of equipment we are presented with a counterpoise to the displacement of our social being, however we must add a cautionary qualification, and that is that this holds for as long as the nature of technological equipment is of such a nature that our sociabilities are substantially exercised. But where our practices and involvement in equipment is absorbed by technology not in the sense of transparency, but in the sense that our efforts are no longer required and substituted as such by technology, and then the extent of our inuring in social being is proportionally diminished by such ontological substitution. In other words the way of revealing is not in the way of being of equipment as ready-to-hand and Dasein’s being as such is not disclosed in such comportment, but instead technology as way of revealing manifest the standing reserve. When this occurs then equipment no longer offers itself up as
Archimedean lever, but is itself a modality of an enframing, which reveals itself, to be stripped of its equipmental status, its status as thing and as object and merely a resource which is at hand to fulfill a technological functionality. Then we face the Heideggerian fatalism of humanity without social substance, a nihilistic fate. The question that thus confronts us is that with talk of the breakdown in circumspective absorption in the equipmental nexus as far as our involvement is concerned and the emergence of other modalities of being in unavailableness and presence-at-hand do these offer recourse as way of revealing, that is potentially serve as counterpoise to the way of revealing as standing reserve. We consider these possibilities in what follows.

7.1.2 Unavailableness: temporary and permanent interruption in availableness/ readiness-to-hand

In the previous section dealing with equipment and its ‘availableness’ we noted along with Dreyfus that Heidegger reversed the order of theory over practice favored by classical Western Philosophy in the matter of our primary mode for accessing knowledge of the world. We were at pains to show that Heidegger was not negating the role of theory but rather delimiting its relation to our primordial and original engagement with the world and its epistemic priority. This question of the role of theory in relation to the cognitive intentionality of the subject and the self-referential nature of the object is now put into perspective in Heidegger’s understanding of their emergence, as contingent upon the breakdown in the comportment of ‘absorbed coping’ and ‘transparent equipment’. In our terms the modality of theory is revealed as embedded in the sociability of
circumspective absorption and emerges when this mode is disrupted which as such comes to the way of revealing of presence-at-hand and its functionality or sociability.

What must be noted however is that theory as derivative still has a ‘foot’ in the background understanding of being but it is recessive and assumes an analogous relationship as that between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand (the former in the latter) though inversely so. What happens in an interruption to the previous ‘transparent’ and circumspective functioning of equipment is that the virtual transparency of equipment and Dasein are no longer absorbed and as a result both, so to speak, reappear and emerge as subject and object. This subject–object relationship thrusts itself to the foreground and severs the existential involvement of readiness-to-hand, thus altering the modality of social being and its sociality. This opens up for us the potential in engaging the technological modality of being of the standing reserve theoretically, thus delimiting its region of influence and its relation to Dasein, that is our existential–ontological constitution of being.

How far can we take this theoretical modality of being, given that it renders recessive social being for theoretical being and thus our sociabilities are socially decontextualised but paradigmatically recontextualised? However, in being able to shift contexts does it offer the possibility of at least theoretically being able to move outside of the orbit of the essence of ‘enframing’? Or conversely does it mean that if one is within the sway of modern technology our modality of thinking serves already as ‘ordering, measuring and calculating’, hence confirming the Heisenberg moment, which as such, is that the act of
measurement constitutes the reality of what is being measured. And that brings us squarely to the ‘standing reserve’ once again. We will keep the ‘horns’ of this epistemological dilemma in mind as we move into the remaining modalities of the being of equipment. In another sense, we are asking if the sociabilities attached to the way of revealing of presence-at-hand will be able to resist the imperative of modern technology when those associated with readiness-to-hand are absorbed into the standing reserve or similarly and in a prior sense are the sociabilities of readiness-to-hand absorbed into the subject – object modality of presence-at-hand, that is a theoretical paradigm and thus bringing a different tension to bear on social being?

The point of note that we will develop accordingly is that the use and manipulation of equipment during breakdown assumes a conscious dimension with a cognitive centering that is no longer an ‘absorbed coping’ and a visual centering that now informs circumspection. This switch in comportment Dreyfus (1991: 70-71) or sociability is one from “absorbed coping” and “transparent equipment” to “thematic consciousness” and “its objects”. Dreyfus (1991: 70-71) makes the point that Heidegger (1962: 107) was not explicit in his account of “how thematic consciousness and its objects emerge”, though he does state that the latter offers a hint to this end and cites the following. We have remained faithful in this instance to the translation of Dreyfus (1991) and have inserted Heidegger’s (1962) version in square brackets to distinguish between the two interpretations.
Being-in-the-world, according to our interpretation hitherto, amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption (sic) in references or assignments constitutive for the availableness [readiness-to-hand] of an equipmental whole [of a totality of equipment]. Any concern is already as it is, because of some familiarity with the world. In this familiarity Dasein can lose itself in what it encounters within the world [and be fascinated with it]… The occurrentness of beings [presence-at-hand of entities] is thrust to the fore by possible breaks in that referential whole [totality] in which circumspection ‘operates’ …

We need only add that circumspection as non-thematic absorption emerges as possible modality of sight because Dasein as being-in-the-world, as social being, already has an understanding (hermeneutic) of what it means to be, thus is accordingly concerned and in so doing somewhat familiar with its existence and being in general. This much has been covered previously, the point of note is that entities as pieces of equipment recede into the totality of the referential nexus and are thus discernable as individual items only within this whole.

However, what Heidegger is now saying is that when this totality is ruptured and equipment in circumspective absorption becomes unavailable then this equipment is so to speak objectified and thus emerges (momentarily) as present-at-hand or occurrent. What was ready-to-hand and ‘available now assumes the mode of being of the ‘occurrentness’, and circumspection which was non-thematic now becomes deliberate and potentially thematic in an objective sense. Exactly how this shift manifests itself and how it relates to
vision depends on the extent of the disruption to the non-thematic circumspective absorption as related to the mode of being of ‘availableness’ or ‘readiness-to-hand’ of equipment. Heidegger (1962: 104) cited in Dreyfus (1991: 71) identifies three modes of disruption of circumspective absorption in ‘availableness’ or ‘readiness-to-hand’ which allow for the emergence of the Dasein as cognitively or theoretically centered subject, and for the modality of the being of entities as ‘present-at-hand’ or ‘occurrent’ that is as isolated and determinate, and thus as distinct ontological structure.

The modes of conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy all have the function of bringing to the fore the characteristic of occurrentness [presence-at-hand] in what is available [ready-to-hand].

Since Heidegger’s (1962) account of the three modes of concern are brief and by Dreyfus account (1991) quite sketchy we will move between the former and the latter to develop an understanding that surfaces the modalities of vision that are implicated in how we encounter things as equipment with our ‘epistemological dilemma’ in mind.

7.1.2.1 The mode of concern of conspicuousness: temporary disruption and unavailableness

What we have established thus far is that we encounter equipment and Dasein, that is our existential - ontological constitution of social being, in the mode of being of ‘availableness’ and in the comportment, that is the sociability, of ‘non-thematic circumspective absorption’, as ontologically transparent in its sociality. Both our ‘mental’ content and ‘visual’ content, so to speak, ‘disappear’ into said circumspective absorption
and the task at hand. Notwithstanding, there are times when in our involvement in the mode of being of availableness’ or ‘readiness-to-hand’ of equipment, we encounter some or other problem when the tool we are using incurs some damage as a result of which we are no longer able to use it for the designated purpose. In these instances Heidegger (1962: 71) notes that:

We discover its unusability, however, not by looking at it and establishing its properties, but rather by the circumspection of the dealings in which we use it. When its unusability is thus discovered, equipment becomes conspicuous. This conspicuousness presents the ready-to-hand equipment as in a certain un-readiness-to-hand. … Pure presence-at-hand announces itself in such equipment, but only to withdraw to the readiness-to-hand of something with which one concerns oneself - that is to say, of the sort of thing we find when we put it back into repair.

What emerges is that how we encounter the temporary disruption countenanced in the ‘unusability’ of equipment is not through our capacity for vision, but rather in the rupture of the transparency with which we encounter the equipment we are using and ourselves as existing in relation thereto, that is as Dasein. In this rupture we are ‘untimely ripped’ from our involvement and immersion and thrust into the foreground of our activity where we encounter the ‘conspicuousness’ of that which we have been manipulating. What takes on the character of conspicuousness is not the visual dimensions of equipment that is thrust before us, which now momentarily reconstitutes us in a subject-object relation,
but rather our circumspective absorption that is now redirected towards what Dreyfus (1991) more appropriately refers to as the mode of being of the ‘unavailableness’ of equipment. However, because the break is temporary we are not in a state of ‘unavailableness’ as extended condition of the being of equipment and are readily returned to its being as available or ready-to-hand once repaired. In this regard Dreyfus (1991) takes the position that one is not dealing so much with a change in the modality of the being of equipment, as such, in as much as it suggests a move from “availableness” to “unavailableness”, but he sees it as a temporary “malfunction” which allows a glimpse into the being of not only the latter, but of presence-at-hand too or as he prefers ‘occurrentness’. There is support in the quote above as ‘conspicuousness’ or ‘malfunction’ merely suggests ‘unavailableness’ in that it is only so in a certain way and presence-at-hand withdraws to allow for availableness to return taking its rightful place once the equipment has been restored to its working order. We accept this line of interpretation only insofar as it relates to the transience of disrepair and where in fact such repair or damage is redeemable but would argue for a stronger ontological claim contra both Dreyfus and Heidegger in the light of the tendential nature of modern technology to wards disposability of pieces of equipment.

Before taking this up we take up our dilemma and concern for how what has been described as ‘conspicuousness’ through equipmental malfunction offers a symptomatic for considering the relation of modern technology to our existential – ontological constitution and thus our social being. In the temporary rupture both being and equipment become conspicuous and thus in that moment we have in our existential involvement-
equipment and its modality of revealing as technology an ontological disclosure of the
structure of being. One is faced with one’s sociability in the ontic transcendence involved
in our break in non-thematic circumspective absorption and one is faced with a break in
the equipmental nexus and thus its sociality. Taken together, we are confronted with the
nature of our social being and in as much as the technological modality of being involves
equipment and profligately so, we are regularly confronted with temporary and extended
breakdowns in our technological milieu and thus with interpolations to our social being.

In this scenario we are pushed to draw on sociabilities where the nature of equipment is
such that it keeps the deep connective with social being ‘alive and well’. In this regard we
take a contrary view to Heidegger’s techno-pessimism by suggesting that intrinsic to
modern technology is also the imperative of replacement and limited shelf life as part of
its mechanism of social reproduction. And it is precisely in this technological culture of
disposability and obsolescence that disruptions in the technological milieu are seen as its
standard feature, rather than its exception. Thus, sociologically speaking it could be seen
to vary by social class, or in the wealth-poverty continuum, in as much as equipment of
high quality and high cost end up with a high reliability, and equipment of lower quality
and lower cost with shorter reliability. Be that as it may, the point is that technology’s
sweep is not ‘even and combined’ and as such offers social sites in which, the way of
revealing as standing reserve is assuaged and kept from enveloping all in its wake.

There might inadvertently, as ‘quirk of fate’, be some existential – ontological virtue in
not being able to afford the highest quality equipment, for in its unreliability rests an
access to social being and a diagnostic that can potentially serve as counterpoise. Of course in the logic of homo economicus of ceterus paribus, where everything is equal and the market putatively eventuates in consistent reliability the ontological sites for disclosure become much more limited, and we would thus need more than a temporary breakdown to secure ourselves a counterpoise to the displacement of our sociality and social being. Having said this we want to steer clear of the implication that we may be proposing technological anarchy as counterpoise and its precedent in Luddism, though one may be able to appreciate it role in disclosing the absorption of social being into the standing reserve and resisting its imperative. Though, one may also concede that perhaps in the end it may come to that as one social manifestation of resistance to the technologisation of being. This may very well be portentous of the movement into such a Heideggerian technological condition.

After having given some mind to our dilemma we now turn to whether one is in fact witness to a shift in the ontological structure of equipment in the mode of the concern of ‘conspicuousness’ or “malfunction”. In this regard we find ourselves somewhat at odds both with Heidegger (1962) and Dreyfus (1991) on this matter. Dreyfus (1991: 71) plays down the mode of encountering equipment in the temporary state of unusability and the conspicuousness that emerges or what he calls “malfunction” making the point instead that it “provides a preview” of the other two modes. We accept that in the guarded and qualified use by Heidegger (1962) of a “certain un-readiness-to-hand” he has grounds; however in as much as it accounts for something as commonplace as damage to equipment and the frequency of its occurrence means for us that it needs to be taken
account of as a modality of being in and of itself for a different reason. It does after all impact on what Dreyfus (1001) calls the ‘transparency’ of equipment and Dasein and does in fact introduce a qualitative break in the sociability of ‘absorbed coping’. However, Dreyfus’s (1991) argument hinges on, and is applicable in those instances where there is, a return to an original state of availableness but it does not by that fact render obsolete, nor incidental what has been disclosed about the modality of being of unavailableness or un-readiness-to-hand in its modality of revealing of conspicuousness, albeit somewhat ephemeral.

The point of departure here is that it need not necessarily be temporary and in fact in the modality of equipment of modern technology it is instead a permanent state of disrepair, in other words the piece of equipment has to be replaced. To be sure this replacement does return us to an original state of availableness, but the part being disposed of, in itself, constitutes a permanent feature of the technological condition of obsolescence and waste, and thus its predisposition for disposability. As such its conspicuousness is not diminished by its ready replacement it is enhanced in the increasing accumulation of the mountains of failed equipment littering workshops, factories, plants and eventually ending up in garbage dumps and landfills.

Thus we would extend Dreyfus (1991) claim as far as the mode of conspicuousness or malfunction is concerned and argue that it in as much as much of modern of technological equipment is not readily repairable and thus remains conspicuous in those many instances it is not returned to state of repair and constitutes waste it does take on
the modality of being of ‘unreadiness-to-hand or ‘unavailableness’. And contra
Heidegger who holds that conspicuousness is only unreadiness-to-hand in a “certain”
way we make the stronger claim that it is so in a definite way in those instances where
damage is not repairable, as it mostly is with much equipment contemporaneously, and
furthermore since its conspicuousness accumulates as waste. But more than this of
existential-ontological import conspicuousness or malfunction signals this pervasive
tendency of obsolescence, disposability and waste as the way of revealing of the standing
reserve, and how our constitution as social being is increasingly taking this form as our
sociabilities are being absorbed by technologies and displaced as formerly productive
labour which increasingly swells the ranks of the ‘standing labour reserve’. We might in
certain respect be closer than we think to being revealed as nothing but resources for
tourism, servicing, medical industry and such like.

However with respect to ‘unavailableness or unreadiness-to-hand crossing an ontological
threshold into another modality of being entirely as in pure presence-at-hand Heidegger
(1962: 103) seems unequivocal on this as what is encountered he points out still takes
place within the horizon of intelligibility of readiness-to-hand.

This presence-at-hand of something that cannot be used is still not devoid of all
readiness-to-hand whatsoever; equipment which is present-at-hand in this way is
still not just a Thing which occurs somewhere. The damage to the equipment is
still not a mere alteration of a Thing - not a change of properties which just occurs
in something-present-at-hand. .
In light of the above Dreyfus (1991) to be sure is certainly making a strong ontological claim in holding that un-readiness-to-hand or unavailableness constitutes a new modality of being of equipment and that it is not simply a deficient state of readiness-to-hand or availableness. We would tend towards Dreyfus interpretation though considered in a different ‘light’ of the technological modality of being of equipment in the context of the result of malfunction, disrepair and thus its conspicuousness as deplorable waste and rate of obsolescence making literally for ‘mountains’ of ‘garbage heaps’. The point being made is not one borne of an ecological sensitivity which it certainly nevertheless is, but that the mode of being of the unavailableness of this equipmental waste is reconstituted as recycled material and as such re-enters the technological cycle or whole as part of the standing reserve. As such what was formerly conspicuous in its waste becomes inconspicuous as causa materialis and thus part of the equipmental nexus. Thus un-readiness-to-hand or unavailableness we would argue does indeed merit being treated as an ontological structure as disclosed in its mode of conspicuousness as case in point as it does enter the equipmental whole with the ontical distinction of ‘recycled material’ though tied to its modality of being of conspicuousness, thus ontological. We now move onto the next mode of being of equipment.

7.1.2.2 The mode of concern of obstinacy and Unavailableness

In accordance with Dreyfus’s (1991) reorganization of Heidegger’s (1962) discussion on the three modes of being of equipment of conspicuousness, obstinacy and obtrusiveness we take up the matter of obstinacy before obtrusiveness as the latter expresses the emergence of the subject and object relation in ‘unavailableness of equipment in a more
definitive way than the latter. The particular ontological status of obstinacy does not warrant reconsideration as distinct ontological category. Though, obstinacy does surface fundamental issues such as to how it bears on the subject-object relation and what kind of visionary being is being invoked, in relation to how it in turn bears upon circumspection. Thus it does raise issues that bear on social being and sociabilities and how these in turn fare in relation to technological interpolation and to equipment as its counterpoise.

First let us consider what Heidegger (1962: 103-104) means by this mode of concern called obstinacy:

In our dealings with the world of our concern, the un-ready-to-hand can be encountered … as something … which ‘stands in the way of our concern. That to which our concern refuses to turn, that for which it has ‘no time’, is something un-ready-to-hand in the manner of what does not belong here, of what has not as yet been attended to. Anything which is un-ready-to-hand in this way is disturbing to us, and enables us to see the obstinacy of that which we must concern ourselves in the first instance before we do anything else. With this obstinacy, the presence-at-hand of the ready-to-hand makes itself known in a new way as the Being of that which lies before us and calls for our attending to it.

Here we note, again as before, that what is present-at-hand or occurrent is disclosed when that which is ready-to-hand or available is disturbed in such a way as to render, albeit it momentarily, the equipment as un-ready-to-hand or unavailable. Previously we noted this in the mode of concern of conspicuousness when equipment in their unavailability was
rendered briefly present-at-hand before it was returned to repair and availableness. Now we see Heidegger making us aware of instances when equipment in addition to being unusable becomes unavailable when it ‘stands in our way’, and blocks what it is we are engaged in such that we have to clear the path in order to continue that which we are concerned with completing. What emerges in this instance is that what we are distracted by and occupied with doing what is particularly stubborn in as much as it does not brook being sidestepped in any way whatsoever, such that without being attended to it will continue to obstruct the consummation of that to which the work is being directed towards or intended.

And insofar as that which obstinately blocks the manipulation and use of equipment, so that whatever task is being performed is hindered, the result of which is such that one encounters the mode of being of such equipment, as present-at-hand that is merely occurrent. If so, are we then finding in the mode of concern of obstinacy an ontological threshold marking a point in the modality of being of equipment separating readiness-to-hand from presence-at-hand, or availableness from occurrentness? And, can we extend our argument that we have seized upon with respect to ‘conspicuousness’ that unavailableness presents itself in a sufficiently defined way in this latter mode, such that it inures itself sufficiently to be considered an ontological structure, sui generis, in the mode of obstinacy?. To both questions Heidegger’s (1962: 104) understanding of obstinacy as presented below does not seem to make for such allowances.
But the ready-to-hand is not thereby just observed and stared at as something present-at-hand; the presence-at-hand which makes itself known is still bound up in the readiness-to-hand of equipment. Such equipment still does not veil itself in the guise of mere Things. It becomes ‘equipment’ in the sense of something which one would like to shove out of the way. But in such a Tendency to shove things aside, the ready-to-hand the ready-to-hand shows itself as still ready-to-hand in its unswerving presence-at-hand.

With respect to the matter of obstinacy suggesting the move from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand, we do not see in this a critical threshold in which a shift is registered where equipment is transformed into a thing as such. Since, as Heidegger holds above, obstinacy still comes under the adumbration of the horizon of availableness or readiness-to-hand. And secondly that which is shoved aside is presented as an obstacle coming in the way of circumspectively directed activity, and is not as in the mode of conspicuousness, damaged equipment, or that which is in a state of permanent disrepair. There is thus no relation as such to permanent unavailableness, nor is there any recourse to its reconstitution as recycled material and as such representing a transformation from the state of unreadiness-to-hand or unavailableness to that of readiness-to-hand or availableness.

Thus, in both cases as ontological threshold to either presence-at-hand or to unreadiness-to-hand obstinacy offers neither necessary condition nor sufficient condition. But it does offer itself as site for the emergence of temporary unavailableness in which presence-at-
hand or ‘occurrence’ becomes manifest briefly, and as such does invoke a different modality of circumspection or sociability that is addressed to dealing with that which obstructs circumspective absorption. However, in dealing with what is obstinate and in the path of equipment so as to return to readiness-to-hand what is disclosed are the assignments and references that is the ‘in-order-to’ and the ‘towards’ which the equipment is directed to, or in other words the kind of sociality instantiated in the equipmental nexus.

Before taking up obstinacy in its modal specificity we want to consider the aforementioned for its relevance as counterpoise to the imperative of modern technology. What is at stake as we have taken up variously is our social be-ing and its potential absorption into the standing reserve, that our sociality is rendered insubstantial as resource and no more, and how equipmentality may offer itself as a different way of revealing and as diagnostic of the technological condition. With respect to its ontological dimension, that is as disclosure of being it is a way of revealing our being and Dasein’s existential involvement in equipment, in its sociability as non-thematic circumspective absorption and its transparencies.

And secondly in so far as it discloses the sociality of being it is a way of revealing the social be-ing binding together the sociabilities entailed in equipmental functions and purposes to constitute an equipmental whole and gestalt as hermeneutic for making sense and understanding the social world instantiated in the equipmental nexus as a function of this social be-ing. With regard to equipment in its mode of temporary unavailability in
its mode of obstinacy and it as counterpoise we find in the plenitude of technological equipment much that has to be pushed aside in order to busy ourselves with sociabilities necessary for securing our social well being. The car that needs petrol so that one may go to work or get some important part to restore some equipment so that one may continue some or other function will not budge unless one has refueled. Though in having to deal with the obstinacy of equipment as in having to fuel a car so that one may proceed, one is brought to a disclosure of how one is socially connected to whatever is momentarily blocked, thus the sociality of our world and our existential involvement in what we do with equipment is made manifest as the latter’s way of revealing being.

This equipmentality is a ubiquitous feature of modern life and as such the mode of being of unavailableness in its temporary mode as obstinacy is an omniscient characteristic, which in its technological modality of being would be a constant interpellation of social being, thus undercutting the way of revealing of the standing reserve. Equipment here too offers it self as an ontological site to counter pose the modality of technological being by anchoring us in, and hailing us, our existential – ontological constitution of social being and Dasein as our way of being and existing as human. This seems to us to be a more unequivocal modality for counteracting the enframing of modern technology, though as diagnostic it suggests itself in the silence, which may come in the place of the hailing of the social imperatives, and the lack of exigency that come with the temporal structure of care and concern for our existence. It is when we no longer care one way or the other that our insubstantiality as resource may find ground for its expression, though we are sanguine about the prospects of this modality of being of obstinacy of equipment and it
recalcitrant haling of the imperatives of our social be-ing. Whether we choose to see this or not will depend on the sensitivity of our vision and it hermeneutic.

Thus we take up the matter of circumspection in as much as it involves a particular modality of vision or envisioning as it is directly relevant for our purposes and take up Dreyfus’s (1991: 72) interpretation of this aspect of the mode of obstinacy. We are particularly interested in the way Dreyfus inflects Heidegger’s analysis of the disruption to readiness-to-hand in the ‘circuitry’ he establishes with respect to its different levels of intensity that emerge in relation to obstinacy. Accordingly, Dreyfus considers what happens in temporary breakdown, in order to show how this relates to the emergence of a subject and object, its modalities of circumspection and the specific conditionalities of each moment. Thus in the mode of obstinacy our involvement with equipment sees different sociabilities in circumspective involvement when faced with different intensities of temporary breakdown such that respectively we move from “deliberate coping to deliberation”.

During circumspective ‘deliberate coping’ the absorption of equipment into the equipmental nexus is disturbed and thus what was previously described by Dreyfus as ‘transparent equipment’ now becomes manifest, in other words emerges into the being of ‘presence-at-hand’ though still within the horizon of equipmentality and not things. What is different from the mode of conspicuousness is that the temporary breakdown or
obstinacy and the ensuing unavailableness not only make present equipment as now manifest but also the equipmental nexus that is its references and assignments which are already there. These references and assignments which face temporary breakdown refer to as Dreyfus (1991: 72) points out drawing on Heidegger (1962)

“the constitutive assignment of the in-order-to [this hammer is something one uses to pound nails] to a ‘towards-this’ [pounding the nails into the wall to hold these brackets] has been disturbed.

However, when the breakdown assumes serious proportions then circumspective deliberate coping is itself disturbed for a more intensive engagement with the equipment and equipmental nexus. Here we encounter yet another mode of circumspective coping in the form of “deliberation”. To be clear the mode of circumspective deliberate coping is an involvement with equipment, which is still trained on the function and ‘constitutive assignment’ and what we might call the ‘consummative’ assignment except in this instance we become aware of what we are doing, and thus transparency as such withdraws. It would seem that what Dreyfus has in mind here is a way to nuance Heidegger’s understanding of this mode by pointing to the practical awareness one has in the process of performing a function towards its consummation, in a careful and deliberate manner especially when one encounters slight obstacles that need to be attended so that a near breakdown may be averted. This however kicks into another level of circumspection when the disturbance becomes serious and breaks down, then deliberate, careful functioning no longer suffices and progress towards the consummation
of the task at hand is blocked. In this event “deliberation” emerges as mode of circumspection which entails more than being deliberate in the use and manipulation of equipment, as now the activity has broken down and calls for “reflective planning … in a context of involved activity” (Dreyfus, 1991: 72). Before characterizing this mode of deliberation and its modality of vision we turn to Heidegger’s (1962: 410) interpretation and note that he anchors in the circumspection involved in “practical concern” and its modality of “seeing” the “existential genesis of science”.

Circumspection operates in the involvement-relationships of the context of equipment which is ready-to-hand. Moreover, it is subordinate to the guidance of a more or less explicit survey of the equipmental totality of the current equipmental-world and of the public environment which belongs to it. … In one’s current using and manipulating, the concernful circumspection which does this ‘surveying’, brings the ready to hand closer to Dasein, and does so by interpreting it circumspectively, we call deliberating.

Here we find once again an understanding of circumspection that receives its intelligibility not from a cognitively centered subject, but instead from that concernful looking about and around as a function of an equipmental gestalt. However, Heidegger does more than merely reassert this point on the prior understanding of an equipmental whole and nexus, but now offers in addition the subsumption of the public environment to that which is constituted in the equipmental totality of the ready-to-hand. Consistent with his non-thematic circumspective awareness the public environment emerges as a
function of the intelligibility contained in one’s circumspective absorption in dealing with the context in which readiness-to-hand is made manifest, as in say a workshop. The disclosure that is made of the social being of the equipmental nexus and its sociabilities that comes with ‘deliberating’ is such that it not of the type that is tied to the social subjectivities of an individual who organizes his or her workshop idiosyncratically, but rather one finds in Heidegger the claim that such social organization of space into an equipmental whole or world carries with it the sociality of a public sensibility and as such is objective. This obviously does not detract from certain esoteric proclivities or variations to the theme but are speaking to a general sensibility which we have called a social hermeneutic and thus devolves to social being.

Thus the organization of a workshop is social not technological such that anyone who shares a familiarity with equipmentality is able to engage in the readiness-to-hand that is integral to its organization. One sees clearly from the vantage point of an existential – ontological understanding of social being that the intelligibility contained in the circumspective organization of the workshop, in relation to one’s involvement in the context of equipment’s readiness-to-hand manifests, at bottom, a sociality, that is in fact borne of an originary transcendence, namely that existential structure of ‘being-in-the-world, our Dasein. Social worlds and society writ large is thus an emergent property of the use and manipulation of equipment in the context of readiness-to-hand as it relates to how the assignment and references coalesce in an equipmental nexus and firms up in an equipmental whole with a gestalt or hermeneutic as its horizon of intelligibility. Such that, an existential ontological understanding of social being is deemed to be in place in
which anyone and everyone with a sense of equipmentality is equally able to derive meaning from its social or public context. Succinctly, this is the Archimedean lever that we find in equipmentality which even in the most technologically sated modality of being still offers itself an existential - ontological understanding of social being. Even when our sociabilities might be truncated as more and more of our functionalities and practices are absorbed into prescient technologies, the sociality of equipment disturbs the way of insubstantiality of the standing reserve for it is in our circumspective existential involvement- in-an-equipmental-world that our social being and its sociality receives its intelligibility.

It would appear then that as counterpoise the way of revealing of equipment restores the ontological dimension to technology. And that its imperative for enframing and the standing reserve is but one manifestation and not the manifestation as ‘grand confinement’. Heidegger (1977) as Feenberg (2004) and Verbeek (2005) argue is making too abstract and monolithic an argument for the relationship between modern technology’s essence and its taking up of society in its sweep and thus as we have held for overreaching into the ambit of social being with token resistance..

The second point of note is that circumspection is considered to bring readiness-at-hand closer to the Dasein that is the human way of showing concern and care for its existence. In the mode of concern of conspicuousness we saw the emergence of the modality of seeing of inspection as way to bring readiness-to-hand closer, such that damage to equipment could be dealt with, and thus circumspective absorption could be sustained.
We have seen in relation to obstinacy thus far how readiness-to-hand is brought closer, though the circumspective mode of being deliberate, in our practical awareness thus ceases to be transparent in our being and in our relation to equipmentality. And in ‘second degree’ obstinacy we encounter the modality of deliberation, which takes what has been brought closer in the mode of being deliberate, and subject it to a deliberation that foregrounds the cognitive dimension, which though responsive to the present-at-hand is still guided by readiness-to-hand. Thus, even though we see below the basis for the ‘existential genesis of science’, it is by definition not one that as yet takes the form of a detachment, or decontextualisation from readiness-to-hand and its transparent sociality, sociabilities and social being, or sees a recontextualisation in a scientific or theoretical paradigm, that is de-worlded or de-socialized. Furthermore in Heidegger (1962: 410) partially cited in Dreyfus (1991: 72-73) we have an analysis of the circumspective modality of deliberation and what it holds for its contemplative aspects.

The scheme peculiar to this is the ‘if - then’; if this or that, for instance, is to be produced, put to use, or averted, then some ways and means, circumstances, or opportunities will be needed. Circumspective deliberation illumines Dasein’s factual situation in the environment with which it concerns itself. Accordingly, such deliberation never merely ‘affirms’ that some entity is present-at-hand or has such and such properties. Moreover, deliberation can be performed even when that which is brought close in it circumspectively is not palpably ready-to-hand and does not have presence within the closest range. Bringing the environment closer in circumspective deliberation has the existential meaning of a making
*present;* for *envisaging* is only a mode of this. In envisaging, one’s deliberation catches sight directly of that which is needed but which is un-ready-to-hand. Circumspection which envisages does not relate itself to ‘mere representations’.

In as much as one is ‘dealing with’ the genesis of an ‘existential science’ in relation to circumspection we take this to be that which is contained in the propositional structure of the if – then structure as it is tied to the context of absorption in ‘readiness-to-hand’. Dreyfus (1991:72) refers to this structure as that which is considered and formalized as “practical syllogism”. In this regard it has something of the shape of a ‘deductive nomological’ structure and as such leans towards science, though is not of a universalistic bent steeped as it is in a local social context of equipmentality. What, however, prompts the movement towards science arises in the disruption that occurs when readiness-to-hand’ yields to ‘presence-at-hand’ by way of ‘un-readiness-to-hand’. To be sure science emerges proper when the break down is total and it is wrenched from the existential context of readiness-to-hand and its sociality and recontextualised, about which more a little later.

Our concern here is for the modality of circumspection that emerges in the context of the ‘second degree’ level of obstinacy referred to as deliberation. In this regard Heidegger makes the general point that the intentional structure of circumspective deliberation, or what it is directed towards, is in making present that which arises in what has been disturbed. This mode of what we may call ‘reflexivity’ for the equipmental nexus, its
functionality and point of consummation falls within the purview of deliberation in as much as it reaches to that which is not apparent and present as such, but must be envisaged that is, made present. Thus, whereas in the mode of obstinacy, being deliberate deals with what is at hand, deliberation by contrast, in its contemplative and reflexivity, is concerned with what is un-ready-to-hand or unavailable, but necessary to remove that which stands in the way of availableness. Where, this mode of circumspection of deliberation, in its specificity, as envisaging differs, from the modality of vision associated with science, is that it is not directed towards the present-at-hand as much as it is directed towards the un-ready-to-hand.

In other words s what Dreyfus (1991:73) make clear is that Heidegger is not dealing with representations in the latter modality of envisaging as cognitively centered, and thus is strictly speaking not reflexive, as he is “shifting attention from a being – a hammer, for example – to Dasein’s ways of understanding of, i.e., way of coping with being – un-readiness-to-hand, for example. Or, in short, we move from an ontical concern to an ontological concern. Briefly, one is not dealing with objects that stand alone, as self-referential in their presence-at-hand; neither is one, dealing with subjects that stand alone in their cognitively centered mental selves. With respect to the ontological structure and its being in itself, that is, sui generis credence is attributed to Dreyfus (1991: 77) who makes the case that
… a way of being of equipment is revealed which is more determinate than transparent functioning and yet whose way of being is not that of an isolated, determinate, occurrent thing with occurrent properties.

We saw this in the mode of circumspection of inspecting, in the mode of concern of conspicuousness or malfunction, and we saw this in the modes of circumspection of being deliberate, deliberation and envisaging in the mode of concern of obstinacy or temporary breakdown. In addition in the latter circumspective deliberation we saw the emergence of the genesis of existential science in the propositional structure or practical syllogisms as articulated in the mode of existential involvement in readiness-to-hand. In these modes we also saw the flow and ebb of presence-at-hand in the disturbances and blockages to readiness-at-hand and in un-readiness-to-hand respectively.

We now move into the province of obtrusiveness or permanent breakdown to consider the emergence of presence-at-hand as it relates to readiness-at-hand but more especially as it relates to presence-at-hand and its modalities of circumspection and perception, in its mode of being of equipment as obtrusiveness. Once again we are concerned with its bearing on our existential – ontological understanding of social being, sociality and sociabilities, and how it offers up itself as a counterpoise to modern technology’s standing reserve, or whether it surfaces a different order of problematic in its subject – object distanciation and detached observation or what we have called a ‘calculus of vision’..
7.1.2.3 The mode of concern of obtrusiveness and presence-at-hand or occurrentness

We take up this mode of concern, as the final modality, unlike Heidegger who deals with it after conspicuousness, but before obtrusiveness, though like Dreyfus we have opted to treat it as the final stage in the being of equipment as it marks the threshold to a new ontological structure, that is, presence-at-hand. Though, unlike Dreyfus we are concerned with the matter of perception and vision, in particular, and in this regard we encounter Heidegger’s thinking by way of his engagement with theoretical vision and curiosity and the distinctions he proffers. We are not concerned with the latter in themselves but rather for their significance in their relation to social being, and its interpolation by modern technology, and the conditions of possibility for its counterpoise.

However, before the discussion on modalities of vision and its relation to technological being and social being we need to come to terms with the modality of concern with equipment that is neither unusable (conspicuousness), nor ‘standing in our way’ (obstinacy) but that is missing, that is, obtrusive. One notes that in Heidegger sandwiching obtrusiveness between the modes of being of equipment of conspicuousness and obstinacy, he may be alluding to the possibility that in each of the modes denoting a temporary breakdown there is always the chance that the damage might be irreparable and that a blockage or obstacle might prove implacable in which case one would have to deal with their unavailableness and thus their presence-at-hand albeit on the background of readiness-to-hand. Be that as it may, we are considering that the latter modes of
concern are indeed temporary and therefore do not fall within the purview of obtrusiveness. In the latter regard Heidegger (1962: 103) notes that:

…we also find things which are missing – which not only are not handy … but are not ‘to hand’ … at all. Again, to miss something in this way amounts to coming across something un-ready-to-hand. When we notice what is un-ready-to-hand, that which is ready-to-hand enters the mode of obtrusiveness. The more urgently … we need what is missing, and the more authentically it is encountered in its un-readiness-to-hand, all the more obtrusive … does that which is ready-to-hand become – so much so, indeed, that it seems to lose its character of readiness-to-hand. It reveals itself as something just present-at-hand and no more, which cannot be budged without the thing that is missing. The helpless way in which we stand before it is a deficient mode of concern, and as such it uncovers the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of something ready-to-hand.

What we would need to add is that not only is the mode of being of readiness-to-hand lost but so too is unavailableness or un-readiness-to-hand. In other words in no longer being able to continue in the use and manipulation of equipment in the immediate refers to a loss of readiness-to-hand, but in no longer being able to restore the situation at all means that even un-readiness-to-hand would no longer be the current mode of being, as that which is transient or an interregnum (between end of readiness-to-hand and beginning of presence-at-hand). However, in as much as we have argued that unavailableness or – readiness-to-hand where it involves extensive damage and irreparability and as such
becomes conspicuous as waste constitutes a distinct modality as being in itself, which is not only transient, but in addition to and not only as waste but as that which is inflected as recycled material, and even as recycled equipment. In this way that which reenters as recycled equipment carries an ontological distinction and thus is marked as a condition of possibility of unavailableness outside the immediate equipmental whole but reconstituted as such within a broader equipmental gestalt. This might be making too fine a point of conspicuousness as obtrusiveness. Nevertheless to return to the matter ‘at hand’ when the latter situation arises, then we are effectively confronting equipment as ripped from their equipmental nexus and their sociality as well as Dasein in existential involvement and its sociability of circumspective absorption or transparency, and thus covered over or veiled by a different modality of being or appearance as present-at-hand and thus as things or objects in themselves before one.

It is in this sense that equipment is made present as that which lies before us without their being-in-themselves (their functionality or usability) any longer available, as this is tied to their relational nature as equipment in an equipmental whole and nexus, that is their context of social be-ing and its sociality and sociabilities. Extruded of these aforementioned relations and functions and social be-ing we are left with equipment and their assignment and references as no longer transparent that is tied to our involvement in our circumspective coping and thus somewhat ‘invisible’, but now entering a ‘conspicuous’ field of visibility as we helplessly stare at what now lies before us in disuse.. Whereas we became variously aware of the visibilities involved in equipment in the other modes of concern in terms of their functions and purposes and our selves these
were only fleeting since in conspicuousness and obstinacy we are only brought to such awareness temporarily.

The ramifications of this regime of transparency and ‘invisibility or visibility that is absorbed into the circumspection that is concomitant to our existential involvement inequipment is that the horizon of intelligibility that is a function of what we have called in its various guises a ‘socialized vision, hermeneutic vision, existential vision, ontological vision, is so speak disembedded from social be-ing since these are no anchored in the sociality and sociabilities of the mode of equipmentality and its gestalt. In as much as there is such a decontextualisation and no existential – ontological anchoring of social being we would argue that as such we are indeed at great risk to be consumed by the way of revealing that is the standing reserve.

However before we leap into this eventuality we need to state quite categorically that this might hold were it not for another modality of contextualization and thus our being is not free or unmoored such that it can be taken up by a technological modality. We will deal with this state of affairs when we deal with curiosity but in term of presence-at-hand and its relation to theoretical vision we are concerned with a specific form of recontextualisation. The issue then is how this stands up as counterpoise? But we are making the general point that with our modality of existential involvement in equipmentality no longer at work we are freed to be taken up by a technological modality of being or are we? Let us consider this in the light of the mode of equipment’s obtrusiveness.
In obtrusiveness, which is when things go missing, and one would expect when temporary breakdown reaches the state of permanence, we cross the threshold into a different ontological structure, and thus engage not equipment as equipment but equipment as things. In this latter uncovered state where we helplessly stare at equipment disclosed as things we are properly in the state of being ‘just-present-at-hand-and-no-more’ and thus find ourselves entering a new modality of being with a different kind of visual and social sensibility. To ascertain what is at stake we turn to Dreyfus’s (1991: 79) analysis of this shift and its implications for the emergence of theoretical reflection and contemplation which entails a focus on their concomitant modalities of vision, sociality and sociabilities to assess its potential as counterpoise.

7.1.3 from modes of concern to the mode of being of presence-at-hand (Vorhandenheit or occurrence)

To be sure what Heidegger has said is that we only enter into presence-at-hand or occurrence once our circumspective absorbed dealings have been permanently interrupted. In nevertheless entering into the mode of being of presence-at-hand what is at stake as far as Heidegger is concerned and what Dreyfus (1991) make abundantly clear is our very theoretical being and scientific modality of generating knowledge. The tone of Heidegger’s (1962) account of presence-at-hand or occurrence carries with it a certain ambivalence which Dreyfus (1991: 78-80) not only points to below but resolves and in so doing opens up a pathway into what is of primary concern to us and deals with different modalities of vision.
Once our work is permanently interrupted, we can either stare helplessly at the remaining objects or take a new detached theoretical stance towards things and try to explain their underlying causal properties. … Heidegger, however, sometimes seems to say that the theoretical stance is merely what is left over after the cessation of practical activity. In this extreme view, the only stance that is left when we withhold our present concern and relinquish our immediate project is just staring at things.

The critical issue of note that we intend focusing upon are the modalities of vision that arise in what Dreyfus (1991: 79) calls the “transition from involved deliberation and its concerns to theoretical reflection and its objects.” To this end Dreyfus draws attention to two different modalities of vision. There is vision which is ‘just staring’ and there is that which is theoretically oriented. However, what is more pressing is that as presented by Dreyfus there is a seeming correlation that Heidegger (1962: 88) makes between theoretical knowledge and staring. That is, that staring leads in itself leads to theoretical knowledge. What concerns us is that in equating theoretical reflection with staring the two modalities of vision are conflated. This however turns out to be unwarranted as Dreyfus (1991: 80) alerts us to what Heidegger truly understands of the modality of vision that informs theoretical knowledge:

Heidegger retracts this implication in a marginal note: “Looking away from is not looking at. The latter has its own origin and has as a necessary result this looking
away from. Observation has its own primordiality” [83]. That is, observing is not just staring. Once there is a break in our ongoing activity we can just stare at objects, but we can also engage in a new activity, theoretical reflection, which operates by “depriving the world of its worldliness in a definite way” (94) [65].

What is noteworthy for us as far one is able to distinguish between just staring and observing is that it offers a basis to engage with Heidegger’s existential conception of science. And moreover, what the latter provides us is a basis to approach the kinds of vision that emerge concomitantly in the crossover to the ontological structure of presence-at-hand. Dreyfus (1991: 80) summarizes Heidegger thus:

As we shall see, there are, according to Heidegger, two distinct modes of “just looking”: gazing with curiosity for the sake of distraction, and observing with the wonder that leads to theory. The isolation of properties required by theory (looking away from their context) is independently motivated and requires its own kind of skill. For Heidegger, scientific theory is an autonomous stance. It is not mere curiosity, nor is it based on an interest in control. Science is not instrumental reason.

We are now brought to an understanding of what the distinction between ‘looking away from’ and ‘looking at’ entail and how these dovetails with the two modalities of vision that accompany occurrentness. It now appears that looking away involves not seeing the equipment, as case in point, as ready-to-hand or available, any longer, which in turn
means ‘depriving the world of its worldliness’. In other words in looking away from the availableness of equipment one is no longer cognizant of the equipmental whole, the equipmental nexus and thus not seeing what is of circumspective concern within an equipmental gestalt. It is after all the assignments and references of the equipmental whole that constitutes worldliness through its sociality and sociabilities in a ‘definite way’. Looking away from the worldliness entailed in the equipmental whole means also switching to different modalities of vision: from the circumspective vision and its modalities of transparent seeing, inspecting and envisaging we move with the shift to presence at hand to the possibilities of ‘gazing with distraction’ (curiosity) and ‘observing with wonder’ (theory/science). We will deal with the former separately as this is particularly pertinent for the existential – ontological understanding of social being in its quotidian order and what it holds in relation to the way of revealing as standing reserve. However, it is the latter that we will focus on now as a means to clearly demarcate the two modalities of vision of the mode of being of the presence-at-hand of objects and what must be clearly noted is that we are not in the orbit of equipment but objects. What distinguishes observing with wonder, Heidegger (1962: 356-357), cited in Dreyfus, raises the more deep-seated question of:

When in the course of existential ontological analysis we ask how theoretical discovery “arises” out of our circumspective concern, .. we are asking which of these conditions implied in Dasein’s being make-up are existentially necessary for the possibility of Dasein’s existing in the way of scientific research. This formulation of the question is aimed at an existential conception of science.
In raising the matter of what Dreyfus (Ibid) calls the “character of the theoretical attitude” of an ‘existential conception of science’ what is at issue here for us is that the ‘observation with wonder’ is not simply borne of a specific set of techniques and methods that are external to our way of being human and merely applied by us as is conventionally understood in relation to a positivistic conception of science.

What we are dealing with here is that an existential conception of science ties the very condition of possibility of science to our constitution as Dasein and our particular modality of existence as what we claim to be a field of social be-ing. And once again Heidegger offers us a holistic way of approaching our social being and our relation to the world within which we dwell and inhabit, and how we come to know it through our primary circumspective involvements and deliberations therewith, and secondarily, in our detached theoretical reflections. Having opened up Heidegger’s theoretical attitude to his existential conception of science Dreyfus (1991: 80-81) now takes us into the specifics of what is involved in the modality of theory insofar as it involves “decontextualising characteristics from the context of everyday practices” citing an example from Heidegger (1962:360-361) to illustrate and at the same time to signal the shift from readiness-to-hand or availableness to presence-at-hand or occurrentness:

… the hammer is heavy .. this proposition can mean that the entity before us, which we already know circumspectively as a hammer, has a weight –that is to say, it has the “property” of heaviness: it exerts a pressure on what lies beneath it,
and it falls if it this removed. When this kind talk is so understood, it is no longer spoken within the horizon of … an equipmental whole and its involvement-relationships. … In the “physical assertion that the “the hammer is heavy” we overlook … the tool character of the entity we encounter… ,

What is being referred to here and distinguished as such is that in the circumspective use of the hammer that is when it is used in say hammering nails we encounter its being as ready-to-hand or handy. In this context we may speak of the hammer’s heaviness insofar as it relates to its bearing on the use of the hammer in the act of hammering. One, so to speak, notes this aspect of the hammer in relation to whether it makes for difficulty or ease of manipulation, or use in the task at hand. However, when we focus on the property of heaviness as such that is outside of the context of its assignments, that it is employed in-order-to do something, and towards which, that is a particular purpose, then we are not considering it within the horizon of its equipmentality and as such outside its social scope as far as its sociality, sociabilities and social being is concerned.

The point is that we are now focused on the physical properties of the hammer and not its handiness for the task at hand. What we now have is the makings of an ontological threshold signaling the shift to a new modality of being of equipment, as things or objects. In this shift the meaning of the hammer as equipment is now lost and the thing stands before us as meaningless because it has been decontextualised that is ripped from its social be-ing, its worldliness. And as Dreyfus (1991: 81) points out we now have a
“new attitude that reveals a new way of being”, he calls “occurrentness” and cites Heidegger’s (1962: 412) take on this ontological shift:

Why is it that what we are talking about - the heavy hammer – shows itself differently when our way of talking is thus modified? Not because we are keeping our distance from manipulation, nor because we are just looking away from the equipmental character of this entity, but rather because we are looking at the available thing which we encounter, and looking at it “in a new way” as something occurrent [present-at-hand]. The understanding of being by which our concernful dealings with intraworldly entities have been guided has changed over.

In considering Heidegger’s understanding of the shift to occurrence or presence-at-hand we note that whilst the necessary conditions for said shift entails a withdrawal from manipulation and use of what is available, and a decontextualisation from the equipmental whole these in themselves are not sufficient to constitute a new ontological structure. What is additionally required is a modality for disclosing the new mode of being, that is, for unveiling what lies before as thing or object for theoretical reflection, which is what is referred to as a ‘new way’ of ‘looking at’ what is available, as opposed to ‘looking through’ equipment to its usability and its nexus or looking away.

This new way of ‘looking at’ is the new way of understanding what was previously understood as availableness within a meaningful context, but is now a modality of being
which is “just-present –at-hand-and –no-more both context free and meaningless, and as such a looking away from the equipmental whole.. In as much as that which we are looking at has been freed from a meaningful context of involvement in availableness, that is entails a looking away, what this holds is the very possibility of being taken up in a horizon of scientific intelligibility. Dreyfus (1991: 81) sums up this field of possibility for science thus:

Once characteristics are no longer related to one another in a concrete, everyday, meaningful way, as aspects of a thing in a particular context, the isolated properties that remain can be quantified and related by scientific covering laws and thus taken as evidence for theoretical entities. … Laws and formal models provide a new, essentially meaningless, context for occurrent properties.

Overall what Heidegger wants to stress according to Dreyfus (Ibid) in his analysis of ‘existential science’ in relation to presence-at-hand or occurrentness and what we have entered into to demarcate it from the modality of vision which is a gazing with distraction is that:

(1) It is necessary to get beyond our practical concerns in order to be able to encounter mere objects. (2) The “bare facts” related by scientific laws are isolated by a special activity of selective seeing rather than being simply found. (3) Scientifically relevant “facts” are not merely removed from their contexts by selective seeing; they are theory-laden, i.e., recontextualised in a new projection.
The relation between practical concerns and theory for Heidegger is clearly that the latter is derived from the former and in this regard he reverses the traditional ontological account and the epistemological privileging of western philosophy. Furthermore, Heidegger is not equating theory with merely staring or gazing at the object before us as to suggest that in this act of ‘bare perception’ scientific knowledge of the properties of said object leaps out, so to speak. The basis for generating scientific knowledge does not stop at a ‘looking at’ and a ‘looking away’ as reification of the object from its scientific context, but we would continue in perceptual vein to say that what is involved is crucially a ‘looking towards’ in particular a theoretical paradigm. Thus, in as much as there are no ‘bare facts’ which we entirely concur with we are dealing with a ‘selective seeing’, and what it is that informs the selections as such seems to be something of the order of a ‘theoretical vision’. The critical difference between a staring and ‘gazing with distraction’ from a ‘gazing with wonder’ is that the latter involves a theoretical vision which recontextualises the object in such a way that it is able to uncover an objects scientific property. From the vantage point of the scientist Dreyfus (1991: 83) the recontextualisation takes this form:

Although he is detached from the everyday practical context, the scientist is interested in his work and dwells in the “disciplinary matrix” that forms the basis of his skillful observing and theorizing.
By contrast Dreyfus (Ibid) juxtaposes and compares the vantage point of the ‘hermeneutic ontologist:

… the hermeneutic ontologist makes his theme precisely the shared background understanding in which he dwells and from which he cannot detach himself. … from the detached, objectifying thematization characteristic of any discipline from physics to factual history.

With respect to the scientist the modality of seeing which attaches itself to that which has been objectified, is premised in a ‘theoretical vision’, whereas the hermeneutic ontologist’s seeing is attached to involvement, and may be described as an ‘existential vision’. What this holds for us in the light of its potential as counterpoise is that in as much as the theoretical paradigm recontextualises equipment as objects and as things in themselves, with the integrity and dignity worthy of being considered object of knowledge, this is representative of what we have in mind as Archimedean lever.

To be sure the horizon of intelligibility of social being and its hermeneutic vision is absorbed into theoretical vision, and the subject – object distanciation of detached observation of vision severs our existential involvement, and thus distances us from our social being, though it does this within the modality of a different de-severance and this is in relation to bringing objects and things closer as theoretical and scientific objects. As counterpoise it serves as a site in the resistance to modern technology’s way of revealing as standing reserve where objects and things lose their substantiality in being able to
gather nature and social being, and thus their ontological capacity for disclosure or revealing. The essence of modern technology as an enframing is such that what remains once it way of revealing is made manifest is nothing but what is constituted as resources to be at hand and taken up and disposed of and no more. Thus in theory and science for as long as it is hermeneutically anchored and existentially informed it potentially stands in opposition to modern technology; but in so far as it leaves its existential provenance and abstracts itself from its horizon of social intelligibility, that is, loses sight of social be-ing and Dasein it becomes but the science of the standing reserve and something akin to ‘positivistic science’. The main contention here is that theoretically objects have as Dreyfus (1991: 125) points out isolable, determinate properties and scientifically what is encountered is disclosed in terms of ‘law governed sets of elements’. Sociologically, society is abstracted and with it what have called social be-ing. By extension social action or what we have preferred to call sociabilities are explained in terms of strict rules.

Our main bone’ of contention is that sociologically speaking in terms of our theoretical orientation we are anchored or rather disembedded in a positivistically dominated conception of science when we should be hermeneutically, existentially and ontologically engaged. It is in the spirit of the latter that we have spent long hours and much deliberation over Heidegger’s ‘fundamental ontology’ and its relation to Dasein or our existential structure and trust that something useful has come of our existentially anchored theoretical labour.
However, in so far as this theoretical vision involves perceivedness or uncovering as its intentional comportment and its sociabilities which in this case involves theoretical vision we are dealing with a phenomenology in as much as what obtains is that object are released to encountered in their own self (see 6.3.1). It is this capacity in vision as hermeneutic that in the perceiving that is theoretical, objects and things are released to be perceived in their uncovering in scientific laws and their unveiling as theoretical objects. Thus, in the perceptual intentional comportment lies a counterpoise to the essence of modern technology, in its being as theory in the mode of hermeneutic phenomenology and existential science and hermeneutic ontology. And that social being enters here as the background intelligibility of the social hermeneutic with our social be-ing thus anchored in our theoretical and scientific modalities of being.

We now turn to the modality of vision described as a staring or gazing with distraction that is neither recontextualised within a ‘disciplinary matrix’ nor contextualized in the quotidian order of everyday absorbed coping. This in short is referred to as “curiosity” a mere staring which we take up similarly to consider its bearing on our concerns for mitigating and assuaging our relation to modern technology and its way of revealing.

7.1.3.1 Curiosity as modality of being and seeing:

We have spent much time discussing perception though from the vantage point of its intentional structure and its relation to our comportment to being-in-the-world and being-amidst-things. Moreover, we have alluded to and made specific references to different modalities of vision. However, most conspicuously we have not offered Heidegger’s understanding of sight and seeing and how this relates to the different modalities of
being. The motivation behind this has simply been to avoid subjecting the conception of vision to its foreclosure in a definition thus rendering it both trivial and superficial. But, we can no longer defer such discussion (and expect that it may be considered to be fairly late in coming), as the question now begs in relation to the point that we have reached with respect to the matter of curiosity, as a particular type of seeing in the modality of being of presence-at-hand. To this end we draw attention to Heidegger's (1962: 186) conception of the different modalities of seeing as it relates to the different modalities of being-in of Dasein merely to indicate the scope of his analysis and to delimit our concern.

In its projective character understanding goes to make up existentially what we call Dasein’s “sight”. With the disclosedness of the there this sight is existentially; and Dasein is this sight equiprimordially in each of those basic ways of its Being which we have noted: as the circumspection [Umsicht] of concern, as the considerateness [Ruchsicht] of solicitude, and as that sight which is directed upon Being as such … Dasein … we call “transparency” [Durchsichtigkeit] … knowledge of the Self …

What is important to note here is that in as much as Heidegger refers to the “disclosedness of the there” he is pointing to the existential structure of being-in-the-world and its hermeneutic in social being we would add.. And thus the equiprimordiality of sight devolves to the modalities of the being of Dasein as ‘being-amidst-things’ (circumspection), ‘being-with-others’ (considerateness) and the way of being human, that is Dasein, being-as-existence (transparency). We will, not be taking up, the latter two for
discussion, but only allude to it here. Though, we have taken it up throughout the thesis as it reflected upon our primary concern, which was our involvement and coping with being-amidst-things. This was done and motivated as a way to probe technology and vision as to how we stand in our relation to enframing and its interpolation of our social being. We have however thought through issues concerning circumspection and its modalities of seeing (looking about, inspecting, envisaging) but without couching it in Heidegger’s (1962:187) conception thereof which we now take up by noting that he frames ‘sight’ in parentheses thus implying that one ought to be cautious in how one understands it and thus:

We must, to be sure, guard against a misunderstanding of the expression ‘sight’. It corresponds to the “clearedness” which we took as characterizing the disclosedness of the “there”. Seeing does not mean just perceiving with the bodily eyes, but neither does it mean pure non-sensory awareness of something present-at-hand in its presence-at-hand. In giving an existential signification to ‘sight’, we have merely drawn upon the peculiar feature of seeing, that it lets entities which are accessible to it be encountered unconcealedly in themselves.

What is uppermost in seeking to arrive at Heidegger’s understanding of ‘seeing’ and ‘sight’ is that at the core of his existential – ontological understanding there rests the hermeneutic terms which under gird his concept of vision. At the primary level of originary transcendence that is being-in-the-world and its dimensionality of social being is the hermeneutic dimension in which we have a pre-ontological understanding of being
and thus we are able to interpret being by way of its disclosedness. Secondly, we have established that disclosure is tied phenomenologically to discovery, in as much as what is unveiled is uncovered; both terms as such refer to the visual dimension of opening to view and to reveal and thus to release what is encountered to the terms of perceiving such that what is seen is noted in itself. However, Heidegger is not using these terms to make a visual point, but rather to make an existential point in terms of how it relates to the structure of our way of existence as humans, which is Dasein. And it is in this second sense that one is dealing with what Heidegger called “fundamental ontology” in the phenomenology of being, that is, the disclosure and discovery of the latter’s structure as it is made possible in the constitutive nature of Dasein that ‘sight’ is to be understood. However, in having said this one is still left in the ‘dark’ as to how to take up the unfamiliar terms Heidegger employs such as “clearedness” and “the there” in relation to sight. There is the direct import of sight into the terms “clearing” and “the there”, in as much as they refer to what is commonly understood as visually apprehended phenomena. In both terms there is firstly the spatial figure, as in a clearing in the forest and that something is over there, a point in space and time. In this latter both terms clearing and there serve as the ground upon which something is rendered visible, as in picking out an object made visible by the ‘light’ of the clearing and that such and such a thing is over there, as in the space within which something is revealed.

In this second sense one is not directed visually to the clearing or the there as such, but rather to what it is that appears and thus the visual dimension recedes in relation to the ground upon which such objects appear, and we lose ‘sight’ of it as one becomes fixated
by the figures that appear as for example an aeroplane in mid air passing through clouds and appearing there in a ‘clearing’, and ‘therein’. The point, which Heidegger alerts us to, is that in fixating on the visual phenomenon as we are wont to do at the neglect of the ground is akin to the fixation we have for things and self without a sense of the ground that makes it possible. In the subject – object distanciation associated with say theoretical vision the social contextual ground is absorbed so to speak as background intelligibility of the theoretical ground that replaces it and upon which theoretical and scientific objects and phenomena emerge. Positivism loses it ontological grounding entirely but that is another matter. In sociologising or theorizing social be-ing, the ground that we lose is precisely the sociality of being as existential – ontological constitution and thus what emerges are ‘social facts’ as isolable and determinable properties; but the ground upon which these sociological figures emerge, the real hermeneutic or horizon of intelligibility disappears into the paradigmatic dimension of theory and there remains mute. What our discussion of vision and our problematisation has sought to achieve is to show the ways in which we can through our theoretical practices anchored as such in an existential – ontological grounding, theorize and yet remain connected to our social being. We need not be ‘untimely ripped from the womb’ of our sociality.

It is this originary ground as ‘clearing’ and as that which is ‘cleared’ in our practices, and our position ‘in’ it as transcendent, that we are to be found ‘there’, in the act of clearing’, and thus completed, that we are then ‘there’ in that very clearing, that is our sociabilities or practices, that Heidegger restores to our ‘visionary being’. The concept Heidegger develops to capture and bring attention to this primary ground of the ‘cleared, clearing,
clearedness’ and the ‘there’ and ‘thereness’ is ‘being-in-the-world, that which defines us as human beings in our social be-ing. In other words what grounds our sight is this originary transcendence our being-in-the-world and the understanding of being-there in the clearing that accompanies it. What we seek now is how Heidegger (1962: 214, 216) takes up sight in his consideration of its articulation in curiosity and Dasein and then consider its merit as counterpoise if at all it may have any:

The basic state of sight shows itself in a peculiar tendency-of-Being which belongs to everydayness – the tendency towards ‘seeing’. We designate this tendency by the term “curiosity”, which characteristically is not confined to seeing, but expresses the tendency towards a peculiar way of letting the world be encountered by us in perception. ... What is to be said about this tendency just to perceive? Which existential state of Dasein will become intelligible in the phenomenon of curiosity?

We note that Heidegger is not yielding to the usual connotations ascribed to curiosity, which is mainly given to its mental overtones, as in an eagerness to learn or something strange, odd and unusual. Even though the visual element seems implicit there are also references to scopophilia showing its relation to vision. Be this as it may, Heidegger is more concerned to make an “existential-ontological” point and thus he accords curiosity a particular modality of being. As a modality of being it offers a field of disclosure or clearing in which things or objects can be illuminated or unveiled, and thus uncovered in perception. What is particularly striking for us in Heidegger offering up curiosity, as a
modality of being is that he refers it to our quotidian order of being, that is, our everydayness. It is this ordinariness that we are interested in as it serves as the basis for our interpretive framework, about which much more later. More to the point what we are concerned with here is to move onto Heidegger’s question above as to how curiosity relates to our being as Dasein. In order to take up this line of thought of curiosity as modality of being Heidegger (1962: 216) takes us back to readiness-to-hand and the modality of being of circumspection as segue way:

Being-in-the-world is proximally absorbed in the world of concern. This concern is guided by circumspection, which discovers the ready-to-hand and preserves it as thus discovered. … Concern may come to a rest in the sense of one’s interrupting the performance and taking a rest, or it can do so by getting it finished. In rest, concern does not disappear; circumspection, however, becomes free and is no longer bound to the world of work. When we take a rest, care subsides into circumspection which has been set free.

We have covered what is involved in the ‘looking about’ that is concerned with the mode of being of equipment as readiness-to-hand or availableness and its absorption in the equipmental nexus and whole. What Heidegger takes up here is that in presence-at-hand or occurrentness we no longer look around with concern for the work at hand as this has ceased, but still find ourselves ‘looking around’ and about, but without this circumspection being tied to being-in-the-world, and the concerns or dealings that arise
as a result thereof. In other words we have been dislodged from our sociality and its sociabilities as disclosed in equipmentality, and thus from our existential involvement in-the-world. However, since we continue to be, that is, to exist we have as matter of course that which concerns this existence, and what we consequently have to take care of. The point is that the structure of care or concernful dealings is an existential structure and thus proximate in our being.

What is different in the shift from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand is that circumspection loses it immediate concern for the manipulation and use of equipment and turns its attention to that which assumes the being of entities. The use of entities is mindful that the kind of staring without attachments without social grounding is not that associated with wonder, and thus theoretical reflection and recontextualisation and its objectification, a terminus a quo, which is a starting point in which theoretical objects are set on their path to discursive realization. But rather, in curiosity one is dealing with ‘presence-at-hand-and-no-more’, a terminus ad quem. Before we touch on the specificities of curiosity as just looking the important matter of the existential structure of care, and its relation to Dasein was briefly pointed out, as it related to circumspection which has now come to a rest. Similarly we note as Heidegger (Ibid) discloses another such existential structure which is tied to the mode of being of equipment of readiness-at-hand and its articulation with the world of work, and how it in turn becomes available to curiosity:
In the world of work, circumspective discovering has de-severing as the character of its Being. When circumspection has been set free, there is no longer anything ready-to-hand which we must concern ourselves with bringing close. But, as essentially de-severant, this circumspection provides itself with new possibilities of de-severing. This means that it tends away from what is most closely ready-to-hand, and into a far and alien world. Care becomes concern with the possibilities of seeing the ‘world’ merely as it looks while one tarries and takes a rest. Dasein seeks what is far away simply in order to bring it close to itself in the way it looks. Dasein lets itself be carried along solely by the looks of the world; in this kind of Being, it concerns itself with becoming rid of itself as Being-in-the-world and rid of its Being-alongside that which, in the closest everyday manner, is ready-to-hand.

The absorption entailed in readiness-to-hand insofar as Dasein disappears into its world of concern that is in the equipmental references and assignments and its nexus and whole is the primary and original condition in which social being and world are brought together. In this coming closer of social being and world such that being is in-the-world is an act of de-severing; what we might consider in the spatial terms to be the collapsing of gap between being and the world. However, in as much as Dasein is concerned, it is in existence, that is, in taking care of and dealing with the concerns that arise out of the unsettled and foundationless human condition, and in so doing gives rise to the emergence of a world (e.g. of work) and inversely to Dasein that one understands being-in-the-world as a de-territorialized structure or notes its de-severance. As such this de-
severing as a function of readiness-to-hand and a manifestation of being-in-the-world is constitutive of the being of Dasein, it is an existential structure. In short readiness-to-hand or availableness brings closer or de-severs social being, equipment and world. But in the mode of presence-at-hand de-severance plays a different role in as much as it is hooked into that which occurs simply in the way it looks or appears.

This being of occurrence, being present-at-hand and no more is then not only a manifestation of that which lies before us, but equally so Heidegger seems to suggest that we too are rendered occurrent or present-at-hand. And thus we are ripped from the de-severed modality of readiness-to-hand and existential involvement in caring about our social being, sociality and our sociabilities. In short we are existentially no longer a being-in-the-world (social being) and neither a being-amidst-things (sociability), but simply present-at-hand-and-no-more, more akin to a social object or more accurately a social entity. What we are primarily concerned with and show is that caring as such does not disappear in this modality of being of curiosity, but as existential structure and as intrinsic to Dasein it is merely redirected to that which lies before us as present and occurrent, that is, as visual spectacle, visiogenic. And in this state we enter the modality of being distinct not only from readiness-to-hand and un-readiness-to-hand with their modalities of concern, but also in its manner of just looking as Heidegger (1962: 216-217) states:

When curiosity has become free, however, it concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen (that is, to come into a Being towards it) but just
in order to see. It seeks novelty only in order to leap from it anew to another novelty. In this kind of seeing, that which is an issue for care does not lie in grasping something and being knowingly in the truth; it lies rather in its possibilities of abandoning itself to the world. Therefore curiosity is characterized by a specific way of *not tarrying* alongside what is closest. Consequently it does not seek the leisure of tarrying observantly, but rather seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters.

The shift to the ontological structure of presence-at-hand expresses for us in the light of a phenomenological and existential conception of vision the basis of a visual threshold. Whereas the visibility of equipment and their visile nature was absorbed into the concern for the work and all it entailed and as such was rendered ‘transparent’, presence-at-hand by contrast, allows of equipment to be made present in their visibility as objects. This objectification however opens up to two modalities of being of Dasein as has already been indicated: firstly, there is the mode of theoretical being, which Heidegger differentiates consistently as can be gleaned above in his reference to the separation of seeing from understanding. This seeing without seeking to understand which belongs to the modality of curiosity differs from theoretical reflection from the vantage point of vision in this respect that it does not have a visile dimension to it. In as much as one relates to an object’s visile dimension means not only that it pertains to what is seen but that one is also able to learn through such visual images. In this sense curiosity as a modality of seeing is reduced to its simplest determination as apprehension of the visual
insofar as it pertains only to its appearance, that is, what it looks like. Secondly, in as much as curiosity is fixated on the visual appearance of entities as spectacle its aesthetic is one of a visiogenic and as such may be predisposed to the modality of television, as an example of ‘not tarrying’. At bottom whereas the mode of concern of theoretical reflection is to acquire knowledge of the objects before one as present-at-hand, which one knows requires a paradigmatic frame, dedicated time and concentration, by contrast the modes of concern of curiosity is distinguished by being ephemeral and capricious. This is its modality of being.

The mode of concern of curiosity Heidegger notes above is one of ‘not tarrying’ and is clear enough in his references to the concerns and care evident in this modality of being. As stated curiosity cares for novelty, but it does not remain or ‘tarry’ with it long enough to get to grasp the ‘essence’ of this being of novelty as I perhaps its equipmentality, but rather flirts from one novelty to another without ever getting close enough to that which lies before. Instead of the de-severing that belongs to availableness which is the ‘bringing closer’ of social being, equipment and world, curiosity brings closer only that which intrigues its visual sensitivities and then only for as long or rather as short-lived as it takes to satisfy its curiosity or voyeurism. In this perpetual flitting from one novelty to another and the restlessness that underlies this modality of being two additional modes of concern of curiosity are revealed by Heidegger (Ibid):

In not tarrying, curiosity is concerned with the constant possibility of distraction. Curiosity has nothing to do with observing entities and marveling at them. To be
amazed to the point of not understanding is something in which it has no interest. Rather it concerns itself with a kind of knowing, but just in order to have known. But this *not tarrying* in the environment with which one concerns oneself, and this *distraction* by new possibilities, are constitutive items for curiosity; and upon these is founded the third essential characteristic of this phenomenon which we call the character of “never dwelling anywhere”. Curiosity is everywhere and nowhere. The mode of Being-in-the-world reveals a new kind of Being of everyday Dasein - a kind in which Dasein is constantly uprooting itself.

What is noteworthy is that in abandoning itself (perhaps social entity is appropriate) to the world, Dasein or social being and our social stance (sociality) loses whatever anchor it has managed to secure in the de-severance or de-territorialisation of being-in-the-world, in the context of an equipmental whole and its sociality. And, as second order reality to similar effect Dasein is also bereft of the anchor that comes with the centering of the cognitive subject in a theoretical recontextualisation. Now at the level of the modality of vision we would make the claim that with respect to readiness-to-hand the visile dimension is what we have encountered and learnt about in the handiness of equipment through its usability though admittedly with its visuality implicit in its equipmental functionality or sociability. However, in this modality of readiness-to-hand we were in rapt concentration and embedded in the sociality or world of work, that is, its referential nexus and manifold relationships.
Secondly, at the level of presence-at-hand, in its modality of theoretical ‘reflection’, its visuality was more explicit in that in the process of objectification entailed in theory what was encountered and rendered visible were objects and their scientific properties. In this regard the visible dimension in terms of its aspect of learning this was overt in its association with the context of a theoretical vision. In this regard we again have dedicated and enraptured focus and an embedded context, though not of the everyday modality of readiness-to-hand, but in the theoretical recontextualisation of presence-at-hand. Though, in the latter, we have made the argument that we should be foregrounding social being in terms of its social hermeneutic, or concept of be-ing. However, in the modes of concern of “not tarrying”, being “distracted” and being “everywhere but nowhere”, we have, what has been referred to as, a “deficient mode of being”. We find this with respect to an epistemic relation in which knowledge is trivialized; we find this also in respect of our ontic transcendence, that is, an intentional comportment, a sociability which is not alongside things; and we find this in relation to our originary transcendence, that is, our being-in-the-world, which is ‘everywhere but nowhere”, as we are not embedded in any social context whatsoever, but disembedded, rootless, in a certain sense we are in the world but not of the world.

Despite this dis-embeddedness from being-in-the-world-of-work and from being-in-the-world-of-theory Dasein in the mode of curiosity is in-the-world of the everyday quotidian order of being. But, being different from the everyday circumspective absorption of readiness-to-hand Heidegger (Ibid) situates what we might understand as the
‘banalisation’ of being, as derived from the three modalities of concern of curiosity in the
mundanities of a manner of “idle talk” and ‘seeing’:

Idle talk controls even the ways in which one may be curious. It says what one
“must” have read and seen. In being everywhere and nowhere, curiosity is
delivered over to idle talk. These two everyday modes of Being for discourse and
sight are not just present-at-hand side by side in their tendency to uproot, but
either of these ways-to-be drags the other one with it. Curiosity, for which
nothing is closed off, and idle talk, for which there is nothing that is not
understood, provide themselves … with the guarantee of a ‘life’ which,
supposedly, is genuinely ‘lively’. … it soon becomes impossible to decide what is
disclosed in a genuine understanding and what is not. This ambiguity extends not
only to the world, but just as much to Being-with-another as such, and even
Dasein’s Being towards itself.

The modes of concern of being ‘distracted’ and ‘not tarrying’ in the face of what is before
one leads us to leap from one thing to another, and thus one finds oneself wherever the
distractedness directs one, which is both context-free and disembedded, that is,
everywhere and nowhere. However, when one relates this to the everyday comportment
or sociability of talking and seeing, one is similarly in a mode of being everywhere and
nowhere, which is ‘precisely’ where ‘idle talk’ and an ‘unfocused vision’ tend to be. The
paradoxes in this mode of being is that idle talk professes to know without tarrying
observantly, and professes to have seen without a focused looking. Yet, in this everyday modality of curiosity there is a sense of excitement that comes with the terminus ad quo of idle talk in “have you heard” without having listened in amazement, or “did you know” without having reflected”. And in the case of an ‘unfocused seeing’ the refrain is usually ‘have you noticed’ with the merest of glances or ‘have you seen’ with the most fleeting of glimpses or even in not having seen at all but merely heard by way of idle talk.

In both cases involving discourse and sight these serve to jumpstart either one or the other modality of curiosity and so reinforce the banalisation of being. However, in the mode of modern technology one notes existentially how audio-visual equipment derive their almost intoxicating power over everydayness, which goes to the heart of our thesis. Here again we seek only to point to this being, rather than to grasp it in its totality. Notwithstanding, to close off this modality of being in relation to the mode of being of Dasein we note that it alludes to an authenticity, when in fact it may either be of the sociality of an inauthentic or an undifferentiated being. In this sense it refers itself to an ambiguity which is manifest in the modality of being of presence-at-hand manifest as curiosity, insofar as idle talk and its equivalence in vision is concerned as regards its claims to authenticity to round off our efforts at an existential-ontological-understanding of social being.

**Concluding comments**
What we confronted in this milieu was the danger to our sociality in which the existential–ontological vision of circumspection–considerateness–and–transparency was being displaced with the modality of sociability and vision devolving to curiosity, a staring as an end in itself, a scopophilia. Thus our originary transcendence in being-in-the-world and its ontic transcendence of circumspective absorption in our equipmental nexus were steadily being eroded. In our technological worlds our being-in and the sociabilities instantiated in electronic social networks sees an increasing intensity in the modalities of concern of a social being mired in curiosity, and thus it manifests distractedness in the pursuit of novelty, a staring without tarrying, an idle talk without real knowing, a way of being present without being embedded, that is, everywhere and nowhere. In short what we have is an ambiguous relation to the world, its sociality and our social being and sociabilities caught between the excitement generated by idle talk and idle vision and its insubstantial nature as pseudo– and virtual, its unreality as simulacrum.

We see this, by way of an illustration, in electronic social networking sites on the Internet, such as ‘Facebook’, ‘You Tube’, for example, and in cellular phone modalities such as ‘Twitter’ and ‘M’xit’ where the concerns or sociabilities of curiosity such as ‘not tarrying, distraction, being everywhere and nowhere in idle talk and idle vision are taken to an extreme. Though, there is something of an involvement in-the-technological-world it is not of the order of what Borgmann (see 2.2.6 and 2.2.6.1) refers to as a focal concern or practice, and as Heidegger holds is not so much being-in-the-world as an abandoning-to-the-world. It is not so much a being-with-others as it is being-amidst-others, and thus it approximates to a relation in which social beings are treated as social
resources at worst and paradoxically as social objects at best. It comes with its visionary equivalents as visual objects of the paparazzi, in particular, or in general make up the fleeting images caught on a cellular phone camera or a video camera and circulated to be gawked at momentarily before the next set of images replaces it in a nano second ad infinitum.

The modality of vision of considerateness that is borne of a sociality connected to our being-with-others and the care and concern that comes with it is absent, and the transparent vision that comes with a non-ego self that is involved-in and coping with being-towards-self as an existential—ontological expression of social being comes under the adumbration of a ‘conspicuous’ vision, where to be seen is not to be noted with respect and admiration, but merely to be seen and stared at voyeuristically, that is, a gaze that reproduces the ‘cult of the self’. It is these modalities of being that we set out to juxtapose as a way to bring it closer for our circumspective reflection, and to note without ambiguity that we do have within our grasp the possibilities to think, understand and to interpret our being-in-the-technological world that does not doom us to the destining of the essence of modern technology as standing reserve, resources and inventory.

Neither, are we compelled to the imperatives of a technological eye and a machinic vision that sees neither social beings nor our humanity, but merely its veneer and an electronic, digital visiogenic. Our modality of being human or Dasein is fundamentally a field of social being which we acquire in becoming human beings, and which offers up the very condition of possibility of an understanding and interpretation of our humanity.
in the sociabilities we learn and apply as existential beings, in the totality of our lives in-the-world, with-others, toward-our-selves, borne of the care and concern that comes with our finitude and mutuality.

We need not surrender to the imperatives of technology and its concomitant modalities of vision, but certainly need to return to an existential – ontological understanding of our humanity, and the sociality and sociabilities it encompasses as a way to reconnect with our social being and its possibilities in the contemporary age, of what we might call the horizon of intelligibility of techno-vision, and its modalities of unveiling or disclosure, and uncovering or discovery of being. In short by way of a Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology of technology and vision as the ground for disclosing social being, in our contemporary age we arrived at an existential – ontological understanding of social being anchored as such in the counterpoise of our involvement-in-equipment and the perceptual intentional comportment of releasing entities to be encountered in themselves.

And to bring this chapter to a close we have offered up an existential – ontological understanding of social being as it articulates in equipment and the intentional comportment of perception and vision, as the means and social sites in which we can engage modern technology without abandoning it or surrendering to it, but in using it such that our social beings are affirmed. Moreover, that modern technology’s enframing as a way of revealing as standing reserve can be contained and delimited to the margins, where resources have their place, but not allow it the untrammeled space to be the only way in which be-ing may be revealed.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

The sociological condition of the current age is such that the modalities of the being of modern technology and vision have converged to reconstitute our social being such that what it means to be human has the makings of a technological mien and a technological milieu each with their modalities of vision. It is argued in this thesis that in modern technology we are confronted with an estrangement and blocking off of our humanity as
we have been transformed by the imperative of modern technology for “enframing” all things in its wake. This modality of “enframing” has even transformed us human beings into resources which as such are at hand to be used and disposed as needed and no more. While vision, on the other hand, similarly, presents us with an epistemological privileging and a foregrounding of our theoretical modality of being, but at the expense and oversight of our primary relation to the world, each other and our selves. This primary relationship is achieved Heidegger holds through our use and manipulation of equipment in coping and dealing with our everyday quotidian order in-the-world.

However, in order to have ‘unveiled’ or ‘disclosed’ the technological condition and visionary condition in themselves, so to speak, and return to the primordial and primary domain of social being as involvement-in-society, it has been necessary to turn to Heidegger’s methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology; simply because social being has variously been reconstituted theoretically and paradigmatically and thus its reality has been remade, though what it is in itself as such disappears from view and into some or other disciplinary paradigm. In taking up the hermeneutic phenomenological interrogative, we have ‘disclosed’ and ‘discovered’ that fundamentally in our technological and visionary beings our sociality has been veiled and covered by various socialities, modes of social being, and sociabilities, that is, modalities of practices, functions and associations, which our primary socialization has bequeathed us as we internalize the role models and possibilities that society proffers.
What Heidegger offers up and what we have reconstituted as social being are the modalities of Dasein (being human) that arise in relation to the stances we take, or do not take, and the self-interpretation we make thereof as a way of defining our selves. In making a choice as to what society proffers from the vantage point of an existential – ontological understanding of social being, as unsettled, foundationless and homeless, which is, as open ended and undecided, and open to possibility, is a modality of sociality which is regarded by Heidegger as that of authentic being. In making the choice by contrast to take on society’s offerings as somehow essentialised, and to accept this as one’s modality of sociality is to flee from the truth of our existential – ontological understanding of social being and to fall into society’s normative order and thus manifest the self as inauthentic.

And finally to make neither choice but to merely allow oneself to drift into whatever one happens to end up with by way of a sociability as social role and functionality is to manifest one’s sociality as undifferentiated and as such is equally a fleeing from our existential – ontological understanding of being as unsettled and thus to fall into society by default. The issue is not that society as such is problematic for whether we accept a modality of sociality as authentic or inauthentic or differentiated they all have their source in society but rather what is at issue is how we understand social being.

The strong point of this thesis is, if we are to end up with an authentic modality of sociality, then our understanding of social being has to find its way back from its recontextualisation in the science of society, that is, sociology to our involvement in-
society and hence its understanding as existential and ontological. To be sure we are making a fundamental point about social being and not a methodological point about how the social is manifest in our sociological theories. The latter is indeed important but comes after we have already detached ourselves from society as a function of our theoretical vantage point outside of an existential – ontological stance. We cannot say that we have been able to extricate ourselves from the subject – object distanciation and epistemological dualism thereto attached, only that we have concentrated our efforts in decentering the epistemic being, and centering the existential being as a way to consider the totality of social being, and not only its modality of expression in theory or science, and to show how the latter flows from our being-in-the-world and not it inverse. This was our theoretical and disciplinary claim.

This thesis has as its terminus ad quo, that is, its point of departure the problematique expressed as a technological condition and a visual condition and as its terminus ad quem the human and social condition in the contemporary age and brings to our awareness the alternative modality that lies fallow in our social being and the sociality it potentiates in relation to being in general. . It did not take ‘human nature’ and ‘social being’ for granted as is the case in the main in sociology and sociological theory, but has taken its cue from Heidegger and uncovered an existential and ontological structure through a hermeneutic phenomenology such that two distinct and related modalities of social being were surfaced in our capacity for sociality and the faculty of sociability.
It is against these social modalities contextualized within the concept of social being as stated that we have come to disclose and discover, and thus through our hermeneutic phenomenological interrogatives take a position against an understanding of the technological modality of being and modalities of vision that continue to estrange us from our humanity. We have endeavored to provide an interpretation of this humanity as anchored in our deep-seated existential – ontological understanding of social being; firstly, in the light of our sociality as involvement in-society that is being-in-the-world and our sociabilities in our comportment with equipment and its equipmental nexus as being-amidst-things.

And we have provided an understanding of this latter sociality in the sociabilities tied to the practices and functions associated with our comportments as it related to our technological modality of being and our modalities of perception in vision. We did this through following very closely Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology and as such was able to unpack the horizon of intelligibility embedded in our social being as hermeneutic and have disclosed and discovered this in the light of a hermeneutic phenomenological interrogative of technology and vision in themselves and their relation to our being-in-the-world and being-amidst-things.

In having uncovered these relations to being we have arrived in league with Heidegger at the originary structure of our way of being human or Dasein as being-in-the-world and that as such it is not amenable to a sociologisation as theorization but that it is emergent as far we can tell only in an existential – ontological understanding of being. And thus we
have come to accept this in the way that ontology of technology and vision and its ways of revealing simultaneously established that our primary comportment with the world through equipment and its usability in things is not first and foremost a cognitively centered experience as is generally and conventionally accepted. But, that it is a through the ‘transparent’ and circumspective absorption in-the-world, that is as existential involvement that we come to understand social being. And that it is only when this modality of being of readiness-to-hand is disrupted and a subject – object relation ensues in presence-at-hand that we enter into the modality of theory and science, and thus sociology. In this regard we are by way of this existential ontological understanding of social being also making the argument that we are in a need of a corrective that is realizable in an ‘existential science’. This being a another theoretical and disciplinary claim.

And finally in opening up Heidegger’s concept of Being to its respecification as social being we have brought to bear on sociology an existential-ontology which anchors the social in its modalities of sociality (authentic, inauthentic and undifferentiated being) and concomitant sociabilities such that what was previously outside the purview of sociology can now enter into our central concerns. These are the interpolation of being by the essence modern technology and the detachment and objectification of vision, the primacy of socialization and the normative order in constituting our pre-ontological understanding of being and thus its hermeneutic bearing, the phenomenology of technology and perception and a return to these phenomena and their essence and how they reveal social being as an embedded mode of intelligibility, the existential structure
of our relation to being-amidst-things as equipmentality and its modalities of sociality, sociability and vision. And finally an understanding that our primary and original mode of concern (the first order reality) is one of involvement in-the-world (practice) and that the modality of theory and science is rather a secondary mode of concern (second order reality) derived from a disruption in the first order, and that we may speak of a tertiary mode of concern (the third order reality) of the modality of curiosity.

In sum then we have given a grounded, complex and nuanced account of the concept social being and its concomitant modalities of revealing in technology and seeing and how these carry within them the horizon of an intelligibility or hermeneutic which offers up an alternative to what we have described as the technological and visual condition of estrangement and distanciation from our selves, each other and the world in which we dwell and inhabit..

The thesis we have developed took as its point of departure that we have come to a point in the contemporary period where we have a convergence of a technological and a related visionary condition which we might collectively call a techno-visionary condition. What we have argued is, on the one hand, we have the technological aspect which spoke to an estrangement and blocking of our sociality, which is our humanity by the technological mien instantiated in our socialization and normative order which was acquired in the technological milieu of our technologised worlds. To the latter we offered as counterpoise the ontology of technology as a way of revealing which is how we are connected to the truth of our social being and being, in general, and that if we remain
mindful of that we do not have to yield to the existential-ontological wasteland of the standing reserve.

On the other hand, we argued that in vision we have had an epistemological privileging manifest in its visuality as occularcentrism and socially reified in objective detachment and recontextualisation paradigmatically in theory and science. These amounted to a decontextualisation and ‘de-worlding’ which transformed our being-in-the-world into a being-in-the-technological-world where our circumspective absorption in an equipmental nexus continued to be reduced in scope. This occurred as we became more reliant on technologies which replaced our active involvement rendering us as spectators and thus increasing the potential for a sociability rooted in curiosity.

However, in the phenomenology of perception and its ontology of vision we found in it a counterpoise in the intentional comportment or sociability, that a releasement of entities was obtained, and thus they could be encountered in and of themselves, thus releasing us not only from the objectification of vision, but also from the objectless-ness of the standing reserve. This we have taken from Heidegger’s claim that art offers an alternative way of revealing, though he does not take this into the province of perception, it occurred to us that as a modality of seeing, in the broadest sense in its existential and ontological grounding, there is surely to be found in the intentional structure of perception, as we take it up in setting perception and vision as Archimedean lever, a basis for dislodging us from the techno-visual condition as stated. This was the substantive claim of our thesis.
And on a sanguine note we end by noting that we need not surrender to the imperatives of technology and its concomitant modalities of vision, but certainly need to return to an existential – ontological understanding of our humanity, and the sociality and sociabilities it encompasses. We suggest this as a way to reconnect with our social being and its possibilities in the contemporary age of what we might call the horizon of intelligibility of techno-vision, and its modalities of foreclosing on the ontological dimension of techne for unveiling or disclosing and uncovering or discovery of the truth of social being. In short by way of a Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology we have arrived at this ontology of technology and vision as the ground for disclosing being and thus an existential – ontological understanding of social being in our contemporary age.

Furthermore, in probing social being, sociality and sociability in the mode of being of equipment in particular and perceptual intentional comportment, we have been able to see in a hermeneutic phenomenology of technology and vision, the very conditions of possibility of keeping in check and counteracting the nihilism of modern technology and its way of revealing, as standing reserve. And, in the final instance, we have through our existential – ontological understanding of social being, and its dimensions (sociality and sociability) putatively offered up to sociology, a way to think our way back into-society from our recontextualisation in theory and science.
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