Article

Hearing and Smelling— Heidegger and Tellenbach¹

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Abstract: This article considers the concept of the "world-with others" (Mitwelt mit den Anderen) by Martin Heidegger and Hubertus Tellenbach. Tellenbach's analysis of "atmosphere" was significantly influenced by Heidegger's take on disposition or attunement. Both thinkers considered these phenomena to be related to coexistence with others. Heidegger maintained that Dasein as "being-with" (Mitsein) is always open to the communal world and considered this world and "being-with" as prerequisites for every possibility of human encounters. For Heidegger, the "world-with others" is a world that always already exists, and Dasein shares this world with others through communication and hearing. Tellenbach partly agreed with Heidegger's thought but did not regard the "world-with others" and "being-with" as self-evident phenomena; instead, he examined how they are constructed through smell and "atmosphere". In addition to comprehensively exploring the phenomenon of the "world-with others," this article aims to closely analyze the similarities and differences between Tellenbach's theory of "world-with others" based on the sense of smell and Heidegger's theory founded on the auditory model.

Keywords: world-with others, sense of smell, atmosphere, hearing

In the tradition of philosophy, the senses of "sight" and "hearing" are the main models of cognition, and they are considered to elucidate the workings of the spirit. By contrast, the sense of "smell" has been characterized as a lower sensitivity and has mostly been ignored in philosophy.² According to German psychiatrist Hubertus Tellenbach, the

² Chantal Jaquet, *Philosophie de l'odorat*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2010), 2f. Jaquet cites Plato as a philosopher who focused on sight, and Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz





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sense of smell has also been disregarded in the field of psychiatry. However, he thought that the appearance of endogenous psychoses is predominantly determined by "abnormal experiences of oral sense." The oral sense, or the oral sensorium, refers to "the unity of smell, taste and oral skin-mucosal feeling." Tellenbach considered the possibility of the sense of smell to be strongly connected not only to the body but also to the spirit. In *Geschmack und Atmosphäre* (1968), he developed the phenomenology of the oral sense.

It is not difficult to find a resemblance between the thought of Martin Heidegger and that of Tellenbach because the latter once studied under Heidegger in Freiburg. For Heidegger, phenomenology means letting the phenomenon be seen, which usually remains hidden and unobtrusive but makes all concrete phenomena possible. Based on this understanding of phenomenon, "being" (Sein) becomes the main theme of Heidegger's phenomenology. The "Dasein" that somehow understands this "being" is not the encapsulated being but rather "being-in-the-world" and "being-with others." In Geschmack und Atmosphäre, Tellenbach considered the "atmosphere," which is inconspicuous and, like Heidegger's "disposition" (Befindlichkeit) and "attunement" (Stimmung), has the power to determine existence, being-with, and the world. Therefore, he believed the "atmosphere" to constitute the ground of the "world-with others" (Mitwelt mit den Anderen).

However, Tellenbach saw the origin of the "atmosphere" in the "oral sense"—that is, in the unity of smell and taste—and found a commonality between the "atmosphere" and the phenomenon of smell. On this point, Tellenbach differs from Heidegger, who focused his attention on sight and hearing in examining the "world-with others." In this article, I will interpret Tellenbach's thought as a complement to or enrichment of Heidegger's phenomenology that allows us to understand the "world-with others" more precisely.

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as philosophers who considered hearing, and argues that no philosophical work has been found that emphasizes the power of the sense of smell and appreciates it.

³ Hubertus Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre: Medien menschlichen Elementarkontaktes (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1968), 15. As this book has not been translated into English, I translated the quotations into English myself.

⁴ Ibid., 13

⁵ In 1981, Tellenbach published an article in English ("Tasting and Smelling"), which summarized Chapters I and II of *Geschmack und Atmosphäre*. I also consulted this article.

Tellenbach on Smelling and "World-with Others"

Characteristics of the Sense of Smell

In this section, I examine how Tellenbach characterizes the oral sense, particularly the sense of smell.⁶ First, he asserts that "nowhere is and remains the relatedness of perception and movement so primordial as in the oral sphere" and that "smelling is breathing."⁷ The sense of smell cannot perceive anything without being accompanied by the physical movements of breathing, which is necessary for the maintenance of life. For example, we can close our eyes or ears to something we do not want to see or hear. However, if we close our noses, we can no longer breathe. There, as long as we are alive, we must always smell something. In fact, we start smelling something as soon as we are born. Therefore, the first lasting encounter with the world is made possible through smell.⁸

Second, what is perceived through smelling always flows into the subject "as a stream of the world presented in smell," whereas what is perceived through sight or hearing is separable from the subject. The principle of separability cannot be applied to the sense of smell; thus, smelling always causes "an instantaneous homogenization of the human condition." Tellenbach called this homogenization "tuning" (*Einstimmung*). By means of this tuning, we merge with the smell of the world and others, which allows Tellenbach to claim that we are, "before all criticism, in a state of prelogical prejudice, we like to be close to the fragrant beings." There is no logical reason for reacting in this way. Instead, a bad smell makes one despicable. So, one is compelled to have prejudice (rejection or affection) regarding something as soon as one smells it.

Third, one not only smells something transitively but also intransitively through one's own skin glands. In other words, in addition to smelling other people and things, one emanates one's own smell. This emanative odor is modified by one's health, sexual maturity, age, diet, and so

¹² Ibid., 27.





⁶ Following Tellenbach's English article published in 1981, Tedeschini listed the following four ways in which the oral sense attunes the self with the environment: "prejudice," "proximity," "repetition" and "protective and cautionary." I will adopt some of these features while also considering others. See Marco Tedeschini, "Atmosphere and Taste, Individual and Environment," in *Atmosphere and Aesthetics*, ed. by Tonino Griffero and Marco Tedeschini (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 280 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24942-7_4.

⁷ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 14.

⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹¹ Ibid., 17.

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on, all of which make it "individual-specific" ¹³ and important for interpersonal relations. Tellenbach considered that "this fragrance of the skin can be a determining factor for the success or the lack of success in human encounters." ¹⁴ He mentioned the role of perfume, which possesses the power of attraction and extends the odor of the skin. ¹⁵ Normally, we smell the odor of others quite naturally and, in doing so, direct our attention to that odor as something sensory. According to Tellenbach, we turn our attention to this odor itself, and "we do not *intend what* is expressed in it—although this may be implied." ¹⁶ In this context, we can understand why, in the literature, it has been argued that odor can function as a mask. ¹⁷

The "Atmosphere" and the "World-with Others"

In this section, I would like to discuss how Tellenbach characterized the "atmosphere" and related it to smell. He designated the "More" (*Mehr*)— that is, the "surplus" that lies beyond the factual while still being perceptible—as the "atmosphere" or the "atmospheric" (*das Atmospärische*). ¹⁸ He used hearing as an example: "We not only hear *what* a voice says: we also hear the How, the timbre that attracts or repels us in a voice." ¹⁹ In this case, the timbre counts as the "More," and one can find this surplus in almost every experience. However, Tellenbach saw the world of the oral sense as the genetically primary and phenomenally dominant locus of the "atmosphere" because, as mentioned earlier, the physical movement of breathing is necessary for life and smelling is related to breathing.



¹³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴ Hubertus Tellenbach, Tasting and Smelling – Taste and Atmosphere – Atmosphere and Trust," in *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 12, no. 2 (1981), 222.

¹⁵ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 23. See also Ibid.

¹⁶ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 31.

¹⁷ One example is Patrick Süskind's novel *Perfume, Das Parfum, Die Geschichte eines Mörders* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1985). Bähme also referred to this novel when discussing Tellenbach's olfactory theory, stating the following: "Smells can be separated from their source—this is their atmospherical character: they tinge the space. Süskind enforces this trait by his hero Grenouille, killing young maidens in order to usurp their smell with the help of his perfume-technical practices. Using their skin, he produces an essence, the attractive and love-making effect of which nobody can resist." See Gernot Böhme, "Smell and Atmosphere," "Smell and Atmosphere," in *Atmosphere and Aesthetics*, ed. by Tonino Griffero and Marco Tedeschini (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 262, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24942-7_4.

¹⁸ Tellenbach, *Geschmack und Atmosphäre*, 47. See also Tellenbach, "Tasting and Smelling," 227. In *Geschmack und Atmosphäre*, Tellenbach often uses the term "das Atmosphärische." However, in his English article, he does not translate this term as "the atmospheric" but as "atmosphere." Therefore, I also translate this term as "atmosphere" instead of "the atmospheric" in this article.

¹⁹ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 47.

Following Johannes Rudert, he had compared the "atmosphere" with "tinted breath" (*irgendwie getönter Hauch*). ²⁰ One exudes the "atmosphere" through one's mouth, nose, and skin when one breathes while feeling the breath of others. By means of respiration, we present ourselves to one another. He called the ability to receive this atmospheric self-presentation of others "a sensitivity to the atmosphere" (*ein Gespür für Atmosphärisches*). ²¹ This sensitivity to the "atmosphere" is originally located in the oral sense. As I have already argued, it establishes a prelogical and preverbal prejudice about what is perceived. Therefore, sensitivity to the "atmosphere" introduces prejudices into human encounters, such as spontaneous rejections ("not-being-able-to-stand-the-smell of a person"), affection and acceptance ("his being to one's taste"). ²²

But what does one actually experience when one feels the "atmosphere" of the other? According to Tellenbach, smell conveys the qualities of the other's immediacy formed by the power of nature (age, habit, diet, etc.) and life history.²³ Through sensitivity to the "atmosphere," these qualities directly attest "to the origin of my attunement" ²⁴ because, as discussed earlier, the principle of the separability of the subject and the object does not apply to the sense of smell. Based on Jean Nogué's argument, Tellenbach said that "the most immediate resonances" are awakened through this attunement.²⁵ These resonances radiate back to the other, and the other feels rejected or accepted. The interplay of resonances constitutes atmospheric aura "as a medium in which Dasein and its world communicate each other ²⁶ and in which an "atmospheric tuning" (atmosphärische Einstimmung) occurs.²⁷

For Tellenbach, the "world-with others" is an elementary condition of existence—that is, if one exists, one necessarily participates in it. However, the "world-with others" is not always already there but is atmospherically constituted in the resonant encounter between one and the other. Then, this

²¹ *Ibid.*, 49. In Tellenbach's English article, the expression "sensitivity *for* atmosphere" is used only once. It would be a direct translation from German to English. However, the expression "a sensitivity to the atmosphere" would be better. This expression would not distort his thinking. Because he himself also uses the expression "sensitivity *towards* atmosphere." See Tellenbach, "Tasting and Smelling" 227.



²⁰ Ibid., 48.

²² Tellenbach, "Tasting and Smelling," 227. With the expression "his being to one's taste," Tellenbach means "his being is to one's taste." Oral sense is the unity of smell and taste, so he also refers to taste here. See also Tellenbach, *Geschmack und Atmosphäre*, 49.

²³ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 54.

 $^{^{24}}$ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 52.

²⁷ Ibid., 53.

encounter can be experienced by others and further developed as a sympathetic vibration of the relationship, which Tellenbach called the "atmospheric integral." ²⁸ By means of the sensitivity to the "atmosphere," we grasp "what characterizes the environment and the world-with others directly and uniformly." ²⁹ In other words, through sensitivity to the resonance emitted toward us by others, we experience whether our claim to belong to the "world-with others" is accepted or denied. Tellenbach indicated that we never experience the atmospheric emanation of our own being by ourselves; instead, we always understand and regain ourselves only in the resonances of others responding to our atmospheric radiation. ³⁰ He called this self-awareness "referral" (*Rückverweis*) or "reassurance" (*Rückversicherung*) ³¹ and considered that the weaker the self was, the more it depended on others. ³²

Heidegger on Hearing and "World-with Others"

Communication and Hearing

For Tellenbach, the "world-with" is atmospherically constituted and further developed in the resonant encounter between one and the other. In Heidegger's phenomenology, through "disclosedness" (*Erschlossenheit*), Dasein is always open to others as "Dasein-with" (*Mitdasein*), and "Dasein-with is essentially already manifest in disposition-with [*Mitbefindlichkeit*] and in understanding-with [*Mitverstehen*]." ³³ What Heidegger called "disposition" or "attunement" "first makes possible directing oneself toward something"; ³⁴ thus, understanding in a "disposition-with" has the power to determine the opinions and modes of behavior of every existence as Dasein-with. In this way, Dasein is always "being-with others" (*Mitsein mit Anderen*) in a "world-with others." The "world-with" is "always that which I share with others." This "being-with others" is "explicitly' shared in discourse." ³⁶



²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55. He also called this atmospheric relationship the "pneumatic-atmospheric inbetween" (*das pneumatisch-atmosphärische Zwischen*). See Hubertus Tellenbach, "Das Zwischen und die Rolle. Zur Konditionsanalyse endogener Psychosen," in *Pathos, Affekt, Gefühl*, ed. by Ingrid Craemer-Ruegenber (Baden-Baden: Alber, 1981), 297.

²⁹ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 49.

³⁰ Tellenbach, "Tasting and Smelling," 227.

³¹ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 55.

³² *Ibid.*, 55. See also Tellenbach, "Tasting and Smelling," 227.

³³ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit, 17. Aufl.* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), 162. I also consulted the English translations by Stambaugh but partially modified them.

³⁴ Ibid., 137.

³⁵ Ibid., 118.

³⁶ Ibid., 162.

This explicit sharing through discourse refers to the articulation of understanding in a "disposition-with". Heidegger called this articulation "communication" (Mitteilung)37 and thought that hearing plays an essential role in this process. "Hearing... is the existential openness of Dasein as beingwith to the other." 38 This openness was also referred to as the basis of "hearkening." 39 Heidegger attached great importance to hearing when discussing the "world-with others" because in discourse, he found a power for articulating attuned understanding. What is expressed in communication is not purely acoustic sound but also "the actual mode of disposition (of attunement),"40 which determines the behavior and opinions of every Dasein in a shared world. The actual mode of disposition manifests itself "by intonation, modulation, in the tempo of talk, and "in the way of speaking." 41 In other words, disposition is expressed not in the "what" but in the "how" of one's speech. Here, as in Tellenbach's phenomenology, we encounter the "surplus," or the "atmosphere," and hearing can be interpreted as something similar to the sensitivity to the "atmosphere," except using the auditory rather than the olfactory model.

Publicness and Shared Disposition

"Being-with" develops by means of "hearing each other" (*Aufeinender-hören*), which means that Dasein is "submissive" (*hörig*) and "belongs" (*zugehörig*) to others.⁴² At first glance, this assertion looks like a play on words. However, it also has a phenomenal basis. Heidegger believed that hearing constitutes "the primary and authentic openness of Dasein to its own most possibility of being, as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it."⁴³ The friend's voice is the "call of conscience" that announces to Dasein its finitude and nothingness. Insofar as Dasein always exists as "being-toward-death" (*Sein zum Tode*) in its finiteness, it is "essentially anxiety." ⁴⁴ In this meaning, Heidegger regards anxiety as the "fundamental attunement of Dasein." ⁴⁵ Dasein is always, although latently,

³⁷ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 162. The German preposition *mit* corresponds to the English "with," and the German verb *teilen* to the English "share." The German noun *Mitteilung* can therefore be translated as "sharing-with."

³⁸ Ibid., 163.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 162.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 163.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 266.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 251.

determined by this disposition.⁴⁶ The friend, that is, the caller of the "call of conscience" is Dasein itself, which is thrown into nothingness and is anxious about its potentiality of being.⁴⁷ In Angst, one has an uncanny feeling. This uncanniness enables the flight "*into* the being-at-home of publicness."⁴⁸ This means that Dasein escapes from itself and closes its ears to itself, thus remaining "submissive" (*hörig*) to others and, in this dependence, "belonging" (*zugehörig*) to them.

In this sense, Dasein stands "as everyday being-with-one-another" "in *subservience* to others. It itself *is* not, the others have taken its being away from it."⁴⁹ Heidegger argued that one calls people "the others" "in order to cover over one's own essential belonging to them."⁵⁰ The flight into the being-at-home of publicness is, therefore, the falling pray of Dasein to the "they" (*Man*), who are, in fact, nobody.⁵¹ "They" have always already decided the "possibilities of being attuned"—that is, the "basic way" "in which Dasein lets itself be concerned by the world."⁵² Put otherwise, "they" prescribe the disposition that always already determines "how" and "the way" in which every Dasein should behave. Heidegger stated that "we enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves; we read, see and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge."⁵³ The aforementioned "disposition-with" (*Mitbefindlichkeit*) refers to the "basic way" that is decided by "them" and determines the behaviors and opinions of every Dasein.

Because of this subservience to others, in everyday life, Dasein must always "hear" the "communication" (*Mitteilung*) with others and share the disposition as the "basic way" of behavior. In communication, Dasein somehow feels the "surplus" and constantly cares about its differences from others. Heidegger called this phenomenon "distantiality" (*Abständigkeit*).⁵⁴ This concern with the difference is based on the fact that "being-with-one-another as such creates *averageness*."⁵⁵ "They" watch so that no exception arises. At the same time, "they" aim at the "*leveling down* of all possibilities of



⁴⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 277.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Espinet also noted Heidegger's description of the auditory model, arguing that the call of conscience is usually "not heard" and that Heidegger saw a relationship between this fact and the falling pray of Dasein to the "they." See David Espinet, *Phänomenologie des Hörens: Eine Untersuchung im Ausgang von Martin Heidegger*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 172f.

⁵² Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, 169f.

⁵³ Ibid., 126f.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 127.

being." ⁵⁶ These three phenomena (i.e., "distantiality," "averageness," and "leveling down") constitute "publicness," which controls how the world and Dasein are interpreted. Heidegger claimed that this control is "always right," because the "publicness" "does not get to 'the heart of the matter,' because it is insensitive to every difference of level and genuineness." ⁵⁷

"World-with Others" as a Unity of Hearing and Smelling

Finally, I will examine how Tellenbach's phenomenology complements and enriches Heidegger's considerations regarding the "world-with others". On the one hand, Tellenbach appreciated Heidegger's ideas about "understanding" (*Verstehen*) and said, "We have absolutely no doubt that the coherence of atmospheric feeling and atmospheric emanation is at the heart of the world of *understanding*." On the other hand, he adopted not the auditory but the olfactory model and saw the world of the "oral sense" as the primary and dominant locus of the "atmosphere." Therefore, in what respect can his thought contribute to a more precise understanding of the phenomenon of the "world-with others"?

Heidegger inquired about the meaning of being, and his intention to discuss the "world-with others" clearly differed from Tellenbach's psychiatric phenomenology. Heidegger was concerned not only with the structure of the "world-with others" but also with the forgetfulness of being in the "self-lostness" of Dasein in everyday life. Using the auditory model, he convincingly showed how this condition develops. Dasein does not want to hear its own call as a "call of conscience," which constantly and uncannily announces Dasein's finitude, and calms itself down by fleeing from itself, becoming obedient to the voice of others and thus belonging to them. This interpretation of Heidegger may be related to Tellenbach's psychiatric theory of "referral" or "reassurance," whereby the weaker the self, the more it depends on resonances from others. However, to escape from oneself, one needs a certain distance from oneself. I consider the auditory model to explain this mechanism better than the olfactory model because in smell, we always emanate our own odor, which is inseparable from us.

However, certain points cannot be sufficiently explained using the auditory model. First, there is the exclusive character of "averageness." Usually, one feels shame when one is below average, and one can be proud when one is above average. However, Heidegger's meaning is different here. He maintained that in public, one is not allowed to be either above or below



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⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Tellenbach, Geschmack und Atmosphäre, 62f.

average. No exceptions are allowed. This is a matter of "leveling" and of the disempowerment of all the possibilities of being. It seems to me that Heidegger's auditory model cannot explain why this "leveling" occurs and why "averageness" is so exclusive.

Perhaps we can find the reasons for the "leveling" in Tellenbach's "homogenization" and "atmospheric tuning." In smelling, as mentioned above, one is inseparably merged with the flow of the world and others without distance and is forced to develop prelogical prejudices (rejection or affection). Nevertheless, we never experience the atmospheric emanation of our own being through ourselves, and our self-awareness is only possible through resonances from others. Given that belonging to the "world-with others" is one's elementary condition of existence, one strives not to be rejected by others and to attune oneself to them. Therefore, "distantiality" that is, caring about differences with others-is also grounded in "homogenization" because being too different from others means deviating from the homogenized world-with. This "distantiality" is easier to understand if we consider it in relation to the olfactory model. For example, one reason people take baths every day is they do not want to stand out from others due to offensive odors. Therefore, the daily customs of taking a bath and changing clothes show that one is concerned about differences from others by being concerned about smell.

Second, in publicness, Dasein is interested in how one behaves and not in one's uniqueness. I believe that the auditory model makes it difficult to explain how this so-called "superficiality," which "does not get to the heart of the matter," is possible. At the same time, the olfactory model provides an indication. As discussed earlier, when smelling others, we focus our attention on odor as something sensory and not on what is really expressed by this odor. We can interpret this to mean that odor and the "atmosphere" work like a mask. Tellenbach claimed, "In smelling and tasting I can also perceive and define substance, when I leave an attitude of aesthetic pleasure and adopt an unmasking, theoretical attitude." We usually rarely meet each other with such a theoretical attitude at the beginning of the encounter. Instead, we normally encounter one another while wearing masks. Moreover, we can even mask our own odors to some extent with the scent of perfumes or soaps. Using the olfactory model, we can see that the "superficiality" of human relationships is natural and instinctive.

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⁵⁹ Tellenbach, "Tasting and Smelling," 224.

Conclusion

In this article, I attempted to interpret Tellenbach's thoughts as a complement to or enrichment of Heidegger's phenomenology that allows us to understand the "world-with others" more precisely. Heidegger considered the world of Dasein as the "world-with" that Dasein shares with others; he presupposed that this "world-with" is always already there with Dasein as Tellenbach, meanwhile, being-with others. addressed Heidegger's presupposition.60 According to Tellenbach's argument, the "world-with" is first atmospherically constituted in the resonant encounter between one and the other and is then transformed into the "atmospheric integral." In this atmospheric resonance and its homogenization, we can see the ground for the disempowerment of all the possibilities of being and the superficiality of human relationships, which Heidegger could only describe insufficiently. Therefore, Tellenbach's investigation contributes to a more precise understanding of the phenomenon of the "world-with others" and allows us to uncover its more fundamental or more instinctive layer.

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⁶⁰ In his German article published in 1990, Tellenbach clearly agreed with Heidegger's assertion that being-with is a prerequisite for every possibility of human encounters. However, he posed his own question about what must be given for being-with to release us into an encounter. See Hubertus Tellenbach, "Phänomenologische Analyse der Mitmenschlichen Begegnung im Gesunden und im Psychotischen Dasein," in Heidelberger Jahrbücher, 34 (1990), 101.

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