**Death, Sex, and the Body: Phenomenology and Foucault**

**Handout on “reliability” in “The Origin of the Work of Art”**

As suggested in the worksheet/handout on §23, “The spatiality of being-in-the-world,” especially p. 107 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger encounters a difficulty in describing, simply in terms of the close/far axis of practical spatiality, how we encounter equipment that we’re relying on. It makes perfect sense for him to claim that the person we’re seeing, talking with on the phone, or looking at a distance of 20 steps away is fairly *close*. But he goes on to seem to say that eyeglasses that we’re wearing, the speaker on the phone we’re using, and the street beneath our feet are “far.” It makes some sense to say that they’re not close, since we’re not actually reaching for them, but how can they be practically far away?

*Exercise 1:* Do you agree that Heidegger is wrong insofar as he suggests that the equipment we’re employing is somehow practically “far”?

I suggest that in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, which he composed about 10 years after *Being and Time* offers a new concept, not present in *Being and Time*, that allows for a better phenomenological description of the equipment we’re currently employing. This is the concept of *reliability*, which he discusses on pp. 12-15 of the handout from the book *Off the Beaten Track*.

*Exercise 2*: What is “reliability,” and how is it related to the “usefulness” of equipment (pp. 12-15)? Insofar as we’re relying on an item of equipment, is it really best described as *either* close or far? It would appear not to be close since it’s not really *handy*, and we’re not actually *reaching* for it (as, say, for a book we need that’s right on the shelf next to the computer we’re typing on)? But was Heidegger right when he suggested in *Being and Time* that it’s far?

On pp. 15-32 of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger goes on to describe an important aspect closely related to the *reliability* of equipment. He calls this “earth.” By “earth,” he clearly doesn’t mean the planet Earth, nor does he mean dirt. Instead, “earth” is a *phenomenological* concept, and is intimately connected with our dealings with things in the world (and here he uses the term world much as he does in §18 of *Being and Time*: “Deployment and meaningfulness: the worldliness of the world.”) Your world is the complex web of practical possibilities that make it possible for you to deal meaningfully with equipment. And your world somehow “rests” on the earth, in much the same way as the usefulness of equipment resides in reliability. Just as equipment wouldn’t be useful unless it was reliable, so too there could be no world without an “earth” to rest on.

*Exercise 3:* What *is* “earth” for Heidegger? How is “earth” related to “world”? And in what way is the reliability of equipment “earthly”?