

On the Pictorial Thinking of Death

A Study in Martin Heidegger's Unthought Art History of Being
Regarding Edvard Munch's *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*

Gustav Jørgen Pedersen



Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas

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INTRODUCTION

...almost a painted philosophy

In a text from 1894, called “Psychic Naturalism” [Psychische Naturalismus], the Polish writer Stanislaw Przybyszewski interprets the art of the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944). In Munch’s paintings, Przybyszewski sees his own philosophical ideas; they are, he claims, crystallizations of a pure “individuality,” a monolithic primordial force of darkness, sexual desire and strong emotions. In passing, however, Przybyszewski notes that one of Munch’s paintings not only reflects and draws from this force of “individuality.” It is, he claims, “almost a painted philosophy.”¹

The idea itself, that painting in some sense is related to philosophy was nothing new. It would not even seem slightly strange in the avant-garde circles of the early 1890s to claim that painting could be something like a painted philosophy. The anti-Naturalist claim that art was not to be conceived of as a depiction of observed reality, but somehow an “art of ideas,”² was among the most progressive views on art one could have in the European avant-garde circles to which both Munch and Przybyszewski belonged.

In my view, however, Przybyszewski’s statement points to a crucial question. For what does it mean that Munch’s art is something like a painted philosophy? What are the

¹ Stanislaw Przybyszewski, “Psychich Naturalism,” in *Art in theory 1815-1900: An anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison et al., 1044-50 (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 1048. [Es ist geradezu die gemalte Philosophie] (*Das Werk Des Edvard Munch* (Berlin: S. Fisher Verlag, 1894), 21). *Das Werk Des Edvard Munch* is the first book written about Munch’s art. It contains essays by Franz Servaes, Willy Pastor, and Julius Meier-Graefe, in addition to Przybyszewski’s text, which was first published as an article in *Die Freie Bühne* in January 1894. According to the author, the painting discussed is entitled *Jealousy*, but most likely it is the painting today known by the title *Melancholy* (Woll 359/360, [image 15]), judging from Przybyszewski’s description.

² Michael Marlais, *Conservative Echoes in Fin-de-Siècle Parisian Art Criticism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 25.

implications for art history if one considers artworks not only as being of philosophical significance or as illustrations of philosophical ideas, but themselves as almost a painted philosophy? How can such a *pictorial thinking* be conceived? This trail of thoughts leads to the point of departure for the present thesis, which will question and study the “philosophical” work of Munch’s art from within the perspective of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s (1889-1976) philosophy.

Despite the fact that Heidegger is among the most central, influential, and controversial philosophers of the 20th century, it appears to me that few art historical studies – with some notable exceptions³ – have explicitly investigated the implications of Heidegger’s thinking on art and history for art history. Although the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” is well known among art historians and the dispute between Heidegger and the art historian Meyer Shapiro is included in anthologies on art theory and aesthetics,⁴ I contend that there is still unexplored potential in Heidegger’s philosophy for art history. For “The Origin” is far from being Heidegger’s final word on art, nor is the essay untouched by his later philosophy.

Nevertheless, “The Origin” is Heidegger’s most comprehensive text on art, which places the “riddle of art”⁵ at the very core of his philosophical endeavors. The essay argues that the work of art is “the happening of truth”⁶ and that as such, art not only occurs *within* history but that “art *is* history in the essential sense that it grounds history.”⁷ But even though “The Origin” is unique in its aim and scope within Heidegger’s oeuvre, the “riddle of art” – especially in relation to poetry – remains central for Heidegger until his death.⁸ In books, lectures, and essays, issues concerning art are treated in connection with other major themes, such as the questions concerning human existence, technology, science, metaphysics, and, most notably, what he calls the “history of being [Seinsgeschichte].”⁹ However, although he claims that art is of crucial, world-historical significance, Heidegger himself scarcely writes on concrete, pictorial works of art. Although, as I will discuss, this can be argued to be

³ See the section on research history below.

⁴ See, for instance, Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 284-300.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” [Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes], in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 1975; reprint, 2013; or. published, 1950), 77. [Rätsel der Kunst] (*Gesamtausgabe 5: Holzwege* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1977), 67).

⁶ “The Origin,” 56. [das Geschehnis der Wahrheit] (*GA 5*, 45).

⁷ “The Origin,” 75. Emphasis mine. [Die Kunst ist Geschichte in dem wesentlichen Sinne, daß sie Geschichte gründet] (*GA 5*, 65).

⁸ Heidegger’s last mention of the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, “Worte Hölderlins,” is dated “spring 1976.” The text expresses Heidegger’s wishes of having a selection of poems by Hölderlin – quoted by Heidegger – read over his grave. Heidegger died May 11 the same year. (*Gesamtausgabe 16: Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges 1910-1976*, ed. H. Heidegger (Frankfurt: V. Klosterman, 2000), 749-751).

⁹ *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 1. (*Gesamtausgabe 6.2: Nietzsche* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1997), 399).

justified through Heidegger's own motivations and aims for his philosophy, I nevertheless contend that his thinking on art and the history of being opens up a perspective for approaching works of art. This perspective, however, remains unarticulated, or rather *unthought*, by Heidegger. Hence, I will suggest that to Heidegger's thinking on art and the history of being there belongs what I will call an *unthought art history of being*.¹⁰ From this perspective, I will suggest that works of art does not merely reflect or illustrate philosophical ideas, but are themselves contributors in shaping our most basic understanding of the world, including our understanding of human existence, life and death. As such, I will suggest, works of art might be understood as an original mode of thinking, a *pictorial* thinking.

Notably, however, not only Przybyszewski has claimed that Munch's art is something like a painted philosophy. A decade after Przybyszewski, Andreas Aubert suggested that Munch wanted "to create philosophy of his art?"¹¹ And in many different formulations, Munch has later been said to paint "universal themes,"¹² or as Reinhold Heller puts it, "a universal pictorial statement," "philosophical conclusions," and even "a metaphysics of love."¹³ This long-lasting perception of Edvard Munch as "the modern poet and philosopher in painting,"¹⁴ was encouraged by Munch himself, who claimed that his paintings "from the modern life of the soul"¹⁵ were "a poem about life, about love and death."¹⁶ Indeed, on several occasions he formulated variations of the following theme:

In my art I have sought
to explain to myself life and its
meaning –
I have also intended to help others
to clarify life¹⁷

¹⁰ Echoing what Amanda Boetzkes and Aron Vinegar have called Heidegger's "unthought history of art." See, Amanda Boetzkes and Aron Vinegar, eds., *Heidegger and the Work of Art History* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 11.

¹¹ [at forme filosofi av sin kunst] Andreas Aubert, *Det nye Norges malerkunst 1815-1900: Kunsthistorie i grundlinjer*, 2 ed. (Kristiania: Cammermeyers forlag, 1908; or. published, 1904), 90.

¹² Øystein Ustvedt, ed. *Edvard Munch: Det syke barn: historien om et mesterverk = The Sick Child: The Story of a Masterpiece* (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, 2009), 124.

¹³ Reinhold Heller, "Love as a Series of Paintings and a Matter of Life and Death: Edvard Munch in Berlin, 1892-1895: Epilogue, 1902," in *Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images*, 87-112 (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1978), 87-111.

¹⁴ Kynaston McShine ed. *Edvard Munch: The Modern Life of the Soul* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 11.

¹⁵ Edvard Munch, *MM N 31* (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1904-05), 2.

¹⁶ "Livsfrisen," in *Tidens Tegn (MM UT8)* (Oslo: 15.10.1918) [Appendix XIV].

¹⁷ *MM N 46* (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1930-34), 3. [I min kunst har jeg forsøgt at få forklart mig livet og dets mening – jeg har osså ment at hjelpe andre til at klarlægge sig livet] See also, for instance, *MM N 62* and *MM T 2748*.



1. **Edvard Munch, *Det syke barn*, 1885-86.**
[The Sick Child] Woll 130. Oil on canvas, 120 x 118.5 cm.
The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

But despite Munch's explicit ambition to deal with existential, philosophical issues through his art, it seems to me that these issues seldom have been addressed *as* philosophical issues as such, but have rather, as I will return to, been studied in relation to Munch's biography or to various socio-cultural contexts. In contrast, this thesis aims to take seriously the philosophical aspects of Munch's art, not as a contribution to strengthen or deconstruct the "myth of the genius,"¹⁸ but in order to arrive at one of the places from which the philosophical work of Munch's art, as well as its place within a history of such pictorial thinking, can be seen and recognized. Among the most central themes in Munch's oeuvre – love, anxiety, sickness, pain, life and death – I have chosen to focus my study on the theme of death.¹⁹ More concretely, the theme of death will be discussed in relation to two paintings, namely *The Sick Child* (1885-86) [image 1] and *Metabolism: Life and Death* (1898-99) [image 2], which I will argue is Munch's most significant works on death in light of the perspective of this thesis. However, while the centrality of the theme of death in Munch's art is usually related to Munch's biography, and his acquaintance with sickness and death in the family,²⁰ I will suggest that these works, in terms of their pictorial thinking, engage with the very fundamental understanding of what death *is*. As such, I will explore the thesis that the pictorial thinking of death in Munch's *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*, each in their own way, can be understood as essential contributions to a fundamental transformation of the understanding of what it means to *cease* to be, and hence, what it means to be.

In summary, the aim of this thesis is twofold. First, I will unfold and attempt to establish what I suggest to call Heidegger's *unthought art history of being*. Second, I will explore one among the many possible paths this perspective opens by discussing the theme of death, focusing on two paintings by Munch, *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism: Life and Death*. Consequentially, I will discuss two main questions: First, what is Heidegger's unthought art history of being? And the second: How can Edvard Munch's paintings *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism* be understood from the perspective of Heidegger's unthought art history of being?

The thesis is structured in two parts, each with two chapters. The aim of the first part is to engage with Heidegger's writings on art and the history of being, along with other relevant themes from his philosophical thinking, in order to sketch out and attempt to establish a point of view from which an art history of being can be studied. As I will discuss in more depth, my

¹⁸ See research history below.

¹⁹ I will discuss my motivation for this choice below.

²⁰ See Arne Eggum, "The Theme of Death," in *Edvard Munch: Symbols & Images*, 87-112 (Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 1978).

approach will particularly focus on the questions concerning the relation between art and thinking (leading to my suggestion of the notion of *pictorial thinking*), and between art and the history of being – in chapter one and two, respectively.

The aim of the second part is to explore and sketch out some possibilities that are opened by the first part, by exposing the Heideggerian perspective to some works of art concerning the theme of death. My discussion will be focused around Munch's paintings *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism* – in chapter three and four, respectively.

Approach

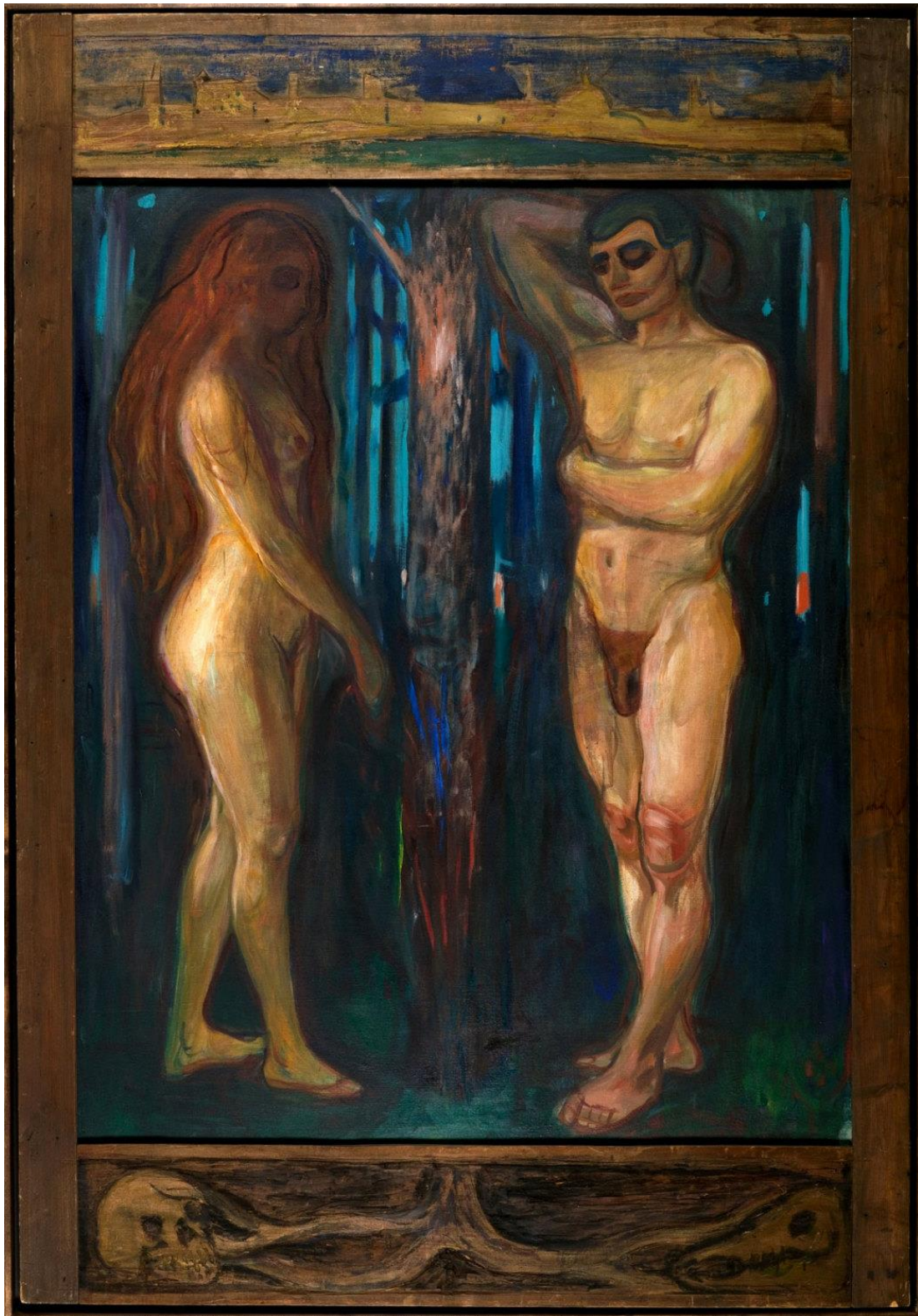
The notion of the *unthought* is one of Heidegger's many idiosyncratic terms. It does not designate a lack or omission, but rather the rich reservoir of new paths and possibilities that can be implied by a philosopher's thinking, while remaining unarticulated. Indeed, "the more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it,"²¹ Heidegger writes. In this sense, my approach towards Heidegger's *unthought* art history of being is neither a search for a Heideggerian art history within Heidegger's oeuvre, nor is it an attempt at reconstructing such a history. It lies closer to what Sven-Olov Wallenstein has suggested "would no doubt be an interesting task," namely to "undertake a Heideggeresque interpretation of art history."²² But more accurately, it is an attempt to think art historically from within the perspective of Heidegger's philosophy.

This means that I will read Heidegger sympathetically, inspired by Heidegger's own ethics of interpretation which he calls *confrontation*. "In confrontation," Heidegger explains, "we undertake to reflect on thinking and to trace it in its effective force, not in its weakness."²³ In other words, the thesis does not adopt a critical approach towards Heidegger's philosophy, but rather takes its point of departure in the attempt at exploring the reach

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* [Was Heisst Denken?], trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Collins, 1976; repr., 2004; or. published, 1954), 76. [Je ursprünglicher ein Denken ist, um so reicher wird sein Ungedachtes] (*Gesamtausgabe 8: Was Heisst Denken?* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2002), 82).

²² Sven-Olov Wallenstein, "The Historicity of the Work of Art in Heidegger," in *The Past's Presence: Essays on the Historicity of Philosophical Thought*, ed. Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback and Hans Ruin (Huddinge: Södertörn Philosophical Studies 3, 2006), 143. The rest of the quote reads " – in particular the examination of whether the various conceptions of art and artistic practice that have been developed throughout Western art theory could be strictly mapped onto the "epochal" structure of metaphysics, as Heidegger appears to assume when he outlines a "destruction of the history of aesthetics" in the first volume of his *Nietzsche*, or whether we would have to address a much more many-layered and non-synchronous structure, which I believe to be the case."

²³ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper One, 1979; repr., 1991; or. published, 1961), Vol I, 4-5. [Auseinandersetzung ist echte Kritik. Sie ist die höchste und einzige Weise der wahren Schätzung eines Denkers. Denn sie übernimmt es, seinem Denken nachzudenken und es in seine wirkende Kraft, nicht in die Schwächen, zu verfolgen] (*Gesamtausgabe 6.1: Nietzsche* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1996), 3).



2. **Edvard Munch, *Stoffveksling (Liv og Død) (Adam og Eva)*, 1898-99.**
[Metabolism (Life and Death) (Adam and Eve)] Woll 428.
Oil on canvas, carved and painted frame, 172.5 x 142 cm.
The Munch Museum, Oslo.

and possibilities of his thinking, and occasionally pushing it further. This does not, however, imply an undirected acceptance of Heidegger's thinking as such, but aims at preparing for the arrival at a point from which a criticism of these unthought dimensions of Heidegger's thinking of art can be ventured at all. Indeed, Heidegger claims that confrontation is "the supreme way, the only way, to a true estimation of a thinker," it is "genuine criticism."²⁴ In terms of such criticism – which at the present seems somewhat premature – the following thesis can only be seen as preparatory work.

Thus, as will be clarified further on, Heidegger's philosophy on art and the history of being is neither the "theory" that I will "apply" to objects of art, nor the "method" which prescribes the procedure through which I will approach Munch's art. Yet, I will suggest that it opens a perspective from out of which works of art and their historical – and most notably, philosophical – significances can be recognized and discussed. In this sense, Heidegger's thinking, along with its unthought dimensions, will guide and direct my approach towards the works of art that will be discussed in this thesis, rather than any theoretical perspective or explicit method.

Backgrounds and Motivations

Among the most central aspects of my discussion of the unthought dimensions of Heidegger's philosophy of art are the implications of his writings on the relation between art and thinking. Thus, as mentioned above, I will eventually suggest that also in pictorial works of art *thinking* – a *pictorial* thinking – can go on; indeed what Heidegger calls a "thinking without science, without philosophy."²⁵ As such, a central motivation for the thesis is to look into ways in which Heidegger's philosophy contributes to an emerging field of art history whereby the work of art is itself understood as *thinking*. Notably, at the end of *The Origin of Perspective* Hubert Damisch asks "what is *thinking* in painting? (...) What are the implications of such "thinking" for the history of thought in general?"²⁶ And in *Quoting Caravaggio*, Mieke Bal writes:

If visual art makes any sense at all beyond the narrow domain of beauty and the affective domain of pleasure, it is because art, too, thinks; it is thought. Not the thought about it, or the thought expressed

²⁴ Nietzsche: *Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 4. [Auseinandersetzung ist echte Kritik. Sie ist die höchste und einzige Weise der wahren Schätzung eines Denkers] (GA 6.1, 3).

²⁵ *On the Way to Language* [Unterwegs zur Sprache], trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1971; repr., 1982; or. published, 1959), 61. [gedacht...ohne Wissenschaft, ohne Philosophie] (*Gesamtausgabe 12: Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1985), 154).

²⁶ Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 446.

in it, but visual thought, the thought embodied in form. Hubert Damisch tirelessly emphasizes the importance of taking art seriously in this sense. Alpers and Baxandall (1994) speak of “pictorial intelligence,” and others have proposed yet other terms to single out this aspect of art.²⁷

Hanneke Grootenboer has called this aspect of art *pensive images*, which she claims “show us thought *in* painting, not expressed in it (as with narrative), or behind it (as with iconographic meaning), but *visual* thought as it is fully embodied in form and materiality.”²⁸ Indeed, discussions on art in relation to thinking, as well as art *as* thinking, can be found in a wide variety of works, emerging from different traditions, from Rudolf Arnheim, to Gilles Deleuze and Éric Alliez, through Jean-Luc Godard to – closer to the approach of this thesis – Gottfried Boehm and Georges Didi-Huberman. Historically speaking, however, the most influential contribution to this issue might well be Hegel’s lectures on the fine arts from the 1820s, published as his *Aesthetics*.²⁹ A recent approach to this work by Robert B. Pippin argues that Hegel’s aesthetics implies a kind of pictorial or aesthetic intelligibility, specific for the domain of the visual arts. Art, for Hegel, is not philosophy but

There is something of philosophical importance at stake in pictorial achievements even if they are not – just because they are not – philosophy themselves. That is to say, the claim is not that such artworks are works of philosophy, or philosophy manqué, but that they embody a distinct form of aesthetic intelligibility, or an aesthetic way of rendering intelligible and compelling a variety of issues of the deepest importance to philosophy.³⁰

In contrast to this, I will suggest that the Heideggerian *pictorial thinking* is not only “of the deepest importance to philosophy,” but itself an original mode of thinking which takes place through the history of art and in concrete works of art.

As already indicated, Heidegger himself does not write much about concrete pictorial works of art, and when he does, it is seldom more than a sentence or two (the discussion of van Gogh’s *Shoes* in “The Origin” being the only substantial exception). Thus, as the purpose of this thesis is to discuss the implications of Heidegger’s writings on art and history for the history of art, it has been crucial exactly to engage directly with works of art. This is the

²⁷ Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 117.

²⁸ Hanneke Grootenboer, “The Pensive Image: On Thought in Jan van Huysum’s Still Life Paintings,” in *Oxford Art Journal*, 13-30 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 18.

²⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, T. M. Knox (Trans.), Vol 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

³⁰ Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2-3.

general motivation for the second part of the thesis, and my discussions of Munch's paintings *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*.

Within Munch's oeuvre, the two paintings have quite different positions. *The Sick Child* is generally considered as Munch's first "major" work and it is among his most celebrated and discussed paintings. As Reinhold Heller puts it, "no other painting in the entire previous history of Norwegian art matches *The Sick Child* in quality or significance, and only Munch's own works equal it later."³¹ The work was also given great importance by Munch himself, who wrote some four decades after its execution that *The Sick Child* "was a breakthrough in my art. – Most of what I have done since had its genesis in this picture."³² Except for a few years during WWII, *The Sick Child* has been on permanent display since 1931, in the National Gallery in Oslo.

Although not on permanent display, *Metabolism: Life and Death* is both regularly exhibited in the Munch Museum in Oslo and featured in international exhibitions.³³ However, if judging from the research literature on Munch, *Metabolism* appears somewhat more peripheral in comparison to *The Sick Child*. As Frank Høifødt argues, *Metabolism* has been a rather "neglected"³⁴ painting in the research on Munch's art. Despite belonging to the variously defined series of paintings exhibited as *The Frieze of Life*,³⁵ it has never attained the central position that Munch seems to have appointed to it. For although Munch admitted that the painting "lies perhaps somewhat to the side of the idea in the other pictures," he claimed that "it is nevertheless as necessary for the whole frieze as the buckle is to the belt."³⁶

However, due to the aim of this thesis, I will neither inquire into the historical circumstances that have led to the different appraisals of the two works, nor to their historical-biographical or socio-historical significance and impact. As I mentioned above, Heidegger claims that the work of art is *the happening of truth*. And as I will discuss in more depth in chapter one and two, my understanding of this claim is that Heidegger contends that artworks, most fundamentally, work on a level that is deeper than their biographical, cultural, social,

³¹Reinhold Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work* (London: John Murray, 1984), 21.

³² [I det syke barn brøt jeg mig nye veie – det var et gjennombrudd i min kunst. Det meste av hvad jeg senere har gjort fik sin fødsel i dette billede] Edvard Munch, *Livsfrisens tilblivelse (MM UT13)* [The Origins of the Frieze of Life], trans. Francesca M. Nichols (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1928), 10.

³³ See Gerd Woll, ed. *Edvard Munch: Complete Paintings* (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 2008), Vol II, 470.

³⁴ Frank Høifødt, "Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens "Beltespenne"," in *Kunst og Kultur*, ed. Bodil Sørensen and Ellen Lerberg, 124-45 (Oslo: 2001), 124.

³⁵ *The Frieze of Life* is a variously defined series of works comprising many of Munch's most famous paintings from the 1890s, among others *Scream* [image 13], *Puberty* [image 14], *Melancholy* [image 15], *Anxiety* [image 16], *Madonna* [image 17], and *Jealousy* [image 18]. For a more comprehensive discussion of *The Frieze*, see chapter four, section one.

³⁶ Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

political, and religious implications. Artworks concern primarily – yet inconspicuously – our most basic sense of what beings are. According to Heidegger, however, our understanding of what various beings are always relates to an understanding of what beings are *as a whole*. Hence, when works of art alter our understanding of what beings are, they might also – in some cases – influence our understanding of what beings are as a whole. According to Heidegger, history [Geschichte], or rather, the history of being [Seinsgeschichte], is not to be conceived of as a collection and representation of objects and events situated in a previous space-time (which he calls ‘historiology’ [Historie]),³⁷ but rather as the very fundamental transformations of how we understand what beings are as a whole. In this way he can claim, as already mentioned, that “art *is* history in the essential sense that it grounds history.”³⁸ Artworks contribute in “shaping history”³⁹ by showing us what beings are.

In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger claims that van Gogh’s *Shoes* discloses the basic understanding of what *tools* or *equipment* [Zeug] is. Yet at this point, he admits that he is “disregarding the possibility, however, that differences relating to the history of being may yet also be present in the way equipment *is*.”⁴⁰ In my view, this is among the crucial places where Heidegger’s later writings illuminate and extends the thinking of “The Origin,” and I will suggest that an important aspect of the perspective of the unthought art history of being is exactly to take into account “differences relating to the history of being” in relation to *what* and *how* the various works of art disclose.

The Sick Child and *Metabolism*, unlike Van Gogh’s *Shoes*, do not disclose an understanding of what *equipment* is. Rather, I will suggest that they both fundamentally concern the understanding of what *death* is. Although death is not *a* being, it nevertheless “is” in the sense that it is present as the withdrawn horizon of human finitude (as will be discussed in chapter four, Heidegger calls this the existential phenomenon of *being-towards-death* in *Being and Time*, and in his post-war writings, “the shrine of nothing”⁴¹). Therefore, the main questions I will pursue in chapter three and four is *what* understandings of death are shown in *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*, and *how* these are shown. In order to answer these questions,

³⁷ The translation of ‘Historie’ as ‘Historiology’ is unfortunate due to the addition of the suffix ‘-logy.’ I have chosen this translation, rather than ‘Historiography’ as it sometimes is also translated, as I prefer the scientific connotation of ‘-logy’ rather than that of writing in ‘-graphy.’ The translation must nevertheless be considered as a technical term.

³⁸ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 75. Emphasis mine. [Die Kunst ist Geschichte in dem wesentlichen Sinne, daß sie Geschichte gründet] (GA 5, 65).

³⁹ “The Origin,” 66. [Geschichte mitgestaltet] (GA 5, 56).

⁴⁰ “The Origin,” 32. [Wir sehen jedoch von der Möglichkeit ab, daß auch noch in der Weise, wie das Zeug ist, wesensgeschichtliche Unterschiede walten] (GA 5, 17).

⁴¹ “The Thing,” 176. [der Schrein des Nichts] (*Gesamtausgabe 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2000), 180).

however, I will also explore how “differences relating to the history of being” are present in the way *death* “is” and discuss a selection of related artworks stretching back to the Archaic and Early Christian periods.

My choice of focusing on the theme of death is based on the view that although the understanding of death has changed over the centuries and millennia, the contemporary, late-modern epoch⁴² has seen the rise of a dramatically different understanding of what death is. According to Allan Kellehear, for most of human history, death has been understood as a place of transition from this world unto the next.⁴³ In contrast, the contemporary epoch has seen the emergence of the fundamental understanding of death primarily as the termination of a particular physiological process (first defined by the cessation of breathing, then of the heartbeat, and today of brain activity).⁴⁴ This change has been accompanied by changes in the dominant *attitudes* towards death, described in sociological and historical terms in the classic works on death by Philippe Ariès (as “death untamed” and “the invisible death”⁴⁵) and more recently by Kellehear (as “the shameful death”⁴⁶).

Although this fundamental change in the understanding of death, sociologically conceived, is far from global, I would suggest that its very emergence attests to some fundamental alterations in the very limits of how we understand beings as a whole. Significantly, the understanding of death as termination has opened the possibility for an alteration of the very dream of human immortality, which generally has been reserved to the afterlife, but which now is growingly considered a real possibility of *this* life – at least among followers of the *Transhumanist* movement,⁴⁷ as well as among several tech-entrepreneurs with the financial assets to pursue so-called “radical life-extension.” Notably, Peter Thiel (investor and co-founder of PayPal) claims that “death eventually [will] be reduced from a

⁴² As will be discussed in chapter two, the epochs of Heidegger’s history of being are not determined chronologically. Nevertheless, in order to give the reader a slight feel for what, where, and “when” Heidegger seems to have in mind when talking about the late-modern [Neuzeitlich] epoch, I suggest to follow the hint of Heidegger’s emphasis on Nietzsche’s philosophy, and to provisionally designate the epoch as Western Europe after the industrial revolution until today. For a discussion of the notion of *epochs*, as well as the being-historical determinations of the various epochs, see chapter two, section two.

⁴³ Allan Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 177.

⁴⁴ See “Dying as a Social Relationship: A Sociological Review of Debates on the Determination of Death,” *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 66, no. 7, 1533-44 (2008).

⁴⁵ See for instance Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death* [L’Homme devant la mort], trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981; or. published, 1977), 559-601.

⁴⁶ Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*, 213.

⁴⁷ In the 1982 manifesto, “Transhumanist Arts Statement,” the artist and philosopher Natasha Vita-More – today a central proponent of the Transhumanist movement – writes: “Transhumanist Artists want to extend life and overcome death. (...) We are ardent activists in pursuing infinite transformation, overcoming death and exploring the universe.” Natasha Vita-More, “Transhumanist Arts Statement,” (1982, revised 1999/2002).

mystery to a solvable problem,”⁴⁸ and that the end of death “would mean the final mastery of science over nature or chance.”⁴⁹ It is an ambition shared by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who intends to contribute to the quest for immortality by working “to cure all diseases this century.”⁵⁰ Google, on its side, established in 2013 the company Calico (California Life Company), a research institution which was announced not only to radically extend human life but “to cure death” altogether.⁵¹ The point I would like to make is that to me, it seems that the very possibility of the conception of the possibility of “curing” death is based on an alteration of the fundamental understanding of what death *is*; namely that death no longer appears as a mystery, but as a *technical*, and hence solvable and curable, problem.⁵² More precisely, then, my choice of focusing on the theme of death is thus based on the motivation of contributing to the historical understanding of the emergence of the contemporary, late-modern age’s understanding of death, which in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis will be related to Munch’s painting *Metabolism* and to Heidegger’s designation of the late-modern epoch as grounded in a “technical” understanding of truth.

Biographical Note

The thesis does not concern Heidegger and Munch as historical and biographical persons. Nevertheless, I would like to mention that although separated by a generation in age, Heidegger and Munch’s lives overlapped by 55 years. During Heidegger’s adult life, Munch’s works were exhibited in over 130 solo and group exhibitions in Germany, the majority of which were held from the early 1920s until the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Dresden in 1933.⁵³ Despite Munch’s widespread fame in Germany at the time, and despite the fact that some of the exhibitions were as close to Heidegger’s residences in Marburg, Todtnauberg, and Freiburg as Frankfurt, Mannheim, Heidelberg, and Basel, there is – to my knowledge – nothing in the collected works by Heidegger, the *Gesamtausgabe*, published so far, that indicates any interest in Munch by Heidegger. Nor have I found anything that might indicate any connection to Heidegger in Munch’s notes and texts.

⁴⁸ Peter Thiel, “Foreword,” in Sonia Arrison, *100 Plus: How the Coming Age of Longevity Will Change Everything, From Careers and Relationships to Family and Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), xi.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁵⁰ Anita Balakrishnan, “Zuckerberg: I want to cure all diseases this century,” URL: <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/04/27/zuckerberg-i-want-to-cure-all-diseases-this-century.html?1461972947467=1>. (Retrieved: 05.05.16).

⁵¹ Harry McCracken and Lev Grossman, “Google vs. Death,” *time.com*, URL: <http://time.com/574/google-vs-death/> (Retrieved: 05.05.16).

⁵² On this, see for instance the section on “The Gilgamesh Project,” in Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind* (London: Harvill Secker, 2014).

⁵³ Woll, *Edvard Munch: Complete Paintings* Vol IV, 1615-1626.

Translation and Sources

Heidegger is infamous for his notoriously difficult style of writing, and as such, as being difficult to translate. For reason of fluidity and style in the main text, I rely on and quote the available translations into English; while in the footnotes quoting and referring to the German, now standard edition of Heidegger's collected works, the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA) published by Vittorio Klostermann. When introducing central concepts, and occasionally for emphasizing aspects idiomatic to the German language, I will include the German word in square brackets. However, because of Heidegger's writing style, it is not always possible to make the English and the German quotes correspond in shorter quotes. Despite the occasional awkwardness, I will nevertheless include the German original in the footnotes for reasons of clarity (while placing longer quotes in an appendix), but the reader is also referred directly to the *Gesamtausgabe*. The *Gesamtausgabe* is planned to comprise 102 volumes, some of which are not yet published in German, and many of which are still not yet translated into English. The only essay by Heidegger that I quote that is yet to appear in the *Gesamtausgabe* is "Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens" [The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought], which is planned to be published in GA Vol. 80.2. As such, my reference to the German is from *Denkerfahrten: 1910-1976*.⁵⁴

Where several English translations are available, most notably of *Being and Time* and "The Origin of the Work of Art," I have chosen the ones I am most familiar with, and which I prefer stylistically: John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson's translation of *Being and Time* from 1962 and Albert Hofstadter's translation of "The Origin of the Work of Art" from 1971. As my native language is neither English nor German, but Norwegian, I have also consulted and compared the English translations and German originals with the few Norwegian translations of Heidegger that are available.⁵⁵

Stylistically, I will prefer the translations of 'das Sein' as 'being,' and 'das Seiende' as 'beings' – that is, both without capital B, in order to avoid any confusion between being in Heidegger's sense and a Supreme Being. For reason of unity in style, I have altered all translations in line with this preference. Where it seems necessary, I will include discussions of translations of individual words and concepts in the footnotes.

⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, "Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens," in *Denkerfahrten*, ed. H. Heidegger, 135-49 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983).

⁵⁵ *Væren og Tid* [Sein und Zeit], trans. Lars Holm-Hansen (Oslo: Pax, 2007); *Brev om "Humanismen" til Jean Beufret* [Brief über den Humanismus], trans. Eivind Tjønneland (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2003); *Kunstverkets opprinnelse* [Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes], trans. Einar Øverenget and Steinar Mathisen (Oslo: Pax, 2000); *Oikos og techne: "spørsmålet om teknikken" og andre essays*, vol. 27, Idé og tanke (Oslo: Tanum, 1973).

All references to Munch's paintings are indicated by catalogue number of Gerd Woll's *Catalogue Raisonné*s. All references to Munch's own notes and texts are indicated by the standard reference to the Munch Museum's archive and <http://www.emunch.no/>

References to the Bible are only indicated by chapter and verse, while all translations quoted in the text are taken from the New International Version (NIV). Finally, if not indicated otherwise, all translations from Norwegian to English are my own.

Some Limitations and Delimitations

Taking into account that my aim is to attempt not only to unfold Heidegger's thinking on art and history, but to explore some of its unthought dimensions, and from there engage with two concrete works of art concerning the theme of death – as well as taking into account the timeframe of three years that has conditioned my work – it has been necessary to delimit my treatment of Heidegger's philosophy in several ways. Most importantly, throughout the text I will not engage directly in critical discussions with the vast amount of secondary literature on Heidegger's philosophy. I am aware that many of the themes of Heidegger's philosophy I discuss, are suitable as topics for a thesis of their own, and that they deserve a broad, deep, and critical discussion. However, I consider my own attempt at making sense of Heidegger's writings by engaging directly with his thinking as a crucial aspect of the very “confrontational” approach of the thesis. And as I will account for in the section on research history below, I have been informed and inspired by many works both on Heidegger's philosophy in general, and concerning his thinking on art in particular; and I will use, quote, and refer to these sources throughout the text whenever I find it helpful for my argument.

My approach towards Heidegger's oeuvre has been guided by the approach of the thesis, and I have not delimited my choice of Heidegger's texts to a particular chronological period in Heidegger's writings. That being said, the theme of the thesis has led me especially to works from the mid-1930s until the beginning of the 1950s, where Heidegger's questioning concerning art and thinking, as well as the notion of the history of being, is at its most intense. I have not aimed at comprehensiveness in scope, but towards finding a way – my way – through a dense and complicated authorship in order to pursue the aim of the thesis. Hence, in terms of its Heideggerian aspects, I do not consider the present thesis a study about Heidegger's philosophy, but a study in or from within Heidegger's philosophy.

My choice of delimiting the main focus of the study to *merely two* works of art by Munch has been a result of the scope that Heidegger's unthought art history of being opens up

in the discussions of these works. Indeed, in the chapters on *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism* I will relate the two works not only to philosophical aspects of Naturalism and Symbolism, but also to a pictorial history of death that stretches back to the Archaic period in the case of *The Sick Child*, and to the Early Christian period in the case of *Metabolism*. In my treatment of these pictorial histories, I will focus my discussion on a selection of works of art that I consider relevant and illuminating, and I have delimited my choice of sources by utilizing what I have found to be the most helpful in order to understand the works from the perspective and aim of the thesis.

Research History

The present thesis relates to three different fields of previous research: the research on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (especially concerning art and his later philosophy), on Edvard Munch, and the theme of death. In the following, I will consider these three fields separately.

Martin Heidegger

The general body of commentary literature on Heidegger is immense, and spans from the many publications on his involvement with the German Nazi regime to ecology. His work has influenced and prompted commentaries from most significant continental philosophers in the past century. But although Heidegger is regarded as one of the most controversial and influential philosophers from the previous century, and despite the fact that he has influenced discourses within art historical theory and methodology, few attempts have been made to approach art historical research explicitly based on Heidegger's thinking on art and history.⁵⁶ A significant exception, however, is Amanda Boetzkes and Aron Vinegar's anthology *Heidegger and the Work of Art History* which is an anthology of twelve different articles which in various ways are dealing with Heidegger's philosophy (as well as the self-proclaimed post-Heideggerian philosophy of Graham Harman's Object Oriented Ontology) in relation to artworks and art theory. In addition, Claude Cernuschi has conducted a study of the thematic correspondences between the art of Barnett Newman and Heidegger's philosophy.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Which seems also to be implied in the abovementioned quote by Sven-Olov Wallenstein, "I do not propose to undertake a Heideggeresque interpretation of art history, though this would no doubt be an interesting task." Wallenstein, "The Historicity of the Work of Art in Heidegger," 143.

⁵⁷ Claude Cernuschi, *Barnett Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2012).

For the present thesis, David Nowell Smith's *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics*⁵⁸ which is an approach to Heidegger's philosophy from the perspective of comparative literature, has provided several interesting reflections on Heidegger's understanding of art.

Most of the literature on Heidegger's philosophy of art is, for natural reasons, usually conducted by philosophers with ambitions pertaining to philosophical discourse, rather than art history and theory. As has already been mentioned, as the present thesis is not a study about Heidegger's philosophy, but ultimately an attempt at approaching the history of art from within a Heideggerian perspective, it deviates from most of the secondary literature on Heidegger's philosophy of art. Nevertheless, some examples of recent literature from the English speaking world that has informed my work are Iain D. Thomson's *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*,⁵⁹ Julian Young's *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*,⁶⁰ and Joseph D. Parry's anthology *Art and Phenomenology*,⁶¹ in addition to articles by Heidegger scholars such as Hubert Dreyfus⁶² and Mark Wrathall,⁶³ among others. Especially Thomson's study, which highlights the relation between art and the history of being, as well as attempting to approach two post-modern works of art from this perspective, has been important to my work.

My primary focus in the Heideggerian corpus itself is on his middle- and late period (that is, after *Being and Time*), after what has come to be called Heidegger's "turning," and especially on the topics of the history of Being and thinking. As such, some books on Heidegger's later philosophy that have been central for the present thesis are Iain D. Thomson's *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education*,⁶⁴ Julian Young's *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*,⁶⁵ George Pattison's *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger*,⁶⁶ Michel Haar's *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*,⁶⁷ Gregory Fried's *Heidegger's Pólemos: From Being to Politics*,⁶⁸

⁵⁸ David Nowell Smith, *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

⁵⁹ Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶⁰ Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶¹ Joseph D. Parry, ed. *Art and Phenomenology* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

⁶² See for instance Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Heidegger's Ontology of Art," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 407-19 (Malden: 2006).

⁶³ See for instance, Mark A. Wrathall, "The Phenomenological Relevance of Art," in *Art and Phenomenology*, ed. Joseph Parry, D. , 9-30 (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁶⁴ Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶⁵ Julian Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶ George Pattison, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁶⁷ Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being* [Le chant de la terre], trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993; or. published, 1987).

⁶⁸ Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Pólemos: From Being to Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

Andrew J. Mitchell's *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*,⁶⁹ Michal Allen Gillespie's *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History*.⁷⁰ As well as Arnfinn Bø-Rygg's afterword in *Oikos og techne: "Spørsmålet om teknikken" og andre essays*,⁷¹ and Hans-Georg Gadamer's "Heidegger's Later Philosophy."⁷²

Nevertheless, as was stated above, it has been a deliberate delimitation of the scope of the thesis to engage as directly as possible with Heidegger's own thinking and not to engage in critical discussion with the secondary literature on Heidegger's philosophy.

Edvard Munch

Through its Heideggerian perspective, this dissertation deviates from most of the previous research on Edvard Munch, his life and his works. In the previous research literature on Edvard Munch the history of Munch has been told in many ways. Most often it is a history of illness, death, tragic love, and madness.⁷³ Other times, it has been told as a story of a formal and technical innovator,⁷⁴ a man interested in physiology and science,⁷⁵ of a strategic businessman,⁷⁶ or a deeply religious person.⁷⁷ More often than not, however, it seems to me that these Munch-studies are studies of the person Edvard Munch, the one that was born in Løten in 1863 and died alone in his home at Ekely in Oslo in 1944. His art is understood as the product of this person, his interests and the society within which he lived, and the main topic of research for art historians has been to trace connections between the art and the person.

⁶⁹ Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ Michael Allen Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁷¹ Heidegger, *Oikos og techne : "spørsmålet om teknikken" og andre essays*, 27,

⁷² Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Heidegger's Later Philosophy," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. David E. Linge, trans. David E. Linge, 213-28 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976; reprint, 1977; or. published, 1960). First published as an introduction to Heidegger's *Holzwege* in the 1960 Reclam edition.

⁷³ Among the many formulations of this story, Peter Watkins' film on Edvard Munch from 1974 is probably the best known. See also Rolf E. Stenersen, *Edvard Munch: Nærbilde av et geni* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1964).

⁷⁴ See for instance Øivind Storm Bjerke, "Edvard Munch, *The Sick Child*: form as content," in *Edvard Munch: An Anthology*, ed. Erik Mørstad, 65-86 (Oslo: Unipub, 2006).

⁷⁵ Shelley Wood Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002). See also Alison Morehead, *Creative Pathologies: French Experimental Psychology and Symbolist Avant-Gardes, 1889-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007, PhD. Dissertation).

⁷⁶ Jay A. Clarke, *Becoming Edvard Munch: Influence, Anxiety, and Myth* (Chicago and New Haven: The Art Institute and Yale UP, 2009).

⁷⁷ Paul Nome, *Kunst som "Krystallisasjon": En Studie i Edvard Munchs notater om hans tro, livssyn og kunsthåndverk, relatert til hans bilder* (Oslo: Teologisk Menighetsfakultet, 2000, PhD. Dissertation). See also Haakon Mehren, *Munch med nye øyne: Kunstnerens hellige univers* (Oslo: Orfeus, 2013).

How the person Edvard Munch has been conceived has changed a lot throughout the years. As Patricia Berman noted in the early 90s, one can roughly separate between research on the ‘mythic’ and the ‘historical’ Munch. That is, between the myth of the “tormented genius” and the “real” historical person who was shaped by social, cultural and economic contexts.⁷⁸ Although, in a recent research survey from 2008, Berman updates her terms and now prefers to distinguish between the ‘intrinsic’ and the ‘contextual’ readings of Munch, it seems to me that the main line of research on Munch, be it mythic or historical, intrinsic or contextual, mostly concerns the *person* Edvard Munch.⁷⁹

Although scholarship concerning Edvard Munch has its strong satellites in North America (especially the works by Reinhold Heller, Patricia Berman, and Jay Clarke) and Germany (for instance Dieter Buchhart), most research has been, and is still taking place in Norway by scholars connected to the Munch Museum, the National Museum and the University of Oslo. Works by Leif Østby, Ragna Stang, Trygve Nergaard, Arne Eggum, forms a few of the most important historical approaches to Munch, while a brief overview of more recent scholarly approaches would include works by Erik Mørstad, Øivind Storm Bjerke, Mai Britt Guleng and Øivind Ustvedt, to mention but a few.⁸⁰ Most research articles concerning Munch are published in exhibition catalogues connected to the two museums that together own most of Munch’s art today. In the recent past, the Munch Museum has provided the basic research tools of catalogue raisonnés in *Edvard Munch: Complete Paintings* and *Edvard Munch: Collected Graphic Works*,⁸¹ both edited by Gerd Woll. In addition, in 2011 the Munch Museum launched the webpage www.emunch.no (accompanied by an exhibition and catalogue⁸²) which eventually will provide scans of every page (published and unpublished texts, notes, and letters) left by Munch at his death, making them searchable and even providing some English translations.

Internationally, several PhD. dissertations have been written about Munch. Three significant examples are Tina Yarborough, *Exhibition Strategies and Wartime Politics in the*

⁷⁸ Patricia Berman, "(Re-) reading Edvard Munch: Trends in the Current Literature, 1982-1993," *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 66, Winter, 45-67 (1994).

⁷⁹ Relating artist and work is a characteristic of traditional art history which as such has its own historical emergence. For two critical discussion of the history of art history writing as an issue of artist/work see Gabriele Guercio, *Art as Existence: The Artist's Monograph and its Project* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006) and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art* [Devant l'image: Question posée aux fins d'une histoire de l'art] (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005; or. published, 1990).

⁸⁰ For a survey of the recent research literature concerning Edvard Munch, see Patricia Berman, "The Many Lives of Edvard Munch," in *Edvard Munch: Complete Paintings*, ed. Gerd Woll, 1277-93 (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 2008).

⁸¹ Gerd Woll, ed. *Edvard Munch: Collected Graphic Works* (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 2012).

⁸² Mai Britt Guleng, ed. *eMunch.no - tekst og bilde* (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 2011).

Art and Career of Edvard Munch, 1916-1921,⁸³ as well as Alison Morehead, *Creative Pathologies: French Experimental Psychology and Symbolist Avant-Gardes, 1889-1900*,⁸⁴ and Shelley Wood Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism*.⁸⁵ In the Norwegian context, however, six PhD. dissertations concerning Munch have been written. These are Frank Høifødt, *Kvinnen, Kunsten, Korset: Edvard Munchs Kunst anno 1900*,⁸⁶ Paul Nome, *Kunst som "Krystallisasjon": En studie i Edvard Munchs notater om hans tro, livssyn og kunstforståelse, relatert til hans bilder*, Wenche Volle, *Munchs Rom*,⁸⁷ Stian Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch. Et utsatt liv*,⁸⁸ Signe Marie Endresen, *Serial Experiments. Close-Readings of Edvard Munch's Det grønne værelset (1907)*,⁸⁹ and Erik Mørstad, *Edvard Munch: Formative år 1874-1892: Norske og franske impulser*.⁹⁰

Distinctly philosophically oriented approaches to Munch and his art have been less common, but there are a few examples. An article by Hans Herlof Grelland, "The Concept of Anxiety and its Image: Edvard Munch and Søren Kierkegaard"⁹¹ briefly discusses the relation between Munch and Kierkegaard's writings, while Espen Anders Amundsen's master thesis, *Munch og Nietzsche*⁹² discuss the relation between Munch and Nietzsche's philosophy, which is similar to the approach of Michael J. Stawser II's "Dionysian Painting: a Nietzschean interpretation of Munch."⁹³ Jonas M. N. Sørensen has discussed the relation between Emmanuel Lévinas' understanding of death and Munch's painting *The Death of Marat II* in a published conference paper.⁹⁴ Hend Dīaa Dīaa Seifeldin Khalifa's master thesis *Authentic Dasein and the Anxious Uncanny*⁹⁵ is a thematic interpretation of a few paintings by Munch in light of Kant's and Heidegger's philosophies. Without going into detail of each text, what they

⁸³ Tina Yarborough, *Exhibition Strategies and Wartime Politics in the Art and Career of Edvard Munch, 1916-1921* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995, PhD. Dissertation).

⁸⁴ Morehead, *Creative Pathologies: French Experimental Psychology and Symbolist Avant-Gardes, 1889-1900*. Esp. Chapter 7. "Madness in Method: Edvard Munch and the Problem of Pathological Form."

⁸⁵ Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism*.

⁸⁶ Frank Høifødt, *Kvinnen, Kunsten, Korset: Edvard Munchs Kunst anno 1900* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 1995, PhD. Dissertation).

⁸⁷ Wenche Volle, *Munchs Rom* (Oslo: Oslo School of Architecture and Design, 2012, PhD. Dissertation).

⁸⁸ Stian Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2013, PhD. Dissertation).

⁸⁹ Signe Marie Endresen, *Serial Experiments. Close-Readings of Edvard Munch's Det grønne værelset (1907)* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2015, PhD. Dissertation).

⁹⁰ Erik Mørstad, *Edvard Munch: Formative år 1874-1892: Norske og franske impulser* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2016, PhD. Dissertation).

⁹¹ Hans Herlof Grelland, "The Concept of Anxiety and its Image - Edvard Munch and Søren Kierkegaard," in *Edvard Munch: Angst/Anxiety*, 39-47 (Århus: ARoS, 2012).

⁹² Espen Anders Amundsen, *Munch og Nietzsche* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2004, Master Thesis).

⁹³ Michael J. Stawser II, "Dionysian Painting: a Nietzschean interpretation of Munch," *Konsthistorisk Tidsskrift* (1992).

⁹⁴ Jonas M. N. Sørensen, "Levinas on Death: An Interpretation of Edvard Munch's The Death of Marat II (1907)," *Nordicum - Mediterraneum*, Vol. 8, no. 2 (2013).

⁹⁵ Hend Dīaa Dīaa Seifeldin Khalifa, *Authentic Dasein and the Anxious Uncanny* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo, 2012, Master Thesis).

have in common is that the meeting point between artworks and philosophy is characterized by discussions of thematic correspondences between Munch's art and different philosophies. Or, in the case of Grelland's article, the issue is to biographically ascertain to what degree Munch himself read and understood Kierkegaard. In my view, in the abovementioned studies, Munch's works are seen "in light of" the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Levinas, Kant, and Heidegger. That is, Munch's works are taken as illustrative of already given philosophical ideas, and not – as I will come to suggest in this thesis – beings that show and articulate "philosophical ideas" or rather, what I will call pictorial *thinking*, themselves. It is the claim of this thesis that if we are to understand how Munch's art echoes the above philosophers – or how the philosophers' thinking resounds in Munch's art – attention must first be paid to the pictorial thinking that goes on in these works.

The theme of death, more specifically, is among the most common topics in the Munch research, along the themes of love and anxiety. It is a usual theme in studies of *The Frieze of Life*, as Munch characterized the frieze as "a poem about life, about love and death."⁹⁶ Not unusually, the theme is given a chapter in books and biographies,⁹⁷ or the theme is treated in the course of the text.⁹⁸ The major article on the topic, however, is Arne Eggum's "The Theme of Death." Eggum discusses Munch's major works concerning death (beginning with *The Sick Child* and ending with *Metabolism*), paintings as well as drawings and graphic works, and also works with related themes such as family, inheritance, childhood, puberty and sickness. The article is generally a historic-biographical reading of the various death-motifs in light of Munch's family history – the death of his mother (1868), sister (1877), father (1889) and brother (1895) – as well as Munch's own illness in the childhood years.

Death

Few issues are more disputed throughout human history than the question concerning death. What it means for a human being to be dying, to die and reside in death has been questions dealt with in a wide array of disciplines, from sociology and biology, to philosophy and

⁹⁶ "Frisen er tænkt som en række dekorative billeder, der samlet skulde gi et billede av livet... Frisen er tænkt som et digt om livet, om kjærligheten og døden." Munch, *Livsfrisens tilblivelse*, 2. See for instance, Mai Britt Guleng, "Livsfrisens fortellinger. Edvard Munchs bildeserier," in *Edvard Munch: 1863-1944*, ed. Mai Britt Guleng, Birgitte Sauge, and Jon-Ove Steihaug, 128-39 (Milano: Skira, 2013), 135-136.

⁹⁷ See "Kvinnen og Døden. Likgufset," in Stenersen, *Edvard Munch: Nærbilde av et geni*, 112-135; "Eros and Death," in Ole Sarvig, *The Graphic Works of Edvard Munch* (Copenhagen: Hamlet Edition, 1980), 39-70; Chapter 8, "The Physiology of Inherited Disease, Death, and Immortality," in Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism*, 90-96; Chapter 2, "Sickness/death/anxiety," in Magne Bruteig, *Munch: Drawings* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2004), 37-55.

⁹⁸ Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 114-122; Ragna Stang, *Edvard Munch: Mennesket og kunstneren* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug & Co, 1977), 123-124.

theology. Despite death's long history, however, the academic awareness of death as a historical phenomenon is of comparably recent date. The idea of a specific study of death was proposed by the Russian zoologist Élie Metchnikoff in 1903, but it was first the post-war years that saw the emergence of *thanatology* as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of death.⁹⁹ Its emergence can be seen itself as a result of a growing awareness of the changing meaning of death in the 20th century, described by Geoffrey Gorer in his now classic article "The Pornography of Death" from 1955.¹⁰⁰ The discipline, moreover, is and has been connected to palliative care and education within medical and nursing schools, taking Elisabeth Kübler-Ross influential work *On Death and Dying* (1969) as one of its major points of departure.¹⁰¹ But it has also encouraged several historical approaches to death and dying.

Notably, there are historical accounts of the theological debates on the nature of death within Christianity¹⁰² as well as more comprehensive approaches to the understanding of death in various world religions.¹⁰³ And although death might have been present in art since the pre-historical cave-paintings¹⁰⁴ and is very much still so today,¹⁰⁵ the major historical survey of art and death remains Philippe Ariès 1983 study, *Images of Man and Death*.¹⁰⁶ The question of death and art has nevertheless been treated in a wide array of more specific studies pertaining to their respective historical periods and geographical regions.¹⁰⁷ Compiling a comprehensive bibliography of the theme of death, however, is obviously impossible, insofar as the theme could be taken up in nearly any academic discipline from economics to etymology. Yet a significant point of orientation for the present thesis is the now classic historical account of death that can be found in Ariès' *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*,¹⁰⁸ and his main work *The Hour of our Death*. More

⁹⁹ Fonseca and Testoni, "The Emergence of Thanatology and Current Practice in Death Education," *Omega*, Vol. 64 (2), 157-79 (2011-2012).

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey Gorer, "The Pornography of Death," in *Encounter*, 49-55 (London: Encounter Ltd., 1955).

¹⁰¹ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Macmillan, 1969; repr., 1970).

¹⁰² D.J. Davies, *The Theology of Death* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

¹⁰³ H. Ōbayashi, *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*, 23.

¹⁰⁵ See for example Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Philippe Ariès, *Images of Man and Death* [Images de l'homme devant la mort], trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985; or. published, 1983).

¹⁰⁷ See for instance, Emily Townsend Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*, vol. 46, Sather classical lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), Lena Liepe and Kristin Bliksrud Aavitsland, *Memento mori: døden i middelalderens billedverden* (Oslo: Novus, 2011), Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c. 1500-c. 1800* (London: Published in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum by Reaktion Books, 1991), Marianne Westh and Bente M. Jørgensen, *Dødsbilleder - livsformer: folkelig verdensopfattelse i det 17. og 18. århundredes Frankrig* (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1988, PhD. Dissertation), and Townsend, *Art and Death*.

¹⁰⁸ Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Marion Boyars, 1976).

recently, Kellehear has conducted a major review of the literature concerning death and presented it as a historical approach to dying in his *A Social History of Dying*.

Although it is not a specific theme of this thesis, it is worth mentioning that also in the Norwegian context there are related studies treating attitudes towards death, such as Arnved Nedkvitne's *Møte med døden i norrøn middelalder: en mentalitetshistorisk studie*,¹⁰⁹ which is a detailed study of the change in attitude towards death taking place in the transition between the Norse and Christian Middle ages in Norway and Scandinavia. Einar Hodvhaugen's *Vårt møte med døden*,¹¹⁰ offers a brief overview of traditional and modern attitudes and customs relating to death and dying in Norway. And Olaf Aagedal (Ed.), *Døden på norsk*,¹¹¹ presents several case studies of Norwegian attitudes towards death in both historical and contemporary perspectives. More broadly, there are several books providing short, historical overviews of death such as Douglas J. Davis, *A Brief History of Death*,¹¹² and W. M. Spellman, *A Brief History of Death*.¹¹³

What is common to this far from exhausting list of historical approaches to death is that they all first and foremost concern the social and cultural history of *dying*. Dying is defined by Kellehear as “*a self-conscious anticipation of impending death and the social alterations in one's lifestyle prompted by ourselves and others that are based upon that awareness.*”¹¹⁴ Dying, in other words, is a social and cultural event, which the above studies usually approach through the notion of *attitudes*. The main question for the historical approaches to death has in other words been to understand how man's attitudes towards death have changed. However, this socio-historical approach to dying usually recognizes the connection between dying as a social event and death as a metaphysical question. That is to say, that changing *attitudes* towards death is usually (but as we will see, not always) seen as contingent upon changing understandings of what death *is*. In Nedkvitne's study this connection is explicit for the choice of object of study, namely in that the change from traditional Norse culture into a Christian culture not only *affected* attitudes towards death, but occurs *as* changing attitudes towards death.

¹⁰⁹ Arnved Nedkvitne, *Møtet med døden i norrøn middelalder: en mentalitetshistorisk studie* (Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag, 1997).

¹¹⁰ Einar Hodvhaugen, *Vårt møte med døden* (Oslo: Det norske samlaget, 1981).

¹¹¹ Olaf Aagedal, ed. *Døden på norsk* (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 1994).

¹¹² Douglas James Davies, *A Brief History of Death*, Blackwell brief histories of religion (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2005).

¹¹³ W. M. Spellman, *A Brief History of Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).

¹¹⁴ Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*, 2.

Studies explicitly concerning the history of what death *is*, namely as a philosophical question, however, are far less common. Jacques Choron's *Death and Western Thought*,¹¹⁵ is in this context the major and classic historical review of philosophical approaches to the question of what death is, as he discusses philosophical approaches to death from the pre-Socratics up to the 20th century.

Introducing Heidegger's Philosophy

The question concerning art emerges as a central topic in Heidegger's oeuvre in the middle of the 1930s, and it is, like most of the Heideggerian themes I will discuss, intimately connected to the so-called *turning* [die Kehre] in Heidegger's philosophy; a turning from the path of transcendental phenomenology, characteristic of the work up until *Being and Time*, to what Heidegger himself comes to call *thinking of being* [Seinsdenken]. A guideline in my reading of Heidegger's philosophy is Heidegger's own claim that "every thinker thinks only one thought."¹¹⁶ And the single thought Heidegger constantly ponders, although hidden in ever-new questions and ways of thinking, is the question of being [die Seinsfrage]; or more precisely, the question concerning the *truth* of being. The implication of this guideline is that in order to understand Heidegger's thinking on art, I think it is crucial to pay attention to the way in which the question of art relates to the question of being. For this reason, I will in this section first briefly outline the question concerning being and its relation to the human mode of being (what Heidegger calls *Dasein*), and the change within the very question of being that is implied by the *turning*.

Second, a significant premise for Heidegger's engagement with art and history is his critique of modern science – a critique that he also levels against the discipline of art history. According to Heidegger, insofar as art history understands the work of art as an *object* it will overlook what he claims makes the work to be of central, world-historical importance, namely that it is *the happening of truth*. But in order to understand what Heidegger means by his description of the work as the happening of truth, I think it is helpful to briefly introduce and discuss his critique of modern science, and with it, art history.

Third, in order to understand Heidegger's views on art and artworks, I think it is crucial first to acknowledge the primary point of departure for Heidegger's writing of "The

¹¹⁵ Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought* (New York: Collier Books, 1973).

¹¹⁶ Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 50. [Jeder Denker denkt nur einen einzigen Gedanken] (GA 8, 53).

Origin of the Work of Art” when he wrote it; namely his explicit ambition to *overcome aesthetics*. This ambition, however, is intimately linked to the task of overcoming “metaphysics.” Thus, I will end this brief introduction to Heidegger’s philosophy by discussing Heidegger’s understanding of aesthetics, metaphysics, and what he means by “overcoming” them.

The Question Concerning Being, Dasein, and the Turning

The central aim of Heidegger’s first major work, *Being and Time*, is to prepare the ground for answering what he calls “*the question of the meaning of being.*”¹¹⁷ According to Heidegger, the entire history of Western philosophy has overlooked this question in favor of the question concerning the meaning of the being of *beings*. That is to say, that the Western history of philosophy has since its early beginnings been oblivious to the “ontological difference” between being [das Sein] and beings [das Seiende]. Instead of questioning being in distinction from beings, the Western tradition has interpreted being as *a* (fundamental or ultimate, i.e. *essential*) being, from which actual (*existing*) *beings* derive. In manner of anticipation, Heidegger contends that this traditional interpretation of being – based in the distinction between suprasensuous essence [*essentia*] and sensuous existence [*existentia*] – has determined Western philosophy from Plato until Nietzsche, and as such, he idiosyncratically names this entire philosophical tradition *metaphysics*.

Heidegger often uses the German word ‘Wesen,’ which is translated to ‘essence’ in English. But this translation is somewhat unfortunate in the case of Heidegger’s texts, considering his concerns regarding the abovementioned *metaphysical* interpretation of being. Contrary to the metaphysical interpretation of essence (which in German is ‘Essenz’), Heidegger means by essence [Wesen] “the coming to presence” or “presencing”¹¹⁸ [Anwesen] of something. The essence essences [das Wesen west] and must be heard as a verb, not as a noun. Essence, in other words, is not itself *a* being. As William Lovitt explains in a footnote regarding his translation of the word, “the essence of anything is its ‘enduring as presence.’ As such, it is the manner in which anything in its enduring comports itself effectually as what it is, i.e., the manner in which it “holds sway” through time.”¹¹⁹ Essence, or rather *essencing*,

¹¹⁷ *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit], trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; repr., 2008; or. published, 1927), 1. [die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein] (*Gesamtausgabe 2: Sein und Zeit* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1977; or. published, 1927), 1).

¹¹⁸ “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977; reprint, 2013; or. published, 1954), 9. (*GA 7, 12*).

¹¹⁹ “The Turning,” 36, n1.

does not designate that which something “really” is (as if behind its appearance), but the *manner* in which it is as it is. Consequentially, essences are not eternal or stable, but are subject to historical change.¹²⁰ In order to avoid confusion, I will throughout the thesis use the Latin ‘*essentia*’ when designating essence in its metaphysical meaning, and reserve *essence* for Heidegger’s ‘Wesen.’

However, in order to confront the history of Western philosophy/metaphysics, Heidegger – in *Being and Time* – holds that it is first necessary to clarify the horizon from out of which this question is intelligible in the first place. This horizon is the being of that being which poses the question, namely the being that we are – which Heidegger names *Dasein* [being-there]. According to Heidegger, “*understanding of being is itself a definitive characteristic of Dasein’s being.*”¹²¹ Thus, *Dasein*’s character of being the being for which its own being is “an issue” is claimed to be the hermeneutical condition for *any* understanding of the meaning of being as such.¹²²

After *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger eventually comes to claim that the priority of the question must be thought inversely. Namely, that *being* as such is what provides *Dasein*’s understanding of its own being. The question, hence, is not concerning the *meaning* of being (for *Dasein*), but the historical *truth* or essence of being itself. In other words, that being *has* its own history, or as will be explained in the next chapter, *is* its own history.

Heidegger’s struggle to come to terms with this “turning” in his thinking is clearly visible for instance in the 1935 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In the third section of the course, entitled “The Question of the Essence of Being,” he is attempting to clarify the meaning of the word ‘being,’ and returns in due course to the initial position held in *Being and Time*: to attempt to understand ‘being’ is “nothing other than asking about the meaning of being.”¹²³ He then repeats the determination of *Dasein*, stating that the “one necessary condition for our ability to be here [da-sein] is this: that we understand being.”¹²⁴ Then, shortly, follows what almost seems like an epiphany for Heidegger: “particular beings can open themselves up as such to us only if and when we already understand being in advance in

¹²⁰ Emad and Kalary suggest the word ‘swaying’ as a translation of ‘Wesen.’ See their discussion in *Mindfulness* [Besinnung], trans. Parvis Emad and Emad Kalary (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006; repr., 2016; or published, 1997), xxxiii-xxxiv. (*Gesamtausgabe 66: Besinnung* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1997)).

¹²¹ *Being and Time*, 32. [*Seinsverständnis ist selbst eine Seinsbestimmtheit des Daseins*] (*GA 2*, 16).

¹²² See *Being and Time*, 32 and 272. (*GA 2*, 16 and 304).

¹²³ *Introduction to Metaphysics* [Einführung in die Metaphysik], trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000; or published, 1935), 88. [nichts anderes als: nach dem Sinn von Sein fragen] (*Gesamtausgabe 40: Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983), 89).

¹²⁴ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 89. Translator’s square brackets. [Wenn aber der Mensch im Dasein steht, dann ist eine notwendige Bedingung dafür, daß er da-sein kann, dieses, daß er das Sein versteht] (*GA 40*, 90).

its essence. *The essence has already lit itself up.* But it still remains in the realm of the unquestioned.”¹²⁵ That is to say, Dasein is conditioned by its understanding of being’s essence [Wesen], but being’s essence is “lit up” by *being itself*. In other words, the understanding of being – which we must remember is *the* necessary condition for Dasein’s being – is “granted” by being to Dasein. From this, the way is short for Heidegger to come to recognize what is going to be a decisive occupation for his thinking over the next decades: that the inquiry into the question concerning being “must maintain itself within the *history of being* if it is, in turn, to unfold and preserve its own historical import.”¹²⁶

This turning is a result, as Heidegger puts it, of the realization that the attempt of answering the question concerning being “did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics.”¹²⁷ Giving priority to the human mode of being – and the transcendental (existential) structures governing it – for establishing the horizon for interpreting the meaning of being, closes off in advance the possibility of understanding being from *being’s* perspective, as it were. That is to say, Heidegger claims that being is not understandable because of any capacity of Dasein, but because “it” – despite not being *a* being – lets Dasein understand it, or rather, lets understanding take place.

Dasein is the being that dwells in an understanding of being; or rather, Dasein is the being that *is* an understanding of being.¹²⁸ ‘Understanding’ [Verstehen] is in this sense synonymous to ‘existence’ [*ex-sistere*; literally, *to stand forth*]. This does not mean, however, that Dasein always or by necessity has an explicit *interpretation* of being clearly in mind, but rather that anything Dasein does, makes, says, or thinks, is guided by an implicit understanding of “what is and what matters.”¹²⁹ Also in the cases when it is never brought out and contemplated, any Dasein, Heidegger argues, has an implicit understanding of what it means for any entity (including itself) to be, and what is worthwhile doing. But even when explicitly considered, a main point Heidegger stresses is that this understanding of what is and

¹²⁵ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 90-91. Emphasis mine. [Denn das viel berufene besondere Seiende kann sich *als ein solches* uns nur *eröffnen*, wenn wir und je nach dem wir schon im Vorhinein das Sein in *seinem* Wesen verstehen. Dieses Wesen hat sich schon gelichtet. Aber *noch* verbleibt es im Fraglosen] (*GA 40*, 92).

¹²⁶ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 97. Emphasis mine. [muß sich selbst in der Geschichte des Seins halten, um ihrerseits die eigene geschichtliche Tragweite zu entfalten und zu bewahren] (*GA 40*, 99).

¹²⁷ “Letter on Humanism,” [Brief über den Humanismus], in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, 239-76 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998; reprint, 2009; or. published, 1946), 250. [Der fragliche Abschnitt wurde zurückgehalten, weil das Denken im zureichenden Sagen dieser Kehre versagte und so mit Hilfe der Sprache der Metaphysik nicht durchkam] (*Gesamtausgabe 9: Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1976), 328).

¹²⁸ Note that ‘understanding’ is distinct from ‘interpretation’ and ‘assertion.’ The former means the basic occurrence of meaning – that is, that something appears as it essentially is, and that Dasein “is” on the basis of – or within – or *as* – this understanding. Understanding, in Heidegger’s sense, is therefore the basis for interpretation, not vice versa. (See *Being and Time*, 188-203). (*GA 2*, 197-204).

¹²⁹ As formulated by Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 43.

what matters is not simply “invented” and projected by the subjective, human being. The understanding of being is always *received*, insofar as being’s essence always already has “lit itself up.” As it is put in “The Origin of the Work of Art”:

In referring to this self-establishing of openness in the open, thinking touches on a sphere that cannot yet be explicated here. Only this much should be noted, that if the nature of the unconcealedness of beings belongs in any way to being itself (cf. *Being and Time*, §44), then being, by way of its own nature, lets the place of openness (the lighting-clearing of the there) happen, and introduces it as a place of the sort in which being emerges or arises in its own way.¹³⁰

Although phrased differently, this resembles the position expressed above, in *Introduction to Metaphysics* – a position referred to yet again in the Addendum of “The Origin” as the “distressing difficulty” concerning “*the relation of being and the human being*.”¹³¹

A distressing difficulty indeed; the relation of being and the human being is, as such, what is aimed at in the question concerning being. From this perspective, I suggest that Heidegger’s attempt at understanding “the riddle of art,” is a central, yet one among several, paths Heidegger attempts to take in his attempt towards understanding the different modes of how being and the human being relate; how these relationships are taking place; and how they are fundamentally grounded in – or rather, occurring as – history [Geschichte], which we will see for Heidegger always means history of being [Seinsgeschichte].

Heidegger’s Critique of Art History as a Modern Science

The relative lack of influence by Heidegger on the discipline of art history is maybe not so surprising, taking into account his seemingly negative verdict of the discipline in general.¹³²

As Boetzkes and Vinegar argue in their introduction to *Heidegger and the Work of Art History*, already in the lecture course *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* from 1923, the roots of Heidegger’s later criticism of art history as a modern science is present.¹³³ According

¹³⁰ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 59. [Mit dem Hinweis auf das Sicheinrichten der Offenheit in das Offene rührt das Denken an einen Bezirk, der hier noch nicht auseinandergelegt werden kann. Nur dieses sei angemerkt, daß, wenn das Wesen der Unverborgenheit des Seienden in irgendeiner Weise zum Sein selbst gehört (vgl. Sein und Zeit § 44), dieses aus seinem Wesen her den Spielraum der Offenheit (die Lichtung des Da) geschehen läßt und ihn als *solches* einbringt, worin jegliches Seiende in seiner Weise aufgeht] (GA 5, 48-49). §44 of *Being and Time* is entitled “Dasein, Disclosedness, and Truth” and is the final paragraph of division one. There it is established that “Being and truth ‘are’ equiprimordially.” *Being and Time*, 272. (GA 2, 304).

¹³¹ “The Origin,” 86. [*Bezug von Sein und Menschenwesen*] (GA 5, 74).

¹³² See for instance, “The Origin,” 39. (GA 5, 26).

¹³³ Boetzkes and Vinegar, *Heidegger and the Work of Art History*, 14. See Martin Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* [Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)], trans. John van Buren (Bloomington &

to Boetzkes and Vinegar, Heidegger sees art history as the perfect example of the development of a “historiological consciousness,”¹³⁴ an understanding of history as the contemporary representation of past events and objects. This – today, almost commonsensical – understanding of history I will suggest lies at the core of Heidegger’s critique of the discipline of art history. And this critique is, as I see it, one of the premises for Heidegger’s philosophical thinking on art as such.

As I wrote above, Heidegger claims that the work of art is “the happening of truth,” but in “The Origin,” he writes that “art-historical study makes the works the *objects of a science*,”¹³⁵ and insofar as we understand artworks as objects, we will never encounter “the work itself.”¹³⁶ But what does this mean? In the lecture “The Establishing by Metaphysics of the Modern World Picture” from 1938, later published as the essay “The Age of the World Picture” in 1952, Heidegger discusses the emergence of the modern epoch through an analysis of the essential characteristics of modern science.

In the essay, Heidegger argues that modern science is essentially characterized by three aspects. These are the *projection of a ground plan* [Grundriss], *method* [Verfahren], and *ongoing activity* [Betrieb]. Science is characterized by that it, in advance of any procedure, opens up and delimits its field of activity within nature or history. It hence projects a ground plan that designates the open sphere in which research can take place. In order to secure the objectivity of that which is investigated within the ground plan, science needs rigorous method. Method is what guarantees that research can establish objective facts and representations. This is true, Heidegger claims, of both the natural and the historical sciences as both represents objects and events, although the objects of the latter is situated in a previous space-time (posited by the projected ground plan). Finally, modern science is characterized by ongoing activity, that is, the activity of the institutionalized scientific community in peer-reviewed journals, conferences, the publication of books and their reviews. In ongoing activity, facts are presented and contested, methods are adjusted. Ongoing activity leads therefore to “the making secure of the precedence of method over whatever is (nature and history), which at any given time becomes objective in research.”¹³⁷

Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1999; or. published, 1923). (*Gesamtausgabe 63: Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*) (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1988).

¹³⁴ Boetzkes and Vinegar, *Heidegger and the Work of Art History* 14.

¹³⁵ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 39. [Die Kunstgeschichtsforschung macht die Werke zum Gegenstand einer Wissenschaft] (*GA 5*, 26).

¹³⁶ “The Origin,” 39. [die Werke selbst] (*GA 5*, 26).

¹³⁷ “The Age of the World Picture,” 125. [die Sicherstellung des Vorrangs des Verfahrens vor dem Seienden (Natur und Geschichte), das jeweils in der Forschung gegenständlich wird] (*GA 5*, 84). Translation altered.

An example could be the art historical practice of dating an undated work. By investigating the dating, art historical practice projects a ground plan in which what is to be investigated is posited; and thus it is determined in advance not only what aspects of the work is relevant, but what the work of art *is*, so that it is relevant for the inquiry. The work is posited as an object, created at a specific point in time. In order to date the art object, the art historian must have at his or her disposal methods which will lead to the correct answer (comparison of sources, which in turn are assigned different valuation as a result of ongoing activity). Upon presenting the result, the conclusion might or might not be contested due to lack of methodical rigor (not using, or misinterpreting, the correct sources).

Contemporary art history as a scientific discipline is of course not reducible to the question of correctly dating art objects. But the essential structure involved in this example can be seen to designate art history in general *insofar* as its mode of investigation is to establish fact and correct interpretations through a correct representation of works of art and their circumstances, understood as the “objects of a science.” In my view, Heidegger’s critique of art history as a modern science seems to encompass not only the investigation of the question concerning dating, attribution, influence, and intention – but also the “new” art historical questions concerning how art, and all its related practices, reveals ideologies, as well as issues of gender, race, sexuality, economics, and technologies. From a Heideggerian perspective, the newness of new art history lies in the expansion of the ground plan and the loosening of the rigor of method by the introduction of “theory” understood as intellectual resources for interpretation (which inevitably leads to a weakening of the certainty of its truth-claims).

However, Heidegger claims that an unquestioned presupposition of modern science is the fundamental understanding of beings as a whole that governs the very possibility of the projected ground plan, method, and ongoing activity; namely, the fundamental distinction between *subjects* and *objects*, along with the interpretation of truth as “certainty.”¹³⁸ As I will discuss in more depth in chapter two, this is the fundamental understanding of beings as a whole which Heidegger claims is characteristic of the modern epoch. Beings as a whole are understood as what can be represented – and thus it is as *world-picture* [Weltbild].¹³⁹

Insofar as Heidegger claims that the work of art concerns our fundamental understanding of what beings are as a whole, it seems to relate to what Erwin Panofsky – from an entirely different vantage point – understands by the concept of *Weltanschauung*

¹³⁸ See *The End of Philosophy*, 26. [Gewißheit] (GA 6.2, 429).

¹³⁹ "The Age of the World Picture," 133-134. (GA 5, 93-94).

[World-view].¹⁴⁰ The third stage of Panofsky's iconological method (which aims at the phenomenon of the *Weltanschauung*) seeks to show that artworks express the "basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of motifs, as well as the production and interpretation of images, stories and allegories, and which give meaning even to the formal arrangements and technical procedures employed."¹⁴¹ Panofsky's approach to art history is based firmly within a neo-Kantian tradition, with particular emphasis on the writings of Ernst Cassirer. As Georges Didi-Huberman has claimed, this has led to the establishment of a certain "Kantian tone"¹⁴² in art history, turning the ontological status of the work of art first and foremost into an *object of knowledge* – or in Heidegger's terms, an *object of science*. For Panofsky, the work of art is a document among other documents, which might be used in order to discover and reconstruct the basic principles which give meaning within an epoch's *Weltanschauung*.

In his discussion of modern science, Heidegger relates the concept of *Weltanschauung* to the emergence of the modern epoch, which, as was mentioned above is characterized by the transformation of the dominant understanding of beings as a whole into a *Weltbild* [world-picture]. A *Weltbild* is thus the objective representation corresponding to a subjective perspective on the world, namely the *Weltanschauung*. What appears as problematic from Heidegger's perspective, is that art historical study – insofar as it essentially is a modern science – will never reach "the work itself" insofar as it is always confined to the projected ground plan, method, and ongoing activity, and hence, that it has always already decided in advance that the work of art is an *object*. Thus, although Heidegger and Panofsky shares the basic conviction that works of art relate somehow to our basic understanding of the world, their understanding of this relation, along with the being of the work of art and its place within the relation, is very different. Moreover, Heidegger seems to claim that the very concept of *Weltanschauung* obscures the possibility of approaching "the work itself" since it already approaches it from within a specific *modern* understanding of beings as a whole. Hence, the attempt to understand art – or history more broadly conceived – before the modern epoch through the concept of *Weltanschauung*, is for Heidegger nothing but "absurd."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ On Panofsky's sources of inspiration on the concept of *Weltanschauung* in Wilhelm Dilthey and Karl Mannheim's writings, see Dana Arnold, *Art History: Contemporary Perspectives on Method* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 101-103.

¹⁴¹ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 38. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴² Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, 109. See the entire chapter three for Didi-Huberman's argument.

¹⁴³ Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 134. [widersinnig] (*GA* 5, 94).

In summary, Heidegger claims that art history – understood as a modern science – will never reach “the work itself” insofar as it predetermines in advance that the work of art is an object. What Heidegger means by “the work itself,” however, is yet to be clarified.

Overcoming Aesthetics, Overcoming Metaphysics

The first lecture-version of “The Origin of the Work of Art” was held November 13, 1935, just a few months after the lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics* from the summer semester the same year. In my view, it is important to remember this upon approaching “The Origin,” as it emphasizes how early within Heidegger’s writings the essay actually is. It is situated in the very beginning of the “turning” in Heidegger’s philosophy, which is attested by the presence of a very brief draft of the history of being.¹⁴⁴ However, at this point, many of the most important and influential issues in Heidegger’s thinking are not yet thought out, let alone put into text. The early, already mentioned critique of modern science in “The Age of the World Picture” is still three years away, the Nietzsche-lectures are not yet begun (1936-46), and the Bremen-lectures (1949) – including “The Question concerning Technology” – are still in the distant future.

However, in order to understand Heidegger’s views on art and artworks, I think it is crucial first to acknowledge the primary point of departure for Heidegger’s writing of “The Origin” when he wrote it; namely his explicit ambition to *overcome aesthetics*. Significantly, the first lecture version of the essay originated around the same time as Heidegger co-arranged a seminar with the art historian Kurt Bauch at the University of Freiburg entitled “Die Überwindung der Ästhetik im Fragen nach der Kunst” [The Overcoming of Aesthetics in the Question Concerning Art] in the winter semester of 1935-36.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the working notes for “The Origin” had at one point in 1934 the title “On the Overcoming of Aesthetics.”¹⁴⁶

Moreover, near the end of *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, a posthumously published work written in 1936-38, in a section entitled “‘Metaphysics’ and the Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger explicitly states that “the question of the origin of the work of art... is most intimately connected with the task of overcoming aesthetics.”¹⁴⁷ What, then, does Heidegger mean by “aesthetics” and what does it mean to “overcome” it?¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ See “The Origin,” 74. (GA 5, 64).

¹⁴⁵ See Michael Gnehm, “The Gaze of ‘Historicity’ in Schongauer and Dürer,” in *Heidegger and the Work of Art History*, ed. Amanda Boetzkes and Aron Vinegar, 195-228 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 201.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* [Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)], trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1999; or. published, 1989), 354. [Appendix IV] (*Gesamtausgabe 65: Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann,

To the former question, the brief answer Heidegger gives is that “aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense.”¹⁴⁹ This is analogous to, but not identical with, the previously mentioned critique of art history as modern science, discussed above. While Heidegger claims that art history takes the work of art as an object of *scientific* (i.e. methodical) inquiry, aesthetics posits it as an object of *experience* [Erlebnis]. The work of art corresponds to our sensuous perception of it. In this sense, Heidegger claims that despite the fact that the philosophical discipline of aesthetics first emerged in the 18th century, “aesthetics begins with the Greeks... during the age of Plato and Aristotle.”¹⁵⁰ Only the pre-Socratics “had no need of ‘aesthetics.’”¹⁵¹ By tracing the historical developments of aesthetics back to the Greeks, and subsuming all forms of art apprehension under the same term – aesthetics – Heidegger’s aim of “overcoming aesthetics” implies a fundamental confrontation with this entire history.

But why is it problematic to see the work of art as an object of aesthetics experience? According to Heidegger, it is because the aesthetic approach to art both presupposes and reinforces the modern philosophical understanding of being as ontologically determined by the dichotomy of subject and objects.¹⁵² That is to say, the aesthetic approach to art presupposes and reinforces the *metaphysical* understanding of being as determined by *essentia* and *existentia*. As such, an aesthetic approach to art will never see the work as the happening of truth, and thus never recognize what Heidegger claims is its historical significance.¹⁵³

As I mentioned above, Heidegger claims that the Western history of philosophy from Plato to Nietzsche – what he calls metaphysics – has overlooked the ontological difference between being and beings, and therefore been oblivious to the question of being as such and

1997), 503). The ambition of overcoming aesthetics must be taken into consideration when reading Heidegger’s infamous statement from the epilogue of “The Origin,” where he suggest that “perhaps [aesthetic] experience is the element in which art dies.” (“The Origin,” 77). [Doch vielleicht ist das Erlebnis das Element, in dem die Kunst stirbt] (GA 5, 67). On this, see Ingvild Torsen, “The Metaphysical Discipline of Aesthetics: Martin Heidegger on The End of Art,” in *History and Judgment*, ed. A. MacLaclan and I. Torsen (Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellow's Conferences, 2006).

¹⁴⁸ For a thorough discussion of Heidegger’s critique of modern aesthetics, see Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 40-64.

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 77. Translation modified. [Die Ästhetik *nimmt* das Kunstwerk als einen Gegenstand und zwar als den Gegenstand der αἴσθησις, des sinnlichen Vernehmens im weiten Sinne] (GA 5, 67).

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche: *Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 80. [Die Ästhetik beginnt bei den Griechen erst in dem Augenblick, da die große Kunst, aber auch die gleichlaufende große Philosophie zu ihrem Ende gehen. In dieser Zeit, dem Zeitalter Platons und des Aristoteles] (GA 6.1, 78).

¹⁵¹ Nietzsche: *Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 80. [keiner „Ästhetik“ bedurften] (GA 6.1, 78).

¹⁵² See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 51-55.

¹⁵³ For a discussion of Heidegger’s interpretation of the most central proponent of modern aesthetics – Kant – see Ingvild Torsen, “Disinterest and Truth: On Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant's Aesthetics,” in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 15-32 (Oxford: Oxford UP, January, 2016).

rather focused on the question of the being of beings. In this way, metaphysics always aims at providing the total and final answer not only what individual beings are, but what beings are *as a whole*. Thus, Heidegger writes, “metaphysics... means the *truth* of beings as a whole.”¹⁵⁴

As will be discussed in more depth in the second chapter, Heidegger claims that the culmination of metaphysics poses the “the supreme danger,”¹⁵⁵ and consequentially, he sets himself the task of preparing for the “overcoming of metaphysics.”¹⁵⁶ Insofar as aesthetics, then, denotes the metaphysical approach to art in Western history, to overcome aesthetics therefore means to overcome metaphysics in the region of art – a region, the transformation of which Heidegger claims is one of the “essential phenomena” of the modern epoch.¹⁵⁷ The task of overcoming aesthetics, in other words, belongs to the task of overcoming metaphysics as such.

For Heidegger, however, to ‘overcome’ [überwinden] metaphysics and aesthetics does neither mean to master or vanquish, nor to simply leave them behind as something foregone. In “The Turning,” Heidegger writes that to ‘overcome’ is meant in the sense of to ‘get over’ [verwunden] something, similar to how “one gets over grief or pain.”¹⁵⁸ Greif does not disappear in overcoming it, but it is accepted and dealt with, it is somehow “incorporated.”¹⁵⁹ Through overcoming, one is transformed, but that which is overcome is still there, although in a new, less all-encompassing way: “To overcome signifies: to bring something under oneself, and at the same time to put what is thus placed under oneself behind one as something that will henceforth have no determining power.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, overcoming metaphysics means to incorporate – get over – the fundamental interpretation of being as determined by the

¹⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *History of Being* [Die Geschichte des Seyns], trans. William McNeill and Jeffrey Powell (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2015; or. published, 1998), 19. [Metaphysik... heißt die *Wahrheit* des Seienden im Ganzen] (*Gesamtausgabe 69: Die Geschichte des Seyns* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1998), 19).

¹⁵⁵ “The Question Concerning Technology,” 26. [die höchste Gefahr] (*GA 7, 27*).

¹⁵⁶ *The End of Philosophy*, 84. [Überwindung der Metaphysik] (*GA 7, 69*).

¹⁵⁷ “The Age of the World Picture,” 116. (*GA 5, 75*).

¹⁵⁸ “The Turning,” 39. [Dieses Verwinden ist ähnlich dem, was geschieht, wenn im menschlichen Bereich ein Schmerz verwunden wird] (*Gesamtausgabe 11: Identität und Differenz* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2006), 116).

¹⁵⁹ “Overcoming is worthy of thought only when we think about incorporation.” (*The End of Philosophy*, 91). [Überwindung bleibt nur insofern denkwürdig, als an die Verwindung gedacht wird] (*GA 7, 77*). Note that this is different to how Gianni Vattimo explains ‘verwindung’ as “an acceptance that twists it and so promotes remission, as from a disease.” (Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism & Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, & Law* [Nichilismo ed emancipazione], trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006; or. published, 2003), 169). To get over a disease is not to incorporate it, but to leave it behind, get it past, and in some cases, even to ex-corporate it.

¹⁶⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper One, 1982; repr., 1991; or. published, 1961), Vol IV, 223. [Was heißt Überwindung? überwinden bedeutet: etwas unter sich bringen und das so unter-sich-Gelassene zugleich hinter sich bringen als dasjenige, was fortan keine bestimmende Macht mehr haben soll] (*GA 6.2, 365*).

distinction between *essentia* and *existence*. To overcome metaphysics is to bring “out the essence of metaphysics, and only thus [bring] metaphysics back within its own limits.”¹⁶¹

In conclusion, I contend that Heidegger’s thinking on art is intimately entangled in Heidegger’s philosophy more broadly conceived. And as such, my guideline throughout this thesis will be to keep in mind the *question of being* in my discussions of Heidegger’s thinking, but also – as I will clarify in due course, when discussing the pictorial thinking of death in Munch’s *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*.

Overview of the Thesis

The first chapter, entitled “Truth, Art, and Pictorial Thinking,” is structured in three sections, corresponding to the three notions of the title. The chapter takes its point of departure in Heidegger’s claim that the work of art is the happening of truth, and thus begins by discussing Heidegger’s understanding of truth as *unconcealment* and as *the strife between world and earth*. The second section discusses the distinction Heidegger makes between *art* and the *work* of art, as well as the notions of createdness, preservation, and founding. The section ends by suggesting there to be a difficulty in Heidegger’s account, which provokes the question of whether one *can* encounter works of art at all and recognize their historical significance from Heidegger’s perspective. In order to address this issue, the third section discusses Heidegger’s understanding of the relation between art, thinking, and what he calls the essence of language, and ends by suggesting the notion of *pictorial thinking* as a possible way through which the historical work of art can be approached, despite the difficulty pointed out above.

The second chapter, “The Metaphysics of Art and the History of Being,” is structured in two sections, corresponding to the two notions in the title. The chapter takes its point of departure in Heidegger’s claim that there is a relation of correspondence between the history of being and the essential history of Western art. As such, the first section investigates Heidegger’s understanding of the *metaphysical essence of the work of art*. The second section first discusses Heidegger’s notions of history and epochs, which are crucial for his understanding of the history of being. Then follows a brief overview of the determinative characteristics of the epochs of the history of being, from the pre-Socratic to the late-modern

¹⁶¹ *On the Way to Language*, 20. [die das *Wesen* der Metaphysik zum Vorschein und sie dadurch erst in ihre Grenzen einbringt] (*GA 12*, 103-104).

epochs. Special emphasis will be given to the modern and late-modern epochs, as they will be most relevant for the second part of the thesis. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks on Heidegger's unthought art history of being and suggestions for how works of art can be approached from this perspective.

The third chapter, "*The Sick Child: Death and the Pillow*," is structured in three sections. The first section introduces Munch's painting *The Sick Child* and provides a close description of the work in order to unfold how it relates to the question concerning the nature of death. In order to clarify the historical significance and contribution of the pictorial thinking of death in *The Sick Child*, the second section discusses the history of pictorial thinking to which it will be argued that *The Sick Child* belongs. This history stretches back to the Archaic period of art history, and the discussion will be focused around three exemplary works of art: an Archaic *pinax* (funerary plaque) depicting the ancient Greek funerary rite *prothesis*; an engraving from a late-medieval *Ars Moriendi*, a handbook of how to die well; and finally, the oil painting *Sick Girl* by Munch's contemporary Christian Krohg. The third section returns to *The Sick Child* and suggests that its transgression of the pictorial idiom of Naturalism should also be seen as a challenge towards of the metaphysical presuppositions that sustains and guides the Naturalist pictorial idiom. As such, the work's pictorial thinking – of what will be suggested to be called the *affective reality of death* – brings along a challenge towards the understanding of the modern notion of the subject, and thus can be seen as a contribution to a transformation of the epoch's understanding of beings as a whole.

The fourth and final chapter, "*Metabolism: The Fall of Man and the Birth of Death*," is structured in three sections. The first section introduces *Metabolism* and discusses its relation to Symbolism and to Munch's artistic project *The Frieze of Life*, to which Munch claimed that *Metabolism* is as necessary as the "buckle is to the belt."¹⁶² The section ends by posing the fundamental question of what death *is* so that it can be thought pictorially, which will be argued to be necessary to clarify before further discussing *Metabolism*. As such, the second section turns to Heidegger's writings on death in *Being and Time* and in the post-war lectures "The Thing" and "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." After comparing and discussing these two different ways Heidegger approaches the question of death, the section argues that analogous to what Heidegger calls "oblivion of being"¹⁶³ there belong an oblivion of death, to the history of being. The third section returns to *Metabolism*. First, it will investigate the pictorial history

¹⁶² Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

¹⁶³ Martin Heidegger, "Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture "Time and Being"," in *On Time and Being*, ed. Joan Stambaugh, trans. Joan Stambaugh, 25-64 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972; reprint, 2002), 29. [Seinsvergessenheit] (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2007), 37).

concerning the fall of man, to which it will be argued that the work belongs. After a study of this history – stretching back to catacomb paintings from the first centuries AD, through medieval book illuminations, and an engraving by Albrecht Dürer – the chapter ends by suggesting that *Metabolism* brings into view a radically different understanding of what death is, which will be related to Heidegger's determination of the late-modern epoch as the epoch of technology and nihilism.

Part I

CHAPTER ONE

TRUTH, ART, AND PICTORIAL THINKING

This thesis explores the question of how the history of art – here limited to a study focused around two paintings by Edvard Munch, *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism* – can be approached from the perspective of Heidegger’s thinking on art and the history of being. As the first step of sketching out and establishing the perspective from which I will approach Munch’s works in the second part of the thesis, this chapter will first explore and discuss Heidegger’s understanding of the work of art as “the happening of truth.”¹⁶⁴ Moreover, in an attempt at addressing what I will suggest is an unanswered question opened by Heidegger’s writings on art, I will eventually discuss the relation between art and thinking, and finally suggest the notion of *pictorial thinking* as a reply to this difficulty.

However, as Heidegger’s engagement with the “riddle of art”¹⁶⁵ is deeply embedded in the broader concerns of his philosophical thinking, I will situate my discussion within other relevant aspects of his philosophy. Most notably, I will follow the guideline introduced in the introduction, namely Heidegger’s claim that “every thinker thinks only one thought”¹⁶⁶ –

¹⁶⁴ "The Origin," 56. [das Geschehnis der Wahrheit] (GA 5, 45).

¹⁶⁵ "The Origin," 77. [Rätsel der Kunst] (GA 5, 67).

¹⁶⁶ *What is Called Thinking?*, 50. [Jeder Denker denkt nur einen einzigen Gedanken] (GA 8, 53).

which in Heidegger's own case is the question of being. Thus, as I will show further on, I will understand Heidegger's engagement with the question of art as ultimately motivated by the question of being, and hence that it should be understood in light of this motivation.

The very definition of the work of art as *the happening of truth* necessitates a discussion of Heidegger's understanding of truth, which he draws from the ancient Greek word for truth, ἀλήθεια [*aletheia*; Unverborgenheit; unconcealment]. As will be made apparent in the following chapters, the question of truth is intimately related to the question of being – which in Heidegger's later works is formulated as the question concerning the *truth* of being – as well as to the notion of the history of being. Consequently, the question of truth is also discussed by Heidegger in various ways throughout his oeuvre.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, in the first section of this chapter I will discuss Heidegger's understanding of truth by focusing on its formulation around the time of "The Origin of the Work of Art," namely as the *strife* [Streit] *between world* [Welt] *and earth* [Erde].

In the second section, I will turn to the question of art and Heidegger's distinction between *art* and the *work* of art. Briefly put, Heidegger claims that art is one of the several ways truth (unconcealment) *happens*, while the work of art is the concrete being that occasions a happening of truth and lets it take place. Indeed, the work is "setting up a world and setting forth the earth."¹⁶⁸ As I will clarify further, I suggest this to mean that Heidegger contends that, most fundamentally, works of art concern our most basic understanding of that which is.

As was discussed in the introduction, Heidegger describes the human mode of being – Dasein – as the being that understands being. That is to say, he claims that every aspect of Dasein's doing and reflecting – every single aspect of its life as a whole – is sustained, directed, and guided by a basic, implicit understanding of what it means for beings to be. In this sense, whether Dasein understands beings as the creation of God, for instance, or as material entities that simply *are* for no particular reason or purpose, is not a question of distinguishing between two different "perspectives" on an otherwise stable reality "in itself," because the very understanding of a reality "in itself" is based on an understanding of what it *means* for reality to be "in itself." Thus, as will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, it is rather a question of two fundamentally different ways in which the very understanding of a reality "in itself" *is* – and with it, two different understandings of the being of beings as a

¹⁶⁷ For a thorough study of Heidegger's notion of truth along with the historical changes of the notion within his oeuvre, see for instance Mark A. Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

¹⁶⁸ Heidegger, "The Origin," 48. [Indem das Werk eine Welt aufstellt und die Erde herstellt] (*GA* 5, 36).

whole. As such, they belong to two different *worlds* of two different being-historical *epochs*, in Heidegger's sense.

Consequently, Heidegger's notion of the work of art as the happening of truth concerns exactly Dasein's understanding of being insofar as he claims that the work is, as was mentioned above, "setting up a *world* and setting forth the earth."¹⁶⁹ As such, I will suggest that Heidegger contends that the work of art works to strengthen and focus, and in some cases challenge – and thus contribute in transforming – our basic, implicit understanding of being.

However, a crucial aspect of Heidegger's understanding of the work of art is that the world that it sets up must be recognized by what he calls *the preservers* [die Bewahrenden]. That is to say, that for the work to be a work, it must be *at work* – it must be working. This I will suggest to mean that for the work to be a work it must contribute in holding open an understanding of being, which in turn is seen and recognized by a historical community of preservers. In other words, Heidegger seems to claim that the very work character of the work of art is intimately connected with its historical contemporaneity, or more accurately, to its being-historical *epoch*. But as will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, the being-historical epochs changes, and with them the openness of the worlds that the works of art contribute in holding open. Indeed, Heidegger seems convinced that works from ages long gone, now placed in museums and galleries, "are no longer the same as they once were,"¹⁷⁰ and relates this to what he calls "world-withdrawal and world-decay."¹⁷¹ Yet, I will suggest this provokes the question of whether – and if so, how – one *can* encounter works of art at all and recognize their historical significance from Heidegger's perspective? For if the work character of the work is to belong to a being-historical epoch, can we – who do not belong to the same epoch, and thus are obstructed from *preserving* the work – at all approach, see, understand, or think *the happening of truth* that Heidegger claims that the work as work *is*?

In the third and final section of this chapter, I will address this question through a discussion of the relation between art – in the sense of poetizing [Dichtung] – and thinking [Denken], between which Heidegger claims there is a close relationship. As I will argue, the two terms are understood in an idiosyncratic way by Heidegger, but most notably, he claims that they both belong to the essence of language, which he names *saying* [Sagen] and *showing* [Zeigen]. As such, he claims that "what is spoken poetically, and what is spoken in thought,

¹⁶⁹ "The Origin," 48. Emphasis mine. [Indem das Werk eine Welt aufstellt und die Erde herstellt] (GA 5, 36).

¹⁷⁰ "The Origin," 40. [Die Werke sind nicht mehr die, die sie waren] (GA 5, 26).

¹⁷¹ "The Origin," 40. [Weltentzug und Weltzerfall] (GA 5, 26).

are never identical; but there are times when they are the same.”¹⁷² In this way, not only the art of poesy, but “all art,” hence including pictorial works of art, “moves in the realm that speaks as language.”¹⁷³ Based on this discussion, I will suggest that although the works of bygone epochs might no longer be working as works – that we might no longer stand forth [ex-sistere] and be there [Da-sein] in the openness of truth that is happening in the work – the truth that happens in the work is still *shown* and brought to appear in the work’s *showing*. In the same way as (philosophical) thinking articulates an understanding of being and brings it into words, without demanding that we stand in the understanding of being that it bespeaks; the work still displays or articulates, as it were, an understanding of being despite our inability to stand in the openness of the world that it sets up. I will name this way of being a work of art *pictorial thinking*, analogous to what Heidegger calls “poetic thinking.”¹⁷⁴ Finally, I will briefly outline how I suggest this thinking might be approached through what Heidegger calls *recollection* [Erinnerung], and through two interconnected notions I will call *poietics* and *the limits of pictorial intelligibility*.

¹⁷² *What is Called Thinking?*, 20. Translation altered. [Das dichtend Gesagte und das denkend Gesagte sind niemals das Gleiche; aber sie sind zuweilen das Selbe] (GA 8, 21).

¹⁷³ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking* [Bremer und Friburger Vorträge], trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis UP, 2012; or. published, 1994), 131. [Alle Kunst, nicht erst die Dichtung, bewegt sich in dem Bereich, als welcher die Sprache spricht] (*Gesamtausgabe 79: Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1994), 139).

¹⁷⁴ “What are Poets For?,” 93. [dichtenden Denkens] (GA 5, 273).

Section One | Truth and Intelligibility

As I discussed in the introduction, Heidegger's engagement with the question of art is motivated by the task of "overcoming aesthetics."¹⁷⁵ And insofar as Heidegger understands *aesthetics* as *metaphysics* in the realm of art, the question of art is related to the even broader task of "overcoming metaphysics."¹⁷⁶ Thus, Heidegger claims that the traditional, i.e. metaphysical, ways of dealing with works of art, either as objects of a science (through art historical approaches), or as objects of experience (through aesthetic appreciation), overlooks what he claims makes works of art be of crucial world-historical significance, namely that they are happenings of *truth*. However, the determination of the work of art as the happening of truth is itself based on Heidegger's critique of what he calls "the traditional conception of truth,"¹⁷⁷ and his interpretation of the ancient Greek word for truth, *aletheia*. In order to understand Heidegger's determination of the work of art as the happening of truth, this section will therefore introduce Heidegger's understanding of the concept of truth as it is formulated around the time of "The Origin of the Work of Art," namely as the *strife* between what he calls *world* and *earth*.

The Traditional Conception of Truth and Truth as Unconcealment

Heidegger's interpretation of truth emerges against the background of his critique of what in *Being and Time* is called "the traditional conception of truth."¹⁷⁸ The traditional conception of truth, he claims, is usually understood as *correspondence*, that is, as the correspondence between a proposition and the state of affairs, or between *existentia* and *essentia*. The proposition "the apple is red" is true (corresponds to the matter of facts) if the apple *is* red. True gold *is* gold if the apparent gold corresponds to the *essentia* of gold (which, in our time, is that it consists of atoms with 79 protons in the nucleus). However, propositions might be erroneous and appearances might be deceptive. Thus, the judgment made in either case might

¹⁷⁵ *Contributions*, 354. [Appendix IV] (*GA* 65, 503).

¹⁷⁶ *The End of Philosophy*, 84. [Überwindung der Metaphysik] (*GA* 7, 69).

¹⁷⁷ *Being and Time*, 257. [der traditionelle Wahrheitsbegriff] (*GA* 2, 284).

¹⁷⁸ *Being and Time*, 257. [der traditionelle Wahrheitsbegriff] (*GA* 2, 284).

ultimately be correct or incorrect. Hence, Heidegger calls the traditional concept of truth *correctness* [Richtigkeit].¹⁷⁹

Contrary to the traditional concept of truth, Heidegger suggests understanding truth through the ancient Greek word for truth – *aletheia* – unconcealment. In “The Origin,” Heidegger considers unconcealment as the *essence* of truth.¹⁸⁰ That is, as was explained in the introduction, not the universal and unchanging metaphysical *essentia* of a particular true statement, but the historical mode of being’s *disclosure*. In the epilogue of “The Origin,” Heidegger writes that “truth is the truth of being,” it is “the unconcealedness of that which is as something that is.”¹⁸¹ What I suggest Heidegger claims is that for any proposition to be spoken, or for any perception to appear, *beings*, in some way or another, must be disclosed in advance, as it were. There must be some open region in which the red apple is allowed to show itself *as* a red apple, before we can judge whether it is red or not. The appearance of gold must be showing itself before we can judge whether it is true gold or not. If spoken through traditional philosophical (metaphysical) language, Heidegger’s understands truth as unconcealment as the condition of possibility of truth as correctness.¹⁸² But to claim that unconcealment is the condition of possibility of correctness, and hence that it is *a priori* to actual appearance, however, seems in my view to distort Heidegger’s understanding of unconcealment, as it suggests that unconcealment is a being (although not physical, but metaphysical, as transcendental).¹⁸³ Rather, Heidegger claims that unconcealment is an event – a happening – and hence always historical; it is something that occurs.

The ancient Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, is formed by the word for oblivion, forgetfulness, or concealment [lethe] along with the privative prefix [a-], which expresses negation or denial. As such, truth is the negation of concealment, i.e. un-concealment, and is in this way always something that happens, a process of un-concealing. But how does Heidegger claim that unconcealment occur? In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger suggests that unconcealment happens through the strife between what he calls world and earth.

¹⁷⁹ “The Origin,” 50. (GA 2, 38) See also, “On the Essence of Truth,” 138. (GA 9, 75) And *Being and Time*, 257-261. (GA 2, 284-290).

¹⁸⁰ In contrast, in *Being and Time*, *aletheia* is seen as the “primordial phenomenon of truth.” *Being and Time*, 262. [Das ursprüngliche Phänomen der Wahrheit] (GA 2, 290). See the entire §44, 256-273, for Heidegger’s analysis of truth in *Being and Time*.

¹⁸¹ “The Origin,” 79. [Die Wahrheit ist die Unverborgenheit des Seienden als des Seienden. Die Wahrheit ist die Wahrheit des Seins] (GA 5, 69).

¹⁸² For such an interpretation and critique of Heidegger’s concept of truth, see for instance William H. Smith, “Why Tugendhat’s Critique of Heidegger’s Concept of Truth Remains a Critical Problem,” *Inquiry*, Vol. 50, no. 2, 156-79 (2007).

¹⁸³ On “being as a priori,” see Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 159-166. (GA 6.2, 213-223).

Truth as the Strife between World and Earth

While the concept of world is central in *Being and Time*,¹⁸⁴ the concept of earth occurs first in “The Origin” (although the theme is predated in a discussion of Heraclitus in *Introduction to Metaphysics*).¹⁸⁵ The notion of ‘strife’ [Streit] occurs in Heidegger’s writings first around 1933.¹⁸⁶

In my view, the interpretation of truth as the strife between earth and world seems to be intimately related to Dasein as well as to the notion of the history of being (to which I will return to). In continuation of my brief discussion in the introduction on Dasein – as the being that *understands* being – in *Being and Time*, Dasein is described as ‘being-in-the-world.’ Through this description, Heidegger contends that Dasein is not to be understood as a subject, as if originally isolated from the world and later “accessing” it. In *History of the Concept of Time* (1925), he writes that Dasein is “precisely the being of the ‘between’ subject and world.”¹⁸⁷ Although, he hastily replies, this makes it erroneously seem that subjects and worlds are two distinct entities and that Dasein merely is the *relation* between them, and not *being-in-the-world* as such – which he claims is “the being of Dasein itself.”¹⁸⁸ Thus, Heidegger holds that Dasein [being-there] is the being that stands forth [ex-sistere] in the openness of the ‘there’ [da],¹⁸⁹ i.e. in the openness of a *world*.

World

Contrary to what might be a usual understanding of the concept of world – which Heidegger at one point formulates as “the entirety of what is actual, including its ground and cause,”¹⁹⁰ and which Hubert Dreyfus has suggested to call “the universe”¹⁹¹ – Heidegger claims that a

¹⁸⁴ See *Being and Time*, 91-148, for the analysis of “the Worldhood of the World.” [Die Weltigkeit des Welt] (GA 2, 85).

¹⁸⁵ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 64-65. (GA 40, 66)

¹⁸⁶ See Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics*, 28. Fried’s book is a comprehensive discussion of the concept of ‘polemos’ in Heidegger’s philosophy. Fried also discusses the implications of Heidegger’s translation of the Greek ‘polemos’ as ‘Kampf,’ ‘Streit’ and ‘Auseinanderzetzung’ in relation to the political context of 1933, which is the year Heidegger joined NSDAP and assumed his 13 months rectorate at the University of Freiburg.

¹⁸⁷ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* [Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs], trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1925; repr., 1985; or. published, 1992), 251. [das Sein des Daseins ist gerade das Sein des “Zwischen” Subjekt und Welt] *Gesamtausgabe 20: Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1979), 346-347.

¹⁸⁸ *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, 252. [das Sein des Daseins selbst] (GA 20, 347).

¹⁸⁹ Or, in one sense, even *is* the ‘there.’ See “Letter on Humanism,” 248. (GA 9, 327).

¹⁹⁰ Hölderlin’s hymn “The Ister” [Hölderlin’s Hymne “Der Ister”], trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996; or. published, 1984), 53. [Benennen wir mit „Welt“ das Ganze des Wirklichen, seinen Grund und seine Ursache miteinbegriffen] (*Gesamtausgabe 53: Hölderlin’s Hymne “Der Ister”* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1984), 18-19).

¹⁹¹ Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 89.

world is the historical ‘wherein’ Dasein finds itself.¹⁹² It is not any particular being or beings, nor the totality of such beings; but a specific, open horizon of disclosure, of intelligibility. In Thomas Sheehan’s words, a world is a “matrix of meaningfulness.”¹⁹³ According to Heidegger, the world is not *something* external to Dasein, but a part of Dasein’s very definition – emphasized in the above-mentioned designation of Dasein as being-in-*the-world*.¹⁹⁴ In my view, this seems to be what is meant by the definition of Dasein as the being that *understands* being; Dasein is the being that lives its life based on, or in, a basic, implicit understanding of being that most often is taken for granted. What is understood in this “understanding of being” I suggest is what is designated by the concept of world.

What understanding of being Dasein stands in, however, is historically variable, as I will return to in the next chapter. But in some way or another, within the openness of its world, beings are disclosed as meaningful for Dasein, and Dasein is disclosed to itself. *How* beings are disclosed as meaningful, along with the way in which Dasein understands itself, is determined by its world.

More concretely, then, a being appears as it is from out of the implicit understanding of being on which it depends to be meaningful. For instance, a pen is intelligible as a tool for writing only when and where there also is paper, ink, written language, letters, diaries, and all sorts of other things and social practices that informs the usage of pens. In order to use a pen one draws on the latent understanding of what a pen is and what it does, which informs the particular situation of using the pen.¹⁹⁵ This “background knowledge” is not necessarily explicit knowledge, but a small aspect of that ‘wherein’ – the world – in which we now live.

In “The Origin,” the phenomenon of world is described by Heidegger as “the clearing of the paths of the essential guiding directions with which all decision complies.”¹⁹⁶ And: “World is the never-objective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into being.”¹⁹⁷ Everything we do, say, make, or think occurs within a wherein that not only constitutes our understanding of what beings (including ourselves) are, but also what is important and what is not, what *matters* and what is

¹⁹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93. (GA 2, 87).

¹⁹³ Thomas Sheehan, “Astonishing! Things make sense!,” in *Gatherings*, 1-25 (2011), 9.

¹⁹⁴ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 91-148, (GA 2, 85-152) for the analysis of world and worldhood. Esp. 93 (ibid., 87) for the four different senses of the meaning of the word ‘world.’

¹⁹⁵ In the formulation of Gadamer: “As the referential totality of Dasein’s projection, “world” constituted the horizon that was preliminary to all projections of Dasein’s concern.” Gadamer, “Heidegger’s Later Philosophy,” 217.

¹⁹⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 53. [Vielmehr ist die Welt die Lichtung der Bahnen der wesentlichen Weisungen, in die sich alles Entscheiden fügt] (GA 5, 42).

¹⁹⁷ “The Origin,” 43. [Welt ist das immer Ungegenständliche, dem wir unterstehen, solange die Bahnen von Geburt und Tod, Segen und Fluch uns in das Sein entrückt halten] (GA 5, 30-31).

meaningful to do, say, make, or think. The world is not the sum of these concerns, but that which *claims* us, and shapes the limits of what we consider to be intelligible and to matter.

In this way, a *world* is the openness of unconcealment (truth) that lets beings – including Dasein itself – be disclosed in some way. As I mentioned above, however, Heidegger understands unconcealment as the process of un-concealing. For Heidegger claims that that which appears as intelligible in the openness of a world is not “purely” available and comprehensible. Any being has some degree of resistance, as it were: “Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presence in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealedness.”¹⁹⁸ In this sense, Heidegger claims that concealment always belongs to unconcealment; and this phenomenon of concealment, he calls *earth*.

Earth

In “The Origin,” Heidegger explains that ‘the earth’ designates neither a planet nor soil, but that it is “that which rises up as self-closing.”¹⁹⁹ According to Andrew Mitchell, the earth designates sensuous appearance, or “phenomenality as such.”²⁰⁰ In the following, I will agree with this interpretation, albeit with a few qualifications, as it will be helpful in the coming chapters.

Contrary to the modern philosophical– again, metaphysical – view that phenomenality emerge as derivative of *essentia* (noumenality), the earth is not based on any secure or stable metaphysical principle or being. Earth is appearance, and is as such self-bearing. There is nothing behind appearances that is more real or true. Hence, earth is nothing merely superficial, but itself “self-secluding.”²⁰¹ It is characterized by being *concealed*, which I suggest to mean that sensuous appearances resist complete interpretation; or in Thomson’s

¹⁹⁸ “The Origin,” 52. [Jegliches Seiende, das begegnet und mitgegnet, hält diese seltsame Gegnerschaft des Anwesens inne, indem es sich zugleich immer in eine Verborgenheit zurückhält] (GA 5, 40).

¹⁹⁹ “The Origin,” 53. [sondern das, was als Sichverschließendes aufgeht] (GA 5, 42).

²⁰⁰ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 71. There is no consensus in the commentary literature on Heidegger concerning the notion of ‘earth.’ For Haar’s four different interpretations of the notion of ‘earth,’ see Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, 57-64. According to Fried, ‘earth’ designates “the historical givenness of meaning.” See Fried, *Heidegger’s Polemos: From Being to Politics*, 56. Young suggests that ‘earth’ designates ‘the holy.’ See Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*, 39-41. My own view is close to Thomson, who designates ‘earth’ as “an dynamic dimension of intelligibility that simultaneously offers itself to and resists being brought fully into...meaning.” See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 89. See also Hubert Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s Ontology of the Work of Art,” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, 407-19 (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 412. And Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 112.

²⁰¹ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 47. [Sichverschließenden] (GA 5, 35).

words, “resists being brought fully into...meaning.”²⁰² We can never fully understand appearances, as it were. They are what they are exactly by being untranslatable and ungraspable. As Heidegger writes, colors *glow* and the heaviness of the stone *weighs*.²⁰³ But any attempt to analyze the glowing of the color makes the phenomenal glowing itself disappear. Likewise, any attempt at measuring the weight of the stone makes its phenomenal heaviness withdraw: “It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it.”²⁰⁴ Although analysis and measurement will provide correct knowledge about the appearance (for example the light-frequency of the glow and the exact weight of the stone), it does so on the condition that the appearance itself is overlooked.

But in understanding earth as phenomenal, sensuous appearance, one takes the risk of ignoring the crucial fact that Heidegger emphasizes that earth is not reducible to our sensuous impressions. Rather, he claims that it is *that* which rises up as self-closing. In Gadamer’s words, it is “that out of which everything comes forth and into which everything disappears.”²⁰⁵

Thus, every being that is disclosed in the openness of a world simultaneously holds itself back in the closedness of the earth. And this very entanglement between world and earth is what Heidegger calls *strife*.

Strife

According to Heidegger, earth and world are always entangled in one another. That is to say, for instance, that a particular color is always the color *of* something; a sound is never pure, it sounds *as* something. As Heidegger writes, “we never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises...rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen.”²⁰⁶ The storm, the plane, and the cars can only appear as the self-closing earth resists the openness of a world, while the openness of world is grounded in the self-rising, yet withdrawing earth. We hear the storm through its sounding; and as such, the storm appears in

²⁰² Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 89.

²⁰³ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 61. (*GA* 5, 33).

²⁰⁴ “The Origin,” 45. [Sie zeigt sich nur, wenn sie unentborgen und unerklärt bleibt] (*GA* 5, 33).

²⁰⁵ Gadamer, “Heidegger’s Later Philosophy,” 223.

²⁰⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 25. [Niemals vernehmen wir, wie er vorgibt, im Erscheinen der Dinge zunächst und eigentlich einen Andrang von Empfindungen, z.B. Töne und Geräusche, sondern wir hören den Sturm im Schornstein pfeifen, wir hören das dreimotorige Flugzeug, wir hören den Mercedes im unmittelbaren Unterschied zum Adler-Wagen] (*GA* 5, 10).

this sound. The beings emerge as a result of the crossing through – a strife – between openness and concealment.

The *strife* between earth and world is, in other words, Heidegger's name of the relation between the two fundamental aspects of truth as unconcealment, designated by the privative affix in *a-letheia*, and un-concealment. Earth is always, and only so, in strife with world; and world is always, and only so, in strife with earth. As such, earth and world are not static entities standing in opposition to one another; and the strife means neither combat, struggle, nor fight. Rather, the striving indicates the mutual – yet, non-dialectical²⁰⁷ – belonging of the two, and their non-reconciliatory nature. I suggest the striving might be thought of as a *tension* within or of intelligibility as such; a tension, like the tension of the drawn archer's bow – where the opposing parts becomes more as they are, the more tense the draw is. Heidegger writes that “the more the strife overdoes itself on its own part, the more inflexibly do the opponents let themselves go into the intimacy of simple belonging to one another.”²⁰⁸ The striving against one another *is* only because they belong to each other.

Dasein's being-there as an understanding of being – what Heidegger now calls the clearing [*Lichtung*]²⁰⁹ – emerge through this strife or tension. Like the clearing in the forest provides an openness among the trees while simultaneously letting the density and thickness of the forest beyond the clearing appear; to the clearing of Dasein belong both the openness of world and the closedness of earth. That is to say, that within the clearing, beings occur, but they can never completely succumb to our mastery and comprehension; beings occur, but they simultaneously withdraw from sight; beings occur, but they also hide, distort, and deceive (only because beings are first allowed in the clearing can they appear in a deceptive manner). Likewise, Dasein occurs, but we can never completely master and comprehend ourselves;²¹⁰ Dasein occurs, but we simultaneously withdraw from sight; Dasein occurs, but we also hide, distort, and deceive. What occurs in the clearing, however, are not merely *aspects* of what is otherwise total and whole, but the occurrence of the clearing is the primordial opening (overlooked by the entire history of Western philosophy, according to Heidegger) that first allows for any representation of totality and wholeness.

As such, under the title “Strife,” in the posthumously published work, *The History of Being* from 1938-40, Heidegger writes:

²⁰⁷ See Nowell Smith, *Sounding/Silence*, 40.

²⁰⁸ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 48. [Je härter der Streit sich selbständig übertreibt, um so unnachgiebiger lassen sich die Streitenden in die Innigkeit des einfachen Sichgehörens los] (*GA 5*, 35).

²⁰⁹ “The Origin,” 52. (*GA 5*, 40).

²¹⁰ That we occur from out of a history and in a world not of our own making, Heidegger calls ‘thrownness.’ *Being and Time*, 223-4. (*GA 2*, 238-239).

The earth is not a sector cut out of beings as a whole.
 The world is not a sector cut out of beings as a whole.
 Beings are not distributed between these two sectors.
 Earth is essencing of beings as a whole.
 World is essencing of beings as a whole.
 Earth and world belong to the being of beings as a whole, and for this reason there is between them the strife that we are never able to think if we represent to ourselves a conflict or a contestation.
 The strife itself must be comprehended from out of the crossing through of their countering²¹¹

In the quote, Heidegger first emphasizes that earth and world are not themselves beings that encircle or enframe other beings. Instead, he writes, “earth and world belong to the being of beings as a whole,” and more accurately, to the “essencing of beings as a whole.” As I wrote in the introduction, Heidegger uses the phrase “beings as a whole” to designate the metaphysical understanding of being that he claims has determined the history of being from Plato until today.²¹² Moreover, as was also mentioned in the introduction, ‘essencing’ denotes *how* or in what *way* something is as it is. The strife between earth and world, in other words, determine the way in which beings as a whole (i.e. metaphysics) *are*. Metaphysics itself occurs through the strife between world and earth; that is, the truth of beings (as a whole) is what is obtained through their striving. As I quoted above, “truth” – as unconcealment, i.e. the strife between world and earth – “is the truth of being,” it is “the unconcealedness of that which is as something that is.”²¹³

As I will return to in the next chapter, and which will be important in my discussion of Heidegger’s unthought art history of being and the paintings of Edvard Munch in the second part of the thesis, Heidegger claims that the truth of being undergoes several fundamental transformations, each of which determines the being-historical *epochs*. What I would like to

²¹¹ *History of Beyng*, 19. (GA 69, 19). [Appendix III] Note, however, that the quote continues “and both must be comprehended in terms of the event [Ereignis].” In order to limit my discussion, but also because I have not found it central for the aim of my thesis, I have chosen not to go into the notion of *Ereignis*. The notion does not occur in the published texts of the 1930s, but appears in later works, as well as in the posthumously published works from 1936-42 (GA 65-67 and GA 69-71). Especially important is the previously mentioned *Contributions*, originally written between 1936-38. I will only mention that in “The Origin,” Heidegger seems to name the phenomenon of Ereignis as the “primordial strife” [der Urstreit] between openness and concealment – *to which* the strife between world and earth belongs. (“The Origin,” 53. Hofstadter’s translation of ‘Urstreit’ is ‘primal conflict.’ (GA 5, 42)). The identity between the primordial strife and Ereignis seems to be indicated by Heidegger’s marginal note in the Reclam edition of 1960. See *Off the Beaten Tracks* [Holzwege], trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002; or. published, 1950), 31. (GA 5, 42).

²¹² “metaphysics...means the *truth* of beings as a whole.” *History of Beyng*, 19. [Metaphysik... heißt die *Wahrheit* des Seienden im Ganzen] (GA 69, 19).

²¹³ “The Origin,” 79. [Die Wahrheit ist die Unverborgenheit des Seienden als des Seienden. Die Wahrheit ist die Wahrheit des Seins] (GA 5, 69).

suggest at this point, however, is that these epochs, then, might be thought of as various fundamental configurations of the strife between world and earth. In turn, these configurations determine the clearing of Dasein; that is, the way in which beings occur as intelligible – the way Dasein understands being. However, Heidegger emphasizes that “the strife itself must be comprehended from out of the crossing through of their countering.” And I suggest this to mean that the strife must be understood in the perspective of a concrete openness, a concrete *crossing through* of world and earth; for instance in concrete beings – such as works of art.

Summary and Transition

In order to prepare for my discussion of Heidegger’s determination of the work of art as the *happening of truth*, I have in this section introduced Heidegger’s understanding of truth as unconcealment. First, against the background the traditional conception of truth as *correspondence*, which Heidegger calls correctness; and second, through the understanding of truth as the strife between world and earth. According to Heidegger, the strife between world and earth is the essencing of beings as a whole; and thus, I have suggested that Heidegger claims that the strife determines both Dasein’s most basic engagements with beings, as well as the being-historical epochs as such.

In the next section, I will turn to the question of the work of art, and Heidegger’s claim that the work of art not only emerge within the strife between world and earth, but might also be an *instigation* of this strife.

Section Two | Art and Artwork

In this section, I will investigate Heidegger's understanding of the work of art as the happening of truth, its relation to the strife between world and earth, the concepts of createdness and preservation, and to the being-historical role of art as a *founder* of history. Finally, I will suggest that Heidegger's account of the work of art provokes a question concerning how one can see and recognize the historical significance of works of art at all, due to his claim that the work character of the work is dependent on *preservers* while at the same time being bound up in its being-historical epoch. This question will in turn lead me to the third and final section of the chapter.

As "The Origin of the Work of Art" is Heidegger's most comprehensive essay on art, I will mostly base my discussion of his understanding of art on this essay. In my reading, I will not, however, aim for comprehensiveness in scope as the essay contains many complexities and difficulties. Rather, I will focus on those parts of the essay that will help me in my attempt at pursuing the aim of the thesis, and those parts that will be central in the coming chapters.

The *Origin* and the *Work* of Art

Initially, "The Origin of the Work of Art" is not an essay concerning the ontological question of what the work of art is.²¹⁴ Rather, as the title itself indicates, the essay is primarily an attempt at intimating the question of the *origin* of the work of art. The origin of the work of art, however, is already on the first page of the essay claimed to be *art*. Hence, the main question of the essay is to understand what *art* is *essentially*.²¹⁵ The answer Heidegger gives to this question, near the end of the essay, is that "art, as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry...The essence of art is poetry."²¹⁶ His approach for reaching this conclusion, however,

²¹⁴ Nor can it not, in my view, be reduced to this question, as Young claims. Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, 16.

²¹⁵ "The question of the origin of the work of art becomes a question about the essence of art." Heidegger, "The Origin," 18. Translation altered. [die Frage nach dem Ursprung des Kunstwerkes wird zur Frage nach dem Wesen der Kunst] (GA 5, 2).

²¹⁶ "The Origin," 72. Translation altered. [Die Kunst ist als das Ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit Dichtung...Das Wesen der Kunst ist die Dichtung] (GA 5, 62-63). Despite Heidegger's warning of taking this statement as an answer to the question of the essence of art ("What art may be is one of the questions to which no answers are given in the essay. What gives the impression of such an answer are directions for questioning." "The Origin,"

is through a discussion of “the place where art undoubtedly prevails,”²¹⁷ namely in the *work* of art. Thus, in order to arrive at the question concerning the nature of the work of art, Heidegger first distinguishes clearly between art on the one hand, and artworks on the other. In the following, I will suggest that the relation between the two is that *art* is one of the several ways truth (unconcealment) *happens*, while the work of art is the concrete being that occasions a happening of truth and lets it take place.

The Work of Art

As mentioned previously, contrary to what Heidegger claims are the scientific (art historical) or aesthetic ways of understanding the work of art, namely as a kind of object (of science; of experience), he claims that the work is primarily *the happening of truth* – although with a “thingly”²¹⁸ aspect. Understanding this thingly aspect is Heidegger’s point of departure when approaching the question of the work of art. The traditional understanding of the work of art as something “more” than an objective, material entity – or rather a combination of this material entity and something “more,” as in the form/content distinction – he claims is based on various, traditional thing-concepts. As such, regardless of whether an understanding of the work of art is based on the understanding of a thing as a bearer of characteristic traits; a unity of a manifold given in sensuous perception; or formed matter, the work of art is ultimately understood as a bringing-together [*sumballein*] of something sensuous (for instance form) and something suprasensuous (for instance content). As such the work of art is a “symbol,”²¹⁹ or as I will return to in the next chapter, a “symbolic image.”²²⁰ This understanding of the work of art Heidegger later claims is the *metaphysical* essence of the work of art.

However, as I discussed above, Heidegger contends that the traditional – metaphysical – understanding of truth is only possible on the basis of truth understood as unconcealedness (aletheia); that is, the strife between world and earth. What this understanding of truth implies, however, is that all beings emerge in an entanglement of intelligibility and phenomenal

85) [Was die Kunst sei, ist eine jener Fragen, auf die in der Abhandlung keine Antworten gegeben sind. Was den Anschein von solchen bietet, sind Weisungen für das Fragen] (*GA 5*, 73)). Heidegger repeats this determination of art as late as in 1969. (“Once it is granted that art is the bringing-into-the-work of truth, and truth is the unconcealment of being...” (“Art and Space,” [Die Kunst und der Raum], in *Man and World 6*, trans. Charles H. Seibert, 3-8 (1973; or. published, 1969), 5). [Einmal zugestanden, die Kunst sei das Ins-Werk-Bringen der Wahrheit und Wahrheit bedeute die Unverborgenheit des Seins] (*Gesamtausgabe 13: Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983), 206)). The choice of ‘bringing’ instead of ‘setting’ might be a reply to the discussion on the problem of the word ‘setting’ in the addendum. See “The Origin,” 81-84 (*GA 5*, 70-74)).

²¹⁷ “The Origin,” 18. Emphasis mine. [wo Kunst ungezweifelt wirklich waltet] (*GA 5*, 2).

²¹⁸ “The Origin,” 20. [Dinghafte] (*GA 5*, 4).

²¹⁹ “The Origin,” 19. (*GA 5*, 4).

²²⁰ Hölderlin’s hymn “The Ister”, 24-5. [des sinnbildlichen Wesens der Kunst] (*GA 53*, 28).

appearance. Or rather, that world and earth designate the two dimensions within *intelligibility as such* that simultaneously strives for openness and concealment. Thus, Heidegger writes, “truth does not exist in itself beforehand somewhere among the stars, only later to descend elsewhere among beings.”²²¹ Rather, the continual disclosure of beings as meaningful appearance is itself truth – in the sense of the process un-concealment. Hence, he claims that “what looks like the thingly element, in the sense of our usual thing-concepts, in the work taken as object, is, seen from the perspective of the work, its earthy character.”²²² The work of art, like any being, emerge within the strife between world and earth. However, contrary to other beings, the work of art does not merely emerge within the clearing opened by truth; rather, the work itself occasions the *happening* of truth by “setting up a world and setting forth the earth.”²²³

As I have argued, Heidegger claims that the notion of world is the ‘wherein’ Dasein finds itself. This ‘wherein’ is not an objective space or a collection of objects external to Dasein, but a part of Dasein’s determination as being-in-the-world, i.e. as the being that understands being. World, thus, is not a private and subjective world of an individual Dasein,²²⁴ but the open dimension of the shared, implicit sense of what it means for being to be that sustains and guides both the individual, the community, and an entire *epoch*.

According to Heidegger, the work of art, then, *sets up* or *opens up* a world: “Towering up within itself, the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force.”²²⁵ I suggest this to mean that the work of art offers a concrete ‘wherein’ for Dasein. It sets up – and thus opens up and offers – an open horizon of intelligibility, a world, with which Dasein engages. More accurately, it opens and *keeps it open*. In this sense, I suggest one could think of the work as something like scaffolding, which helps holding open the world in its strife with the earth. Or maybe it could again be helpful to think of the strife as the drawing of an archer’s bow – the

²²¹ "The Origin," 59. [Aber die Wahrheit ist nicht zuvor irgendwo in den Sternen an sich vorhanden, um sich dann nachträglich sonstwo im Seienden unterzubringen] (GA 5, 49).

²²² "The Origin," 67. [Was jedoch an dem als Gegenstand genommenen Werk so aussieht wie das Dinghafte im Sinne der geläufigen Dingbegriffe, das ist, vom Werk her erfahren, das Erdhafte des Werkes] (GA 5, 56-57).

²²³ "The Origin," 48. [Indem das Werk eine Welt aufstellt und die Erde herstellt] (GA 5, 36).

²²⁴ Moreover, Dasein is constituted by being-with-others, i.e. it is a fundamental social entity. See *Being and Time*, 153-163. (GA 2, 157-168).

²²⁵ "The Origin," 43. [In-sich-aufragend eröffnet das Werk eine *Welt* und hält diese im waltenden Verbleib] (GA 5, 30).

work works to hold the bow drawn in its tension: “the work holds open the open of the world.”²²⁶

Again, we see that a world always is entangled in the strife with earth. The world that the work sets up rises *against* the self-secluding earth, on which it nevertheless depends. Earth, it was argued above, is self-upholding, self-secluding phenomenal *appearance*. Or, more accurately, it is *that* which appears in its appearing. Heidegger claims it is the very self-bearing appearance of the *work-material* of the work: not merely tone, stone, and pigment, but the *timbre* of the tone, the *heaviness* and *shine* of the stone, the *brightness* and *dullness* of color. What Heidegger seems to suggest, however, is that while we most often do not give much heed to earth and rather go straight to “the things themselves,”²²⁷ in the case of the work of art, on the other hand, we can – indeed *must* – notice and give heed to earth. Because contrary to other beings which merely emerge within the dimensions of world and earth, “the work,” as setting forth the earth, “moves the earth itself into the open of a world and keeps it there. The work lets the earth be an earth.”²²⁸

These are the first determinative characteristics of the work of art, Heidegger claims: it both opens up a world – a horizon of intelligibility – and sets forth the earth – the self-secluding, self-showing of that which “shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained.”²²⁹ As discussed above, the striving between world and earth is the emergence of intelligibility in general – and thus of the opening of the clearing in which Dasein stands in truth. That is, the strife allows beings to be what they are (to essence). Through the strife between world and earth beings as a whole *essence*. But “in setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work” is not only occurring *within* the striving, Heidegger claims, it is “an *instigating* of this striving.”²³⁰ In other words, as “setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is the fighting of the battle in which the unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won.”²³¹ The work of art is the occasion of “the happening of truth.”²³²

Notably, however, that the work sets up a world does not mean that it mimetically represents a particular place or some specific beings or events. Rather, as I will return to

²²⁶ "The Origin," 44. [Das Werk hält das Offene der Welt offen] (GA 5, 31).

²²⁷ "The Origin," 25. [die Dinge selbst] (GA 5, 10).

²²⁸ "The Origin," 45. [Das Werk rückt und hält die Erde selbst in das Offene einer Welt. *Das Werk läßt die Erde eine Erde sein*] (GA 5, 32).

²²⁹ "The Origin," 45. [Sie zeigt sich nur, wenn sie unentborgen und unerklärt bleibt] (GA 5, 33).

²³⁰ "The Origin," 48. Emphasis mine. [eine Anstiftung dieses Streites] (GA 5, 36)

²³¹ "The Origin," 54. [Aufstellend eine Welt und herstellend die Erde ist das Werk die Bestreitung jenes Streites, in dem die Unverborgenheit des Seienden im Ganzen, die Wahrheit, erstritten wird] (GA 5, 42).

²³² "The Origin," 56. [das Geschehnis der Wahrheit] (GA 5, 45).

further down, as the happening of truth, the work concerns the “general essence”²³³ of beings. For instance, Heidegger’s own example of a pictorial work of art, van Gogh’s *Shoes*, displays a pair of shoes through pastuous, dark brown oil paint on a canvas [image 3]. According to Heidegger, however, the work does not merely show us a particular pair of shoes, but brings forth the essence of a mode of beings that he calls tools or equipment [Zeug]. Not only by presenting the shoes simply standing on the floor, not currently in use, but by emphasizing their worn yet solid materiality through the very texture of the pictorial surface; by emphasizing the emptiness of the shoes by placing them in a void of brown and beige nuances; and thus showing their complete lostness when abandoned by their owner; the work brings the shoes forth not as autonomous, self-standing objects, but beings that “are” in their use. They are what they are insofar as they are used.²³⁴

What Heidegger claims, in other words, is that the way in which the painting shows something essential about the equipmentality of shoes, is not merely through the choice of pictorial “subject,” but due to the very *way* the work is intelligible. That is, the way in which a tracing of the strife between world and earth is “fixed in place”²³⁵ in the work. What this implies, however, is that not every other pictorial work depicting shoes necessarily concerns the general essence of equipment. For instance, in Jan van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Portrait* from 1434 [image 5], there lies a pair of wooden clogs, seemingly abandoned, on the floor. But van Eyck’s work does not show the clogs in their wornness, emptiness, and lostness, but rather as lying prominently visible in the foreground of the significant event of a marriage. The clogs are usually seen as a conventional symbol that indicates the holiness of the space in which the sacred ritual is taking place. As such, the clogs are part of a work that simply *means* in a different way than van Gogh’s painting, which on its side carries none of the symbolism of *The Arnolfini Portrait*.

Likewise, Sverre Malling’s pencil drawing *Converse (Venom)* from 2007 [image 4], shows an abandoned shoe. But now the shoe is displayed through what seems to me to be a self-conscious art historical reference to Albrecht Dürer’s nature studies (compare for instance with *Columbine* from 1526 [image 11]). As such, the isolation of the shoe does not emphasize its abandonment, but highlights the significance of the shoe, or more accurately, the cultural significance of the Converse All Stars model – itself a stylistic icon of the 20th century. First

²³³ "The Origin," 36. [des allgemeinen Wesens] (GA 5, 22).

²³⁴ This usefulness is essentially *reliability*, Heidegger claims. We rely on equipment to do their job, and they are what they are when we rely on them. See "The Origin," 32-35. (GA 5, 18-21). On the so-called tool-analysis, see also *Being and Time*, 95-102. (GA 2, 90-97).

²³⁵ "The Origin," 62. [festgestellte] (GA 5, 51).



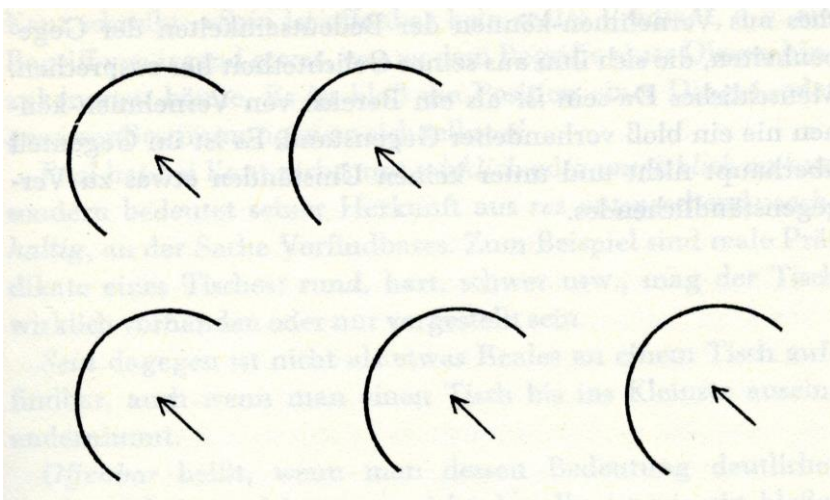
3. **Vincent van Gogh, *Shoes*, 1886.**
Oil on canvas, 38.1 x 45.3 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



4. **Sverre Malling, *Converse (Venom)*, 2007.**
Charcoal on paper, 57 x 76 cm. Private collection.



5. Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434.
Oil on oak, 82.2 x 60 cm. The National Gallery, London.



6. Facsimile of Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminare: Protokolle – Gespräche – Briefe*, (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), 3.

designed as a basketball shoe, it has later been a significant part of both mainstream and sub-cultures (here emphasized by the presence of the characteristic logo of the British Heavy Metal band Venom, which has been crucial for the emergence of Norwegian Black Metal).

These three works, though all depicting footwear, do not all concern the same general essence of equipment. Yet, they all disclose beings and are meaningful in some *way*. In the following, I will suggest that this *way* of disclosing is crucial for understanding how works of art not only concern the general essence of a certain mode of beings (as in Heidegger's example), but also can concern the being of beings as a whole.

Thus, in order to understand further the significance and implications of Heidegger's determination of the work of art as the happening of truth, I will now focus on the emphasis Heidegger puts on the notion of *setting*.

Createdness and Preservation

As was mentioned briefly above, Heidegger claims that the work of art does not merely emerge through the strife between world and earth, but is an instigation of the strife. As such, the work is *setting up* the world, and *setting forth* the earth. This *setting*, Heidegger describes by the terms *createdness* [Geschaffensein] and *preservation* [Bewahrung] – which together unfolds what he calls the work-character of the work; that is, the *reality* of the work as work. Notably, the German word for reality, 'Wirklichkeit,' etymologically derives from 'Wirken' – i.e. 'to work.'

Createdness – the fact that for the work to be a work it has to be *made* or *created* – does not simply signify that the work is a causal product of a the artist-subject; the work is not merely a produced object.²³⁶ Createdness, according to Heidegger, means two things. First, Heidegger writes, "createdness of the work means: truth's being fixed in place in the figure."²³⁷ And second, "the work is distinguished by being created so that its createdness is part of the created work."²³⁸

The first definition of createdness as truth's being fixed in place in the figure, relates to what Heidegger calls *rift* [Riss]. I suggest to understand a particular clearing of truth – an

²³⁶ On the notion of createdness and the question of the artist's intention, see Ingvild Torsen, "Agency, Event, and the World of the Artwork: A Philosophical Problem in Heidegger's Use of Van Gogh," in *Van Gogh Among the Philosophers*, ed. David Nichols (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017, forthcoming).

²³⁷ Heidegger, "The Origin," 62. [Geschaffensein des Werkes heißt: Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt] (*GA* 5, 51).

²³⁸ "The Origin," 62. [Aber das Geschaffensein des Werkes hat gegenüber jeder anderen Hervorbringung darin sein Besonderes, daß es in das Geschaffene mit hineingeschaffen ist] (*GA* 5, 52).

understanding of being as a whole – as a particular configuration of the strife between world and earth. All beings that emerge in light of the clearing are understood in alignment with the configuration of the strife between world and earth (i.e. truth; unconcealment). In this way, the clearing denotes the *limit* of what is considered intelligible and what is not, but also the *limit* that enables beings to emerge as intelligible.²³⁹ The fundamental transformations of this configuration – or rather, the fundamental transformations of this *limit of intelligibility* – are then the fundamental transformations between the being-historical epochs. In Michel Haar's words, what Heidegger calls *rift* makes manifest "the most profound tracing of the world-earth relation."²⁴⁰ Thus the *rift*, I suggest is a tracing of this *limit* between world and earth.

Furthermore, Heidegger claims creation must be understood based on what in ancient Greek is called τέχνη [techne]. According to Heidegger, techne is a form of knowing which "means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present, as such."²⁴¹ Techne designates the "foresight"²⁴² which guides the artist. The *limit* of intelligibility, I suggest, is what the *technites* (the artist) "sees" in his or her foresight, and traces by the rift. The rift is thus a tracing of the specific historical limit of intelligibility; which thus makes manifest a specific historical essencing of beings (as a whole).

The first determination of the *createdness* of the work is that this rift is set into the earth. The rift – the tracing of the historical limit of intelligibility – must be *set* into the self-secluding work-material of the artwork: "The strife that is brought into the rift and thus set back into the earth and thus fixed in place is *figure* [Gestalt]."²⁴³ The work of art is thus a figure, a concrete being where a specific configuration of intelligibility – the rift of the strife between world and earth – is set up/forth, and thus *let be*. The work provides a site for *truth's* self-establishing in *a being*. Thus, as I wrote above, Heidegger concludes: "Createdness of the work means: truth's being fixed in place in the figure."²⁴⁴

²³⁹ "The boundary in the Greek sense [πέρας; peras; limit] does not block off; rather, being itself brought forth, it first brings to its radiance what is present. Boundary sets free into the unconcealed." "The Origin," 52. [Die Grenze im griechischen Sinne riegelt nicht ab, sondern bringt als hervorgebrachte selber das Anwesende erst zum Scheinen. Grenze gibt frei ins Unverborgene] (GA 5, 71).

²⁴⁰ Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, 98.

²⁴¹ Heidegger, "The Origin," 57. [gesehen haben, in dem weiten Sinne von sehen, der besagt: vernehmen des Anwesenden als eines solchen] (GA 5, 46).

²⁴² "The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought," [Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens], in *the Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, trans. Dimitrios Latsis and Ullrich Haase, 119-28 (Cheshire: Jackson Publishing, 2013; or. published, 1967), 120. [Vorblick] ("Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens," 137).

²⁴³ "The Origin," 62. [Der in den Riß gebrachte und so in die Erde zurückgestellte und damit festgestellte Streit ist die *Gestalt*] (GA 5, 51).

²⁴⁴ "The Origin," 62. [Geschaffensein des Werkes heißt: Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt] (GA 5, 51).

This is also related to what I only briefly touched upon above, namely that Heidegger claims that “the work...is not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be present at any given time; it is, on the contrary, the reproduction [Wiedergabe] of the thing’s general essence.”²⁴⁵ Heidegger does not write ‘Reproduktion’ but ‘Wiedergabe.’ Colloquially, the latter is nearly synonymous to the former, but literarily it means ‘giving-again.’ The work gives again, i.e. provides the occurrence for the *passing on* of the being’s general essence – and with it, the truth of beings as a whole – which the artist has seen and received in his or her foresight. It is the site where the being is allowed to stand forth in its being, which means in alignment with the limit that is traced by the rift and fixed in place in the figure that the work is. This “reproduction”/giving-again of the essence of beings, i.e. truth being fixed in place in the figure, is the first aspect of the work’s createdness.

The second aspect is closely related, and is, in my view, only understandable in light of the previous considerations. That beings *are* is the most ordinary thing in the world, Heidegger claims – so ordinary that they tend to withdraw into the background. What is special about the work, however, is the sheer fact “that it is.”²⁴⁶ While the fact that the work is is something that it shares with every other being, the very *that it is* somehow stands forth and, as it were, demands our attention: “The work is distinguished by being created so that its createdness is part of the created work.”²⁴⁷ But what, concretely, does this mean?

While the producer of any object applies form to a work material, Heidegger claims that in such “fabricating [of] equipment – e.g., an ax – stone is used, and used up. It disappears into usefulness.”²⁴⁸ In creating the work of art, the artist, on the other hand, does not “use up” the work material, but sets it forth as the self-concealed appearance it is: the work lets the earth be an earth. This letting is done by the setting of the rift back into the earth, and in this way creating the figure [Gestalt] that the work is. In other words, the work does not merely happen to be within the open as any other thing – created or not – it inhabits the very limits of the open (and thus contributes to holding it open – or, as we will see, to transform these limits). The work of art is not only shaped in accordance with what is intelligible, it inscribes – traces – intelligibility as such into its own being; and this way, it

²⁴⁵ "The Origin," 36. [Also handelt es sich im Werk nicht um die Wiedergabe des jeweils vorhandenen einzelnen Seienden, wohl dagegen um die Wiedergabe des allgemeinen Wesens der Dinge] (GA 5, 22).

²⁴⁶ "The Origin," 63. [„daß es sei“] (GA 5, 53).

²⁴⁷ "The Origin," 62. [Aber das Geschaffensein des Werkes hat gegenüber jeder anderen Hervorbringung darin sein Besonderes, daß es in das Geschaffene mit hineingeschaffen ist] (GA 5, 52).

²⁴⁸ "The Origin," 44. [der Anfertigung des Zeuges, z. B. der Axt, gebraucht und verbraucht. Er verschwindet in der Dienlichkeit] (GA 5, 32).

provides its own measure. Insofar as the work is at work, it refuses to withdraw as an ordinary thing among other things; it shows itself *as* something that shows itself; it is created *as* something created.

These two aspects of the work's createdness, truth being fixed in place in the figure and the work's being created as something created, are followed by the final characteristic of the reality of the work of art: preservation.

According to Heidegger, an equally essential characteristic of the work as its createdness is it being preserved by what he calls the preservers [die Bewahrenden]. The very word preservation [Bewahrung] emphasizes the close relation Heidegger claims there is between preservation and truth [Wahrheit]. Indeed, he claims that to preserve the work means to stand "within the openness of beings that happens in the work."²⁴⁹ That is, to stand within the truth that is instigated and held open by the work. The preservers are in other words not identical with an 'audience' or the 'perceivers' of a work of art – both of which might experience an artwork without ever making preservation take place, Heidegger writes. The preservers are the historical community that recognizes (explicitly or implicitly) the limits of intelligibility prescribed and held open by the work – that is, its occasioning of the happening of truth. Thus, the "standing-within" is explicitly claimed to be a sort of "implicit" knowledge: "This "standing-within" of preservation, however, is a knowing. Yet knowing does not consist in mere information and notions about something. He who truly knows what is, knows what he will to do in the midst of what is."²⁵⁰ Preserving the work, I suggest, is to let oneself be guided by the work, to let it be *at* work as a provider of truth – that which brings along its own measure – the limits of intelligibility. In other words, to preserve the work is to let one's very understanding of beings as a whole be guided by the truth of the work.

Notably, this preservation is not accidental to the work; it is itself an aspect of the very work-being of the work insofar as it belongs to the *work* character of the work. Only when the work is preserved is the work *at* work, and preservation can only take place in "*letting* the work be a work."²⁵¹

What I will suggest this to mean, more accurately, is that works of art are intelligible in some *way* – they show themselves and brings forth meaning in alignment with an

²⁴⁹ "The Origin," 65. [Bewahrung des Wertes heißt: Innestehen in der im Wert geschehenden Offenheit des Seienden] (GA 5, 54).

²⁵⁰ "The Origin," 65. [Die Inständigkeit der Bewahrung aber ist ein Wissen. Wissen besteht jedoch nicht im bloßen Kennen und Vorstellen von etwas. Wer wahrhaft das Seiende weiß, weiß, was er inmitten des Seienden will] (GA 5, 55).

²⁵¹ "The Origin," 64. Emphasis mine. [das Werk ein Werk sein lassen] (GA 5, 54).

understanding of being, which is inscribed in the work by its tracing of the strife between world and earth in the rift. The work thus offers or bestows meaning in some way, and this way of being intelligible must be recognized (implicitly or explicitly) by a historical community in order for it to be at all – the work must be preserved and understood in order to be *at work*. For instance, the wooden clogs in the painting by van Eyck *means* in a different way than the shoes in van Gogh's work. The latter shows the shoes in their abandonment through the heavy and pastuous pictorial surface, and the void of shades of brown, which through this very lostness provokes the question of their use and usefulness. In the first, the clogs are depicted through the crisp naturalism of Northern Renaissance art, but in alignment with an understanding of being (and with it, the work of art) where such conventional symbolism is the rule rather than the exception. Thus, it traces a relation between world and earth where the sensuous, objective realm is clearly distinct from – yet, through convention, in ordered contact with – the suprasensuous realm of allegorical meaning. However, if appreciated for its aesthetics qualities alone, for instance, the work does not *work* in the same way. The work needs preservers that can stand within (understand) the truth that the work opens up.

In summary, the createdness and preservation of the work together describes the work character of the work of art. For the work to be at work it must be working, i.e. the limits of intelligibility that is instigated and held open by the work must be let be at work by the preservers. Through this description of the *work* of art I suggest to find the outlines of its *origin*, namely what Heidegger calls *art*, to which I will turn to next.

Art, Poetry, and Founding

As already mentioned, the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," primarily concern the *origin* of the work of art – namely *art*. Thus, the main question of the essay concerns the *essence* of art. However, the very phrasing of the title contains an ambiguity of language, which Heidegger often exploits. The title says the origin *of* the work of art, both in the subjective genitive sense of the origin *belonging* to the work of art ("that from and by which something is what it is and as it is"²⁵²); and the objective genitive sense of the origin that art *is*. For 'origin' in German is 'Ursprung,' which Heidegger emphasizes denotes both origin and a *primordial leap* (Ur-sprung).²⁵³ Thus, it is in the attempt at understanding this twofold essence

²⁵² "The Origin," 17. [Ursprung bedeutet hier jenes, von woher und wodurch eine Sache ist, was sie ist und wie sie ist] (GA 5, 1).

²⁵³ See "The Origin," 75. (GA 5, 65-66).

of art that Heidegger engages with the question concerning the work of art, which I have suggested denotes both the artwork and the *work* that art “acts out,” as it were.

However, Heidegger’s motivation for questioning the essence of art, I argued in the introduction, is the task of overcoming aesthetics, i.e. metaphysics in the realm of art. And as I discussed, he does not claim that to *overcome* means to vanquish or defeat, but “to bring something under oneself, and at the same time to put what is thus placed under oneself behind one as something that will henceforth have no determining power.”²⁵⁴ Insofar as Heidegger claims that metaphysics determines the Western understanding of being from Plato until today – and consequentially, that aesthetics determines the Western understanding of art – its overcoming implies to see, grasp, and understand this “determining power.” We will see that in the case of metaphysics, Heidegger first, in *Being and Time*, calls this the “the destruction of the history of ontology.”²⁵⁵ That is, an attempt at investigating, dismantling, or indeed deconstructing²⁵⁶ the various ontological (later, metaphysical) fundamental positions that have determined the history of the West. In my view, “The Origin” might be seen as Heidegger’s attempt at preparing for a similar “destruction” of the history of Western *art* – a destruction that Heidegger himself, however, does never fully engage with²⁵⁷ – hence the aim of this thesis.

But why is it so important for Heidegger to overcome aesthetics through an investigation of the *essence* of art? In my view, it is because Heidegger sees artworks exactly not as merely emerging within the strife between world and earth as a being among other beings, but is – as discussed above – an *instigation* of this strife. The work of art is a concrete happening of truth where a specific understanding of being is let emerge through *a concrete being*. This characteristic – that an understanding of being, a limit of intelligibility, is “fixed in place” in a being – Heidegger claims is distinctive for the work of art. The work of art is *the created* entity that exactly through its creation lets truth “establish itself within that which

²⁵⁴ *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 223. [etwas unter sich bringen und das so unter-sich-Gelassene zugleich hinter sich bringen als dasjenige, was fortan keine bestimmende Macht mehr haben soll] (GA 6.2, 365).

²⁵⁵ *Being and Time*, 41-49. (GA 2, 27-36). Translation modified. I prefer the now more common translation of ‘Destruction’ as ‘destruction’ rather than ‘destroying.’ Heidegger’s usage of ‘Destruction’ does not imply a annihilating or destroying of the history of ontology, but rather a dismantling in order to see and understand its modes of changes. See also Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 7, n2, for Thomson’s discussion on the terms destruction and deconstruction. See also Søren Gosvig Olesen, “Heidegger and the History of Being,” in *Transcendental History*, trans. David D. Possen, 18-31 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; reprint, 2013; or. published, 2012), for a discussion of the phenomenological destruction of the history of ontology and the history of being.

²⁵⁶ Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 7, n2.

²⁵⁷ The chapter on “Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics” (Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 77-91. GA 6.1, 74-91), might be the closest Heidegger comes to this – but note that I write a destruction of the history of Western *art* not *aesthetics*. See also, Torsen, “Disinterest and Truth: On Heidegger's Interpretation of Kant's Aesthetics,” 16-20.

is.”²⁵⁸ As such, the work of art is a concrete happening of one specific way in which the process of unconcealment (truth) occurs, namely, the way whereby truth is established in beings. This seems for me to be of crucial importance to Heidegger, as it points to how various understandings of being throughout history is made concretely present to Dasein (yet work inconspicuously), and thus – as I will soon turn to – making art be of a *founding* character. This *way* or mode truth happens (i.e. unconcealment establishing itself in beings), is what Heidegger names *art* – the essence of which he claims is *poetry*.

Heidegger’s understanding of poetry [Dichtung] as the essence of art is distinct from the art of poetry [Poesie]. In the following, I will distinguish the two by using the word ‘poesy’ to designate the latter. Poetry, however, Heidegger relates to the ancient Greek word ποίησις [poiesis] which he translates bringing-forth [hervorbringen; lit. bringing-forth-hither].²⁵⁹ In designating the essence of art as poetry, i.e. as a form of poiesis (bringing-forth), Heidegger circles out what I wrote above: Art is a specific way in which truth happens, which cannot be reduced to any other *way* truth happens. Although Heidegger claims that truth happens in several ways,²⁶⁰ it seems to me that the only two ways in which truth happens that he discusses at length is in the senses of art/poetry and what he calls *thinking*.

As a way in which truth happens, Heidegger claims *art* is the setting-into-work of truth [das Ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit]. In this “key specification,”²⁶¹ Heidegger formulates what I wrote above: first, art is the setting of truth into *a* work, i.e. fixing in place of a specific limit of intelligibility (truth) in *a* being. Second, art is *truth’s* setting *itself* into work, making it “operational” as it were, or rather *act-ual* [Wirk-lich]. What this means is that the truth of being – the historical limits of intelligibility as such – is *let be* in the work of art. In Heidegger’s words, the truth of being “establishes itself”²⁶² in a being, that is, in the work of art. And this character of *letting be*, whereby truth establishes itself in beings, is what Heidegger calls *founding*.

In my view, it is the understanding of the founding character of art that ultimately makes “The Origin” contribute in preparing for the task of *overcoming aesthetics*, insofar as it denotes the way in which art, and the history of art, relates to the history of being – and with it, metaphysics. As I see it, founding denotes the way in which the work of art contributes in holding up, strengthen and focus, and in some cases challenge – and thus contribute in

²⁵⁸ Heidegger, "The Origin," 60. [sich in das Seiende einzurichten] (GA 5, 49).

²⁵⁹ "...Poetically Man Dwells...", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, 211-27 (New York: Harper Perennial, 1971; reprint, 2013; or. published, 1954), 212. (GA 7, 192).

²⁶⁰ See "The Origin," 60 (GA 5, 49).

²⁶¹ "The Origin," 81. [Leitbestimmung] (GA 5, 70).

²⁶² "The Origin," 60. (GA 5, 49).

transforming – our basic, implicit understanding of being. As such, founding [Stiftung], Heidegger claims, must be understood in the threefold sense of bestowal [Schenken], grounding [Gründen], and beginning [Anfangen].²⁶³

First, founding in the sense of bestowal indicates that the work of art offers or *bestows* meaning. Insofar as art is at work in the work, the work will always exceed what is familiar. When at work, the work holds up and displays, and thus offers and bestows, a concrete horizon of intelligibility – a concrete figure which rises as the rift (tracing the strife between world and earth) is fixed in place in the earthy work-material of the work.

Second, I suggest that founding as grounding means that through the work's bestowal of meaning, the work draws up and makes explicit and thus *establishes* and *grounds* an understanding of being. In this sense, the work's disclosure of truth is itself drawn from the understanding of being in which Dasein always already stands: "That into which Dasein is already thrown,"²⁶⁴ which otherwise remains within the closed and self-secluded aspect of the clearing. What I contend is significant is that the setting-into-work of truth thus founds truth in the sense of making explicit, or opening up the understanding of being that Dasein already is. In my view, this mode can be understood as the work of art's capacity of focusing and strengthening the historical limits of intelligibility. The founding of truth thus both means to offer meaning (as bestowal), but at the same time to draw this meaning from the withdrawn ground of Dasein, and thus making the ground "grounded as the bearing ground."²⁶⁵

The third sense of founding, Heidegger calls *beginning*. As I will return to, this mode of founding can be interpreted as the work of art's capacity of radically challenge and occasionally reconfigure the very limits of intelligibility. Although prepared by the two other modes of founding, founding as beginning departs from the familiar – it is a "primordial leap" [Ur-Sprung, i.e. *origin*]. Thus, as *founding*, "art lets truth originate."²⁶⁶ This means that works of art works to hold open the openness of the clearing – the openness of the worlds of the being-historical epochs – but are also sites where the essential transformations of the being-historical epochs takes place in concrete beings. On this, Heidegger writes:

Always when that which is as a whole demands, as what is, itself, a grounding in openness, art attains to its historical nature as foundation. This foundation happened in the West for the first time in Greece. What was in the future to be called being was set into work,

²⁶³ See "The Origin," 72-75. (GA 5, 62-66).

²⁶⁴ "The Origin," 73. Translation altered. [worein das Dasein als geschichtliches schon geworfen ist] (GA 5, 63). See also *Being and Time*, 223-4 (GA 2, 232-233), on the concept of thrownness.

²⁶⁵ "The Origin," 73. [So wird er als der tragende Grund erst gegründet] (GA 5, 63).

²⁶⁶ "The Origin," 75. [Die Kunst läßt die Wahrheit entspringen] (GA 5, 65).

setting the standard. The realm of beings thus opened up was then transformed into a being in the sense of God's creation. This happened in the Middle Ages. This kind of being was again transformed at the beginning and in the course of the modern age. Beings became objects that could be controlled and seen through by calculation. At each time a new and essential world arose. At each time the openness of what is had to be established in beings themselves, by the fixing in place of truth in figure. At each time there happened unconcealedness of what is. Unconcealedness sets itself into work, a setting which is accomplished by art.²⁶⁷

Art, in other words, plays a world-historical role by occasioning truth's self-establishing in beings by being fixed in place in the figure. Through its threefold founding character, then, art "is historical in the essential sense that it grounds history."²⁶⁸ It is a site where the changes in being's history takes place; that is, where the historical truth of being is established in beings.

Summary and Transition | The Question

Following my discussion on the understanding of truth as unconcealment, in the sense of the strife between world and earth, I have in this section discussed Heidegger's understanding of the work of art as the happening of truth. The work of art, Heidegger claims, is an instigation of the strife between world and earth. As *created*, the work traces the strife (the concrete constellation of which I suggested denote the historical limit of intelligibility) through the rift that is set in place in the figure that the work is, and thus lets truth establish itself in a being. This understanding, in turn, must be *preserved* by a historical community. For the work to be a work, it must be working, concretely, to hold open the openness of a world. Art, according to Heidegger, is as such an original way in which truth happens – it lets truth originate – and it is in this way of world-historical significance as it *founds* the historical epochs.

However, if it so, as I have argued, that Heidegger's engagement with the question of art is motivated by the task of overcoming aesthetics – which implies a historical investigation of the ways in which the truth of beings as a whole (i.e. metaphysics) has established itself in works of art – there seems to me to arise a difficulty (and with it, a question) from Heidegger's account. We have seen that a crucial aspect of Heidegger's understanding of the work of art is that the world that it sets up must be recognized by *the preservers*. That is to say, that for the work to be a work, it must be *at work* – it must be working. This I have suggested to mean that for the work to be a work it must contribute in holding open an understanding of

²⁶⁷ "The Origin," 74. [Appendix V] (*GA* 5, 64-65).

²⁶⁸ "The Origin," 75. [ist Geschichte in dem wesentlichen Sinne, daß sie Geschichte gründet] (*GA* 5, 65).

being, which in turn must be seen and recognized by a historical community of preservers. In this way, Heidegger seems to claim that the very work character of the work of art is intimately connected with its historical contemporaneity, or more accurately, to its being-historical *epoch*.

As I see it, the implications of Heidegger's account is not the trivial fact that an ancient Greek sculpture, for instance, will not mean the same to the present-day perceiver as it did in the time of its creation. Rather, the implication seems to be that the work cannot *be* a work at all if no one stands within (and thus preserve) the openness of truth that happens in the work. The work is no longer a *work* if it is not *at* work and thus *working*. As will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, Heidegger claims that the being-historical epochs change, and with them the openness of the worlds that the works of art contribute in holding open. And indeed, Heidegger seems convinced that works from ages long gone, now placed in museums and galleries, "are no longer the same as they once were,"²⁶⁹ and relates this to what he calls a "world-withdrawal and world-decay [that] can never be undone."²⁷⁰

In my view, Heidegger does not really seem to address this difficulty, and thus it provokes the question of whether – and if so, how – one *can* encounter works of art and recognize their historical significance at all, from Heidegger's perspective? For if the work character of the work is to belong to a being-historical epoch, can we – who do not belong to the same epoch, and as such are obstructed from *preserving* the work – approach, see, understand, or think *the happening of truth* that Heidegger claims that the work as work *is*? Or rather, are we left with no other possibility than to approach works art historically as *objects of science*, or aesthetically as *objects of experience* – and thus overlook what Heidegger claims makes works of art be of such crucial, world historical significance? In order to address this question, I will in the next section turn to Heidegger's writings on thinking [Denken] and poetizing [Dichtung].

²⁶⁹ "The Origin," 40. [Die Werke sind nicht mehr die, die sie waren] (GA 5, 26).

²⁷⁰ "The Origin," 40. [Weltentzug und Weltzerfall sind nie mehr rückgängig zu machen] (GA 5, 26).

Section Three | Pictorial Thinking

If the work-being of the work depends upon the work being preserved, and as such that the being of the work is bound up in the being-historical epoch it works to hold open – is it possible today to see and recognize the happening of truth that Heidegger claims that the historical work of art *is*? In “The Origin,” Heidegger himself seems to doubt this: “Even a painstaking handing on of works to posterity, all scientific efforts to regain them, no longer reach the work’s own being, but only a recollection of it.”²⁷¹ Indeed, “the work’s own peculiar reality, on the other hand, is brought to bear only where the work is preserved in the truth that happens by the work itself.”²⁷²

In my view, if preservation means to stand in the openness of truth that the work occasions, this implies that the work-being of the work always belongs to its historical epoch. For instance, the ancient Greek temple or the medieval cathedral will only be *at work* insofar as their preservers recognize the presence of the divine. Taken as objects (of science or aesthetic experience) the temple and cathedral will no longer hold open the openness of the ancient Greek or medieval world. Thus, if the work-being of the work is bound up in its being-historical epoch, and that its reality is brought to bear only if preserved – it seems to me that we cannot today, strictly speaking, recognize the historical work of art *as work*, but only, as Heidegger writes, a recollection of it.

However, Heidegger claims that somehow, “this *recollection* may still offer to the work a place from which it joins in shaping history.”²⁷³ But my question then is: *what* is this “place” from which the artwork joins in shaping history? That is to say, what *is* the work of art so that it can be recollected despite not being *at work* in its work-being? And what does Heidegger mean by recollection [Erinnerung]? In this section, I will think along the unthought of Heidegger’s thinking and suggests that what is recollected is not the work-being of the work but the *thought-being* of the artwork. That is, that the work of art is also a way in which what Heidegger calls *thinking* takes place. In line with this idea, I will eventually suggest that

²⁷¹ “The Origin,” 66. [Selbst die sorgfältige Überlieferung der Werke, die wissenschaftlichen Versuche zu ihrer Rückgewinnung erreichen dann nie mehr das Werksein selbst, sondern nur eine Erinnerung daran] (GA 5, 56).

²⁷² “The Origin,” 66. [Die eigenste Wirklichkeit des Werkes kommt dagegen nur da zum Tragen, wo das Werk in der durch es selbst geschehenden Wahrheit bewahrt wird] (GA 5, 56).

²⁷³ “The Origin,” 66. [Aber auch diese kann dem Werk noch eine Stätte bieten, von der aus es Geschichte mitgestaltet] (GA 5, 56).

along with the work-character of the work there is a thought-character of the work – and thus that the work of art can itself be understood as a way of thinking, what I will call *pictorial thinking*. In order to arrive at my discussion concerning the pictorial thinking of the work of art, however, I will first discuss Heidegger’s idiosyncratic understanding of thinking, and then its relation to art in its essential sense as poetizing – along with their shared belonging in the essence of *language*. Finally, I will outline how thinking goes on also in works of art through a brief discussion of the notions of the limits of pictorial intelligibility, poietics, and recollection.

Thinking

Through his attempt at understanding the nature of philosophizing, Heidegger comes to acknowledge that a clear distinction between philosophy (thinking) and art (poetizing) is difficult to uphold. Indeed, in a lecture on Anaximander from 1946, he claims straightforward that “thinking is poetizing...*thinking* is primordial poetry.”²⁷⁴ Although most of Heidegger’s own examples of works of art are works of poesy [Poesie], it is significant that he clearly distinguishes between such works on the one hand, and the essence of art – what he calls poetry [Dichtung] and poetizing [dichten] – on the other.²⁷⁵ As I discussed above, Heidegger claims that all works of art – be they linguistic, pictorial, musical, or architectural – have the same origin, namely *art*; and art is always poetic insofar as “the essence of art is poetry.”²⁷⁶

Notably, in a text on the poet Stefan George, Heidegger writes: “But what am I saying? Is there thinking, too, going on in a poem? Quite so – in a poem of such rank thinking is going on, and indeed thinking without science, without philosophy.”²⁷⁷ But what is such *thinking* according to Heidegger? How can *thinking* “go on” in a work of art? In order to address this question, I will first attempt to clarify what Heidegger means by thinking.

In German, ‘thinking’ [Denken], as a verbal noun, is occasionally used in a sense approximately synonymous with ‘philosophy.’ This is something Heidegger exploits as a

²⁷⁴ “The Anaximander Fragment,” [Der Spruch des Anaximander.] *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Vol. 1, no. 4, 576-626 (1973/1974), 583. [Das Denken jedoch ist Dichten....Das Denken ist die Ur-dichtung] (GA 5, 328).

²⁷⁵ As David Pascal has suggested, Heidegger distinguishes between poetry in the “narrow” sense of poesy, and in the “broader” sense of poetry and poetizing. See David Pascal, “Heidegger’s *Dichtung*: Poetry and thought,” in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, et al. (New Jersey and Oxfordshire: Princeton UP, 2014), 219.

²⁷⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 72. Translation altered. [Das Wesen der Kunst ist die Dichtung] (GA 5, 63).

²⁷⁷ *On the Way to Language*, 61. [Doch was sage ich? Wird in einem Gedicht auch noch gedacht? Allerdings, in einem Gedicht von solchem Rang wird gedacht, und zwar ohne Wissenschaft, ohne Philosophie] (GA 12, 154).

rhetorical strategy in order to surprise and subsequently push his audience towards his own understanding of the term. In the unfinished lecture course from the winter semester 1944-45, *Introduction to Philosophy: Thinking and Poetizing*, he invokes the designations of the Germans as “the people of poets and thinkers,”²⁷⁸ in the sense of the people of poets and *philosophers*. But contrary to this ordinary understanding of thinking as philosophy, Heidegger insists on a clear distinction between philosophy as it has previously been understood and practiced – i.e. metaphysics – and what he himself means by thinking.²⁷⁹ Nevertheless, there is a peculiar relationship between philosophy and thinking, insofar as he claims that thinking also occurs within the limits of metaphysics.

In the lecture course *What is Called Thinking?* from 1951-52, Heidegger claims that what is called thinking can only be understood if one consider what *calls* for thinking. What calls for thinking he names as the “most thought-provoking.”²⁸⁰ And with this name, I suggest Heidegger designates *being*, i.e. that *being* is the most thought-provoking – indeed, “what remains to be thought about always, because it is at the beginning, before all else.”²⁸¹ Hence, a first pointer towards what thinking means is that for Heidegger, thinking means “the thinking of being.”²⁸²

We have seen that Heidegger claims that that Western philosophy has been determined by *metaphysics*, which means that all previous philosophy from Plato until today has understood *being* as the being of beings. Thus, in the essay, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” from 1964, Heidegger states straightforwardly that “philosophy is metaphysics,” and that “metaphysics thinks being as a whole... with respect to being.”²⁸³ This is similar to a statement from “Letter on Humanism,” almost 20 years earlier: “Metaphysics does indeed represent beings in their being, and so it also thinks the being of beings. But it

²⁷⁸ *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing* [Einleitung in die Philosophie: Denken und Dichten], trans. Phillip Jaques Braunstein (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis UP, 2011; or. published, 1990), 5. [das Volk der Dichter und Denker] (*Gesamtausgabe 50: 1. Nietzsches Metaphysik, 2. Einleitung in die Philosophie - Denken und Dichten* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1990), 95). Note that the common description is “the *land* of poets and thinkers.” In the context of the end of WWII, it is hard not to hear ‘the people’ [das Volk] in relation to Heidegger’s affiliation with the NSDAP.

²⁷⁹ This distinction emerges gradually in Heidegger’s oeuvre: In the middle of the 1930s, Heidegger is happy to describe “thinking” as “philosophical thinking,” (See *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 28 (GA 40, 28)), while in the 1960s the distinction is clean-cut. See, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” in *On Time and Being*, ed. Joan Stambaugh, trans. Joan Stambaugh, 55-73 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002; or. published, 1964). (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens*, 67-90).

²⁸⁰ *What is Called Thinking?*, 4. [Bedenklichste] (GA 8, 6).

²⁸¹ *What is Called Thinking?*, 4. [Wir nennen darum jetzt und in der Folge dasjenige, was stets, weil einther, was allem voraus und so einthin zu denken gibt: das Bedenklichste] (GA 8, 6).

²⁸² “Letter on Humanism,” 241. [das Denken des Seins] (GA 9, 316).

²⁸³ “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” 55. [Philosophie ist Metaphysik. Diese denkt das Seiende im Ganzen – die Welt, den Menschen, Gott – hinsichtlich des Seins, hinsichtlich der Zusammengehörigkeit des Seienden im Sein] (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens*, 69).

does not think being as such, does not think the difference between being and beings.”²⁸⁴ Thus, in contrast to metaphysics, which addresses the being of beings, thinking is always a response to the “call” of being. Nevertheless, the point I would like to draw attention to is that despite Heidegger’s insistence on the distinction between philosophy (metaphysics) and thinking (the thinking of being), Heidegger here explicitly states that metaphysics *thinks*, despite the fact that metaphysics does not think *being*. But how can thinking go on in philosophy, when Heidegger insists on the distinction between philosophy and thinking?

In my view, the clarification that has to be made is that Heidegger does not claim that metaphysics – and with it, the history of Western philosophy – somehow is characterized by a lack or a failure in that it has not seen and recognized the question concerning being. Metaphysics is not something superficial, behind which one can find the “true” being (claiming this would itself be metaphysics through and through). In other words, being, in Heidegger’s sense, is not *a* being. What Heidegger claims, then, is that when being as such has been represented as the being of beings, or “beings as a whole” – that is, metaphysically – this is, as I will discuss in the next chapter, paradoxically being’s way of revealing itself.²⁸⁵ Paradoxically, because being thus reveals itself *as withdrawal* – as a *holding back* of itself. Thus, I would suggest that in the heart of the questioning of being lies this peculiar claim, which implies that metaphysics indeed thinks (responds to the call of being), but does so by necessarily overlooking (due to being’s withdrawal) being itself. Metaphysics thinks the being of beings, but does not think being as such – nor the difference between being and beings. What then, is the thinking of being?

In order to attempt to answer this question – and with it, how to understand being’s self-revealing as withdrawing – I suggest it can be helpful to change the perspective to the relation between thinking and Dasein. Indeed, the description of thinking as a response to the call of being is only one of Heidegger’s numerous attempts at bringing into words the “distressing difficulty” concerning “*the relation of being and the human being*.”²⁸⁶

Notably, in *Introduction to Philosophy* Heidegger claims that “the human is the thinking being.”²⁸⁷ What this means is that for Dasein, thinking (of being) is not

²⁸⁴ “Letter on Humanism,” 246. [Die Metaphysik stellt zwar das Seiende in seinem Sein vor und denkt so auch das Sein des Seienden. Aber sie denkt nicht das Sein als solches, denkt nicht den Unterschied beider] (GA 9, 322).

²⁸⁵ As is indicated by the statement that “the history of being is being itself.” *The End of Philosophy*, 82. [Die Seinsgeschichte ist das Sein selbst] (GA 6.2, 489).

²⁸⁶ “The Origin,” 86. [Bezug von Sein und Menschenwesen] (GA 5, 74).

²⁸⁷ *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing*, 2. [Der Mensch ist das denkende Seiende] (GA 50, 91).

merely a possible activity among other activities, but a necessary – even, *the* necessary – characteristic of its being. First, this does not mean that thinking is a mental or psychological capacity of the subject’s cognitive apparatus. It is not representative imagination, or “ideas.” And thinking is nothing “logical” or “rational.”²⁸⁸ Second, it does not mean that thinking is the production of knowledge. Heidegger repeatedly contrasts thinking with science, famously claiming that “science does not think.”²⁸⁹ In contrast to thinking, science produces and establishes knowledge by “apprehending and confirming that which shows itself to be possibly and necessarily correct within [a] field.”²⁹⁰ Thus, “thinking always knows essentially less than sciences.”²⁹¹ Science does not think, but produces and establishes knowledge. But if thinking does not produce knowledge, what then is thinking?

On several occasions, Heidegger emphasizes that thinking is closely related to the essential determination of Dasein. Significantly, on the first pages of *Introduction to Philosophy*, Heidegger sets out to question what it means to *introduce* man to philosophy. Etymologically – both in English and German – ‘to introduce’ [einleiten] means ‘to lead into,’ but Heidegger claims that Dasein always already stands in an understanding relationship to being, and hence is in no need of an introduction to philosophy. The human being has always philosophized, and cannot but philosophize. Or rather, the human being has always thought, and cannot but think. Indeed, as I wrote above, “the human is the thinking being.”²⁹² Only on this condition can there be some among us who are “the thinkers,” Heidegger claims.²⁹³

This link between Dasein and thinking I suggest to be integral to the argument Heidegger makes in *What is Called Thinking?*. Above, I wrote that “what is most thought-provoking” designates being as such; but in the lecture, Heidegger also claims that what is most thought provoking is “that we are still not thinking.”²⁹⁴ Thus, there seems to emerge a inconsistency in Heidegger’s statements between the claim that the human is the thinking being – and the claim that “man still does not think.”²⁹⁵

In my view, the key to resolve this inconsistency is to see that thinking, in Heidegger’s sense, is *always* “still not” – that is, it does never reach a goal in the sense that it produces

²⁸⁸ Heidegger’s most profound critique of logic as the fundamental principle of thinking can be found in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 77-166. (GA 79, 81-176).

²⁸⁹ *What is Called Thinking?*, 8. [Die Wissenschaft denkt nicht] (GA 8, 9).

²⁹⁰ “The Origin,” 60. [der Ausbau eines schon offenen Wahrheitsbereiches und zwar durch das Auffassen und Begründen dessen, was in seinem Umkreis sich an möglichem und notwendigem Richtigen zeigt] (GA 5, 49).

²⁹¹ *What is Called Thinking?*, 33. [weiß das Denken immer wesentlich weniger als die Wissenschaften] (GA 8, 36).

²⁹² *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing*, 2. [Der Mensch ist das denkende Seiende] (GA 50, 91).

²⁹³ *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing*, 1-2. (GA 50, 90-91).

²⁹⁴ *What is Called Thinking?*, 4. [daß wir noch nicht denken] (GA 8, 7).

²⁹⁵ *What is Called Thinking?*, 8. [der Mensch denkt noch nicht] (GA 8, 10).

knowledge. While metaphysics always strives to convince itself that its answers are the final, total explanation of beings as a whole, thinking never *achieves* anything. Thus, the “still not” of thinking does not mean that thinking once in the future might be accomplished, nor that what is “still not” might once be, or has previously been. What calls for thinking is being, and being is *as such* withdrawing. Dasein, thus, is *drawn* by what withdraws, Heidegger claims. It is a relation of tension, in which thinking never reach that which withdraws, while it cannot *not* draw towards it. Elucidating his understanding of Dasein, Heidegger writes: “As we are drawing toward what withdraws, we ourselves are pointers pointing toward it. We are who we are by pointing in that direction.”²⁹⁶ This description seems to be strikingly close to the only known illustration Heidegger ever drew of Dasein, in the Zollikon Seminars, November 9, 1959 [Image 6]. We are who we are – Dasein – by pointing towards that which withdraws. Being is not *that* which withdraws, and hence meets us, but the presencing-withdrawal itself. What meet us are beings or rather, as I discussed above, what Heidegger calls *world*, and in its openness, the self-secluding earth.

The description of Dasein as the still-not-thinking being, is for me an attempt at rethinking the description of Dasein as the being who *understands* being. Again, this does not imply that Dasein always has an explicit interpretation of being, but that it is guided by an implicit grasp of the world; it is an *implicit* “knowledge” of what and how beings are.

In my view, what Heidegger obtains by rethinking ‘understanding’ as ‘thinking’ is that the fundamental relation between philosophizing – thinking – and Dasein is made explicit. Philosophizing/thinking is not a mere activity among other activities, which could be thrown away as unnecessary, but emerges from out of the fundamental being that we are – namely that we understand being. However, by rethinking ‘understanding’ as ‘thinking,’ the different levels of description get quite confusing. Therefore, I will in the following use ‘understanding’ to denote ‘thinking’ in the sense of the fundamental determination of Dasein.

Thinking, I would then suggest to reserve to the sense in which it is a *response* to the call of being. That is, a response to the address of being, which implies to remain within a questioning attitude towards being in the acknowledgment that thinking is always *still not* and will never master being through knowledge; i.e. thinking is to remain suspended within the pointing towards the withdrawal of being. Thinking, in this sense, is a not-knowing and a remaining within this not-knowing, yet it does not mean simple ignorance. Thus, for Heidegger, Socrates is “the purest thinker of the West” exactly because “he wrote nothing”

²⁹⁶ *What is Called Thinking?*, 9. [Auf dem Zuge zu dem Sichentziehenden weisen wir selber auf dieses Sichentziehende. Wir sind wir, indem wir dahin weisen] (GA 8, 11).

and only “did nothing else than place himself into this draft, this current, and maintain himself in it.”²⁹⁷ Yet, for the rest of Western history, thinking then is a reporting, as it were, from the standing-within the current of being’s withdrawal. Or rather, a way of making explicit and *articulate* the understanding of being that Dasein always already is. The essential thinking of the philosophers of metaphysics, according to Heidegger, is such an articulation of the implicit understanding of being that being’s history has always already opened up through its withdrawal.

For this thesis, a crucial aspect of Heidegger’s understanding of thinking, however, is that in “The Origin,” he lists thinking among the essential ways in which truth happens. Indeed, he writes “still another way in which truth becomes is the thinker’s questioning, which as the thinking of being, names being in its question-worthiness.”²⁹⁸ However, as late as in 1969, in the essay “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” Heidegger writes that, insofar as thinking means to remain within the suspension of being’s withdrawal, thinking can only be “preparatory” and thus “not of a founding character.”²⁹⁹ Thus, although thinking is a responsive attitude towards being, and as such, *lets beings be* by “say[ing] the truth of being,”³⁰⁰ thinking remains preparatory. Contrary to art – which is of a founding character when it lets the truth of being establish itself (setting-itself-into work) in concrete beings, as discussed above – thinking remains a naming and saying of the truth of being. However, it remains implicit and thus unthought in Heidegger’s thinking, that if this *saying* of the truth of being reaches the point whereby “it *transforms* the people’s saying,”³⁰¹ it passes beyond *thinking* and becomes *art*, in the sense of poetizing. Thus, I will turn to the relation between thinking and poetizing, and Heidegger’s claim of their common belonging to the essence of *language*.

Thinking, Poetizing, and the Essence of Language

According to Heidegger, thinking is an articulation of the understanding relation to being in which Dasein stands and through which Dasein *is*. Thinking thus remains a way of saying the truth of being, while art is a way in which the truth of being establishes itself in beings.

²⁹⁷ *What is Called Thinking?*, 17. [Sokrates hat zeit seines Lebens, bis in seinen Tod hinein, nichts anderes getan, als sich in den Zugwind dieses Zuges zu stellen und darin sich zu halten. Darum ist er der reinste Denker des Abendlandes] (GA 8, 20).

²⁹⁸ “The Origin,” 60.

²⁹⁹ “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” 60. [einen vorbereitende, keinen stiftende Charakter hat] (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens*, 75).

³⁰⁰ “Letter on Humanism,” 239. [die Wahrheit des Seins zu sagen] (GA 9, 11).

³⁰¹ “The Origin,” 42.

However, as was pointed out previously, Heidegger claims that thinking and art belongs closely together, and that both are ways in which truth happens. Indeed, thinking and art (in its essential sense as poetizing) Heidegger claims belong to the same “neighborhood.”³⁰² But what is this *neighborhood* of thinking and poetizing? In the following, I will discuss Heidegger’s claim that both thinking and poetizing belong to the essence of language, which he names saying [Sagen] and showing [Zeigen].

In discussing the relation between thinking and poetizing, Heidegger repeatedly returns to the relation between thinking and *poesy*, as well as between thinking and the work of art in general. As mentioned above, in Heidegger’s writings there is a distinction between *poesy*, on the one hand, and poetizing and poetry, on the other. While the former designates the art of poesy (poetic *works* of art), the latter two designates the essence of *art*. All poesy (as work) is a form of poetry, but poetry is not exhausted by poesy. It is significant, then, that in *Introduction to Philosophy*, Heidegger first claims that there is a privileged relationship between thinking and the art of poesy – insofar as “their works and only theirs are of a linguistic ‘nature.’”³⁰³

In the lecture, Heidegger explicitly aligns poetizing with the creation of poesy: “Yet thinking and poetizing reveal an even closer relation than thinking and painting. Thinking and poetizing exist exclusively in the realm of language.”³⁰⁴ This statement, from 1944/45, is in line with previous statements from as early as 1935. Notably, the claim from *Introduction to Metaphysics*, that “only poetry is of the same order as philosophical thinking, although thinking and poetry are not identical,”³⁰⁵ is immediately followed by a discussion of a work by the poet Knut Hamsun. In the “Origin of the Work of Art,” moreover, Heidegger first claims that “the linguistic work, the poem in the narrower sense, has a privileged position in the domain of the arts.”³⁰⁶ But still in “The Origin,” this simple alignment of poetizing and poesy is soon made more complicated: “Poetry is thought of here in so broad a sense and at the same time in such intimate unity of being with language and word, that we must leave

³⁰² *On the Way to Language*, 70. [von einer Nachbarschaft des Denkens zum Dichten] (GA 12, 163).

³⁰³ *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing*, 44. [Ihre Werke und nur ihre sind sprachlicher „Natur“] (GA 50, 139).

³⁰⁴ *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing*, 44. [Denken und Dichten zeigen aber eine noch engere Verwandtschaft als Denken und Malen. Denken und Dichten bewegen sich ausschließlich im Bereich der Sprache] (GA 50, 139).

³⁰⁵ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 28. [In derselben Ordnung ist die Philosophie und ihr Denken nur mit der Dichtung. Aber Dichten und Denken sind wiederum nicht das gleiche] (GA 40, 28).

³⁰⁶ “The Origin,” 71. [das Sprachwerk, die Dichtung im engeren Sinne, eine ausgezeichnete Stellung im Ganzen der Künste] (GA 5, 61).

open whether art, in all its modes from architecture to poesy, exhausts the nature of poetry.”³⁰⁷

On the one hand, then, Heidegger seems to operate with a very narrow understanding of poetry, and on the other, a very broad. In my view, there might be two possible ways of interpreting this discrepancy: First, in the case of the narrow understanding of poetry, note that Heidegger puts “essence” in quotation marks. This is something he usually does to indicate that it is not the “essential essence” that is under discussion but the “inessential essence,” i.e. the *metaphysical* essence.³⁰⁸ Thus, thinking and poetry enjoy a privileged relationship insofar as the two are both linguistic, in the ordinary sense. The (essential) essence of language, as we soon will see, however, Heidegger claims is far removed from this ordinary understanding of language. Nevertheless, the problem with this interpretation is that Heidegger explicitly contrasts poetry with painting, implying that the latter does not “exist exclusively in the realm of language.” Had the word ‘language’ been put in quotation marks, my interpretation might have been more convincing.³⁰⁹

A second possibility, which to me seems to be the case, is that Heidegger changes his understanding of the relation between art and language. This might be so, insofar as he later (in 1957) states – with explicit reference to painting – that “all art, not only poesy, moves in the realm that speaks as language.”³¹⁰ A few years before, the claim from *Introduction to Metaphysics* concerning the sameness of thinking and poetry (“only poetry is of the same order as philosophical thinking, although thinking and poetry are not identical,”³¹¹), is echoed in *What is Called Thinking?*: “What is spoken poetically, and what is spoken in thought, are never identical; but there are times when they are the same.”³¹² A significant shift that might be detected between 1935 and 1951 is that in the latter, Heidegger emphasizes that it is what is *spoken* poetically and in thought that can be the same – not philosophy and poesy as such. Likewise, while he previously claims that only poesy exists in the realm of language, he now

³⁰⁷ “The Origin,” 72. [Die Dichtung ist hier in einem so weiten Sinne und zugleich in so inniger Wesenseinheit mit der Sprache und dem Wort gedacht, daß es offen bleiben muß, ob die Kunst und zwar in allen ihren Weisen, von der Baukunst bis zur Poesie, das Wesen der Dichtung erschöpft] (GA 5, 62).

³⁰⁸ “Indifferent essence [gleichgültige Wesen] (essentiality in the sense of *essentia*) is, however, only the inessential essence [unwesentliche Wesen].” “The Origin,” 49. [Dieses gleich-giltige Wesen (die Wesenheit im Sinne der *essentia*) ist aber nur das unwesentliche Wesen] (GA 5, 37).

³⁰⁹ The statement could also be read as a continuation of Heidegger’s description of the modern (metaphysical) understanding of thinking and poetizing in the previous paragraph, but this is in my view ambiguous.

³¹⁰ Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 131. Translation altered. [Alle Kunst, nicht erst die Dichtung, bewegt sich in dem Bereich, als welcher die Sprache spricht] (GA 79, 139).

³¹¹ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 28. [In derselben Ordnung ist die Philosophie und ihr Denken nur mit der Dichtung. Aber Dichten und Denken sind wiederum nicht das gleiche] (GA 40, 28).

³¹² *What is Called Thinking?*, 20. Translation altered. [Das dichtend Gesagte und das denkend Gesagte sind niemals das Gleiche; aber sie sind zuweilen das Selbe] (GA 8, 21).

claims that all art moves in the realm that *speaks* as language. Understanding this *speaking*, or rather, *saying*, then, becomes the crucial element for understanding the relation between thinking and poetizing. Indeed, it denotes the very “neighborhood”³¹³ of thinking and poetizing, namely the essence of language.

In “A Dialogue on Language” (1953-4), Heidegger (an Inquirer) discusses the essence of language with a Japanese scholar:

- Inquirer: For long, I have been loth to use the word “language” when thinking on its essence.
- Japanese: But can you find a more fitting word?
- I: I believe I have found it; but I would guard it against being used as a current tag, and corrupted to signify a concept.
- J: Which word do you use?
- I: The word “saying.” It means: saying and what is said in it and what is to be said.
- J: What does “say” mean?
- I: Probably the same as “show” in the sense of: let appear and let shine, but in the manner of hinting.
- J: Saying, then, is not the name for human speaking...³¹⁴

The dialogue makes clear that the essence of language is itself nothing linguistic, nor is it reducible to human speaking or written language. Moreover, Heidegger refutes that the essence of language is related to signification or communication. All such interpretations he would claim are derivative of the essence of language. Language, in the essential sense, is much more far-reaching than spoken or written words and sentences. Language, the essence of which is saying and showing, seems to me to be Heidegger’s attempt at rethinking the ancient Greek word λόγος [logos]. It designates the appearance, emergence, or the shining forth of intelligibility: “Language is the happening in which for man beings first disclose themselves to him each time as beings.”³¹⁵ It “offer[s] and extend[s]” the understanding of being that Dasein is.³¹⁶ Thus, in line with the guideline of my reading of Heidegger, language (like truth; like thinking; like poetizing; like history) means *language of being*.

³¹³ *On the Way to Language*, 70. [Nachbarschaft] (GA 12, 163).

³¹⁴ *On the Way to Language*, 47. Translation altered. [Appendix I] (GA 12, 136-137)

³¹⁵ “The Origin,” 72. [die Sprache jenes Geschehnis ist, in dem für den Menschen jeweils erst Seiendes als Seiendes sich erschließt] (GA 5, 62).

³¹⁶ Thus, “to say” – as the essence of language – means to “offer and extend what we call world. lighting and concealing it. This lighting and hiding proffer of the world is the essential being of saying.” *On the Way to*

Thus, when Heidegger claims that “saying is the same element for both poetry and thinking,”³¹⁷ and that saying is the essence of language, he marks out the neighborhood of thinking and poetizing. But what does to “say” mean? Heidegger replies: “‘Say’ means to show, to let appear, to let be seen and heard.”³¹⁸ Saying is thought intimately to showing – it means to *let* beings appear, to *let* that which is show itself. Indeed: “*The essential being of language is saying as showing.*”³¹⁹ Saying means showing, showing means saying. Thus language is not (as it has been put by metaphysics) restricted to the “invisible” realm of sense – in opposition to the sensuous realm: “Showing makes something come to light, lets what has come to light be perceived, and lets the perception be examined.”³²⁰

Thus, I would like to emphasize what I take to be the two most important points in Heidegger’s description of saying *as* showing for the present thesis. First, saying/showing is a *letting* – it does not produce or force something to show itself, but *lets* beings appear. Second, Dasein, as the being that *understands* being, belongs to language in the essential sense. This is so insofar as the understanding of being that Dasein is must be *let* appear. Understanding of being – Dasein – dwells in language.

As such, when Heidegger writes “what is spoken poetically, and what is spoken in thought, are never identical; but there are times when they are the same,”³²¹ I suggest this to mean that what *calls* for thinking and what *calls* for poetizing is the same (i.e. being), but that their responses are not identical. Thinking and poetizing both are the responsive saying/showing of being, but their mode of saying/showing are different. Both *lets* beings appear (by bespeaking being), but their way of *letting* is not identical. Furthermore, this relates to Heidegger’s claim that “language speaks.”³²² Indeed, what speaks poetically is language, what is spoken in thought is language. That is, the letting of being’s withdrawal – and with it, the emergence of beings. If this seems confusing, however, it is because it is confusing. Also for Heidegger:

Language, 93. [erscheinen lassen, lichtend-verbergend frei-geben als dar-reichen dessen, was wir Welt nennen. Das lichtend-verhüllende, schleiernde Reichen von Welt ist das Wesende im Sagen] (GA 12, 188).

³¹⁷ *On the Way to Language*, 84. [Das Sagen ist dasselbe Element für das Dichten und das Denken] (GA 12, 178).

³¹⁸ *On the Way to Language*, 122. [„Sagen“ heißt: zeigen, erscheinen-, sehen- und hören-lassen] (GA 12, 241).

³¹⁹ *On the Way to Language*, 123. [*Das Wesende der Sprache ist die Sage als die Zeige*] (GA 12, 242).

³²⁰ *On the Way to Language*, 115. [etwas zum Scheinen, läßt das Erscheinende vernehmen und das Vernommene durchnehmen (be-handeln)] (GA 12, 233). The relationship between this showing, and what is shown, Heidegger claims, goes deeper and more originary than the conventional relation between sign and signification. The latter, is a relation of designation, based in metaphysics, and not of “bringing something to light.”

³²¹ *What is Called Thinking?*, 20. Translation altered. [Das dichtend Gesagte und das denkend Gesagte sind niemals das Gleiche; aber sie sind zuweilen das Selbe] (GA 8, 21).

³²² “Language,” 188. [Die Sprache spricht] (GA 12, 11).

Poetry moves in the element of saying, and so does thinking. When we reflect on poetry, we find ourselves at once in that same element in which thinking moves. We cannot here decide flatly whether poetry is really a kind of thinking, or thinking really a kind of poetry. It remains dark to us what determines their real relation, and from what source what we so casually call the “real” really comes.³²³

The relation between thinking and poetizing remains – like the relation between being and the human being – a “distressing difficulty” for Heidegger. However, what the foregoing discussion has clarified is that somehow, Heidegger claims, this relation is bound up in the essence of language as saying/showing. As suggested above, however, it seem to me that the distinction between the two can be understood in alignment with Heidegger’s claim that thinking, contrary to art, is not of a *founding* character. As such, it seems that when – and insofar as – thinking not only articulates an understanding of being, but arrives at the place where it can contribute in founding an understanding of being, thinking is *art*, or rather, as Heidegger claims in the essay on Anaximander quoted above: “thinking is poetizing.”³²⁴ However, the aim of the present section is to approach the reverse statement: can poetizing be a form of thinking? Can the work of art also be of a thinking character? For if it is so, as I have suggested, that the work-being of the work – and thus its founding character – is bound up in its being-historical epoch; can it be that it is the *thought*-being and not the work-being of the work that can be the “*place* from which it joins in shaping history”³²⁵? Heidegger does not write so explicitly, yet he claims that in a poem by Stephan George, thinking, too, is going on, indeed “in a poem of such rank thinking is going on, and indeed thinking without science, without philosophy.”³²⁶

In the following, I will suggest that analogous to such “poetic thinking,”³²⁷ there is a notion of *pictorial thinking* unthought in Heidegger’s thinking. This is to say, that in pictorial works of art, too, thinking is “going on.” Indeed, a thinking without science and without philosophy.

³²³ *On the Way to Language*, 83. [Appendix II] (*GA 12*, 178).

³²⁴ “The Anaximander Fragment,” 583. [Das Denken jedoch ist Dichten] (*GA 5*, 328).

³²⁵ “The Origin,” 66. [Aber auch diese [Erinnerung] kann dem Werk noch eine Stätte bieten, von der aus es Geschichte mitgestaltet] (*GA 5*, 56).

³²⁶ *On the Way to Language*, 61. [Doch was sage ich? Wird in einem Gedicht auch noch gedacht? Allerdings, in einem Gedicht von solchem Rang wird gedacht, und zwar ohne Wissenschaft, ohne Philosophie] (*GA 12*, 154).

³²⁷ “What are Poets For?,” 93. [dichtenden Denkens] (*GA 5*, 273).

Pictorial Thinking

Thinking *says* the truth of being, Heidegger claims. Above, I suggested this to mean that thinking is a way of articulating and making explicit an understanding of being while remaining preparatory and not being of a founding character. In contrast, the work of art, when it is at work, is an establishing of the truth of being in a being, and thus works to hold open the openness of a historical world. In the following, I will suggest that the thought-being of the artwork implies that through this establishing the artwork also *articulates* an understanding of being. That is, that in the work there is inscribed, and thus *shown*, a historical limit of intelligibility. In this way, despite world-withdrawal and world-decay – that is, despite the being-historical transformations that obstruct us from standing in and preserving the truth that the work works to hold open – I will argue that as thinking, *pictorial* thinking, an articulation of the happening of truth that the work is is still available. Namely, through what Heidegger calls *recollection* [Erinnerung]. And as will be made clear, this recollection is not the same as a historiological study of objects and events in the past, but is a being-historical thinking-along of the thinking of the artwork that co-creates history [Geschichte mitgestaltet]. Thus, the implication of Heidegger's writings on art is that the history of art as such is intimately connected with the history of being itself. But before turning to this issue in the next chapter, I will attempt to provisionally outline how thinking goes on in painting, and attempt to explain how I will approach – recollect – this *pictorial thinking*.

The work of art, as work, is an establishing of truth in beings, through which the work works to hold open the openness of a being-historical world. As I wrote above, I understand a clearing of truth – an understanding of being as a whole – as a specific configuration of the strife between world and earth. All beings that emerge in light of the clearing are understood in alignment with the configuration of the strife between world and earth. In this way, the clearing denotes the *limit* of what is considered intelligible and what is not, but also the *limit* that enables beings to emerge as intelligible. And as we will see shortly, then, the fundamental transformations of this configuration – or rather, the fundamental transformations of this *limit of intelligibility* – are the fundamental transformations of the being-historical epochs.

When the work *works*, then, I suggest that it shows beings in alignment with the limits of intelligibility (founding; bestowal), it focuses and strengthens the limits of intelligibility (founding; grounding), or alters and transgresses the limits of intelligibility (founding;

beginning). Indeed, as Nowell Smith suggests in a discussion concerning poesy, “shifting the limits of what is intelligible within the medium, [the poem] shifts the limits of intelligibility as such.”³²⁸ However, in the case of poesy, this shift is not “semantic...but prosodic...the limit of language as medium is experienced as noise.”³²⁹ The poem, Nowell Smith thus claims, can alter the limits of what appear as meaningful and what is noise in language (as a medium). But what about the pictorial work of art?

The work-character of the *pictorial* work, I suggest to see as the work’s engagement with the limits of *pictorial* intelligibility. That is to say, the *limit* of what is considered intelligible and what is not in the pictorial work, but also the *limit* that enables the pictorial work to emerge as intelligible. In this sense, the work founds as bestowal when it *shows* so that the limits of pictorial intelligibility is in alignment with the limits of intelligibility as such; the work founds as grounding when it brings out, focuses, and thus strengthens the *limits* of pictorial intelligibility in its correspondence to the *limits* of intelligibility as such; and finally, the work founds as beginning when it alters and transgresses the limits of pictorial intelligibility, and thus contributes in altering the limits of intelligibility.

In my view, this *limit* of pictorial intelligibility is what Heidegger aims at with the concept of *rift*. The rift is the way in which a specific configuration of the strife between world and earth is traced and set into the work, fixed in place, and thus forming a “figure.”³³⁰ The work is this figure, and thus always a place where an intersection – a limit – between world and earth (traced by the rift) is let be. In other word, what I suggest that this means is that the work of art always brings-forth beings, i.e. lets beings essence, in some *way*. As I will argue in the next chapters, I will call the work of art’s *way* of being intelligible the work’s *poietics*. This word indicates that it signifies the work’s idiomatic mode of *poiesis*, i.e. of bringing-forth. In manner of anticipation, I will think of the poietics of the work as its style in the *essential* sense.

However, so far I have elucidated the work-character of the work. But in my view, this interpretation of the work-character of the work opens up for seeing what I suggest to be the *thought*-character of the work. For exactly by *tracing* a specific limit of intelligibly, and thus by bringing-forth in alignment with a configuration of the strife between world and earth, the work makes *manifest* and *articulates* a specific limit of pictorial intelligibility. In other words, the artwork addresses and *shows* an understanding of being. This means that while the work

³²⁸ Nowell Smith, *Sounding/Silence*, 29.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

³³⁰ Heidegger, "The Origin," 62. [Der in den Riß gebrachte und so in die Erde zurückgestellte und damit festgestellte Streit ist die *Gestalt*] (*GA* 5, 51).

as work provides an openness that must be preserved, the work *as thinking* can be seen as an articulation – a making-explicit – of this very openness. Or rather, while the work-being of the work occasions a happening of truth (unconcealment), the thought-being of the work is its showing of this unconcealment. Most fundamentally, I will suggest that the thinking that goes on in the work of art occurs at the level of the work's poietics. How the work brings-forth beings as meaningful, i.e. how beings as a whole are allowed to essence through the work, emerge due to the establishing of a specific limit of intelligibility, the occurrence of which is the work's poietics.

In this way, I suggest that the work can be recognized as a happening of truth – despite not being *at work*. For in the same way as one can engage with the essential thinking of a philosophical text (its essential articulation of an understanding of being, through its *saying* of the truth of being), the work of art understood in its thought-being, can be seen as an articulation of an understanding of being through its *showing* of the truth of being. How this showing takes place through the poietics of the work, and how concrete works of art engage with the limits of pictorial intelligibility, I will discuss in the second part of this thesis.

However, as touched above, Heidegger claims that “even a painstaking handing on of works to posterity, all scientific efforts to regain them, no longer reach the work's own being, but only a recollection of it. But even this recollection may still offer to the work a place from which it joins in shaping history.”³³¹ This “place” I have suggested to be the thought-being of the artwork understood as *pictorial thinking*. However, how can Heidegger's claim that it is through *recollection* that the historical work of the work of art can be recognized, be understood? Indeed, in the abovementioned quote from “The Origin,” he seems to align *recollection* with the *scientific* efforts to regain and hand over works to posterity, which would imply exactly to see the work of art as an object and not as a happening of truth. Notably, however, although this is not explicit in “The Origin,” Heidegger later comes to see *recollection* as a way in which the *history of being* can be approached. As I will argue shortly, Heidegger's understanding of the history of being emerge through an engagement with the fundamental metaphysical positions that are articulated in the essential thinking of the history of Western philosophy. Yet, he claims that the history of being is neither reducible to a historiological study of the history of philosophy, nor is it a “historical report about the

³³¹ “The Origin,” 66. [Aber auch diese [Erinnerung] kann dem Werk noch eine Stätte bieten, von der aus es Geschichte mitgestaltet] (GA 5, 56).

history of the concept of being.”³³² In “Letter on Humanism,” he writes: “Thought in a more primordial way, there is the history of being to which thinking belongs as *recollection* of this history, appropriated by it. Such recollective thought differs essentially from the subsequent presentation of history in the sense of an evanescent past.”³³³ In other words, recollection is not here thought as the historiological, i.e. *scientific*, attempt at regaining the events of the past. And in the essay “Recollection in Metaphysics” from 1941, he writes explicitly that “recollection does not report on past opinions and representations about being. It also does not trace the relation of their influence nor tell about standpoints within conceptual history,” it is instead a recognition of thinking as “the listening response which belongs to the claim of being.”³³⁴ In the following, I will therefore suggest that the recollection of the pictorial thinking of the work of art is an approach that thinks the work from the perspective of the truth of being, and see it as response to the call of being.

In pursuing the aim of the present thesis, I understand recollection, then, as a tracing of the limits of pictorial intelligibility that the work makes manifest and, as such, that seeks to answer the questions: what understanding of beings (as a whole) does the work make manifest? In what *way* does the work provide intelligibility? However, every work provides intelligibility, but this does not mean that every work thinks. Thinking goes on in the pictorial work exactly through its engagement and confrontation with the limits of what is intelligible within its medium. Most crucially, as I will show in more depth in chapter three and four, a painting *founds* (in the sense of beginning) when it not merely *reflects* the understanding of being of its epoch, but when it challenge, transgresses, and exceeds the limits of pictorial intelligibility, and hence contributes in shifting the limits of intelligibility as such.

In the dialogue between Heidegger and the Japanese quoted above, Heidegger claims that “the lasting element in thinking is the way. And ways of thinking hold within them that mysterious quality that we can walk them forward and backward.”³³⁵ Hence, the thinking that goes on in the work of art belongs to this way, and that its recollection designates the walking backwards along this way. The ‘way’ means, as always: the way of being, or rather, the

³³² *The End of Philosophy*, 1. [historischen Bericht über die Geschichte des Seinsbegriffes] (GA 6.2, 399).

³³³ “Letter on Humanism,” 255. Note that here, the word used for recollection is *Andenken*. [Es gibt, anfänglicher gedacht, die Geschichte des Seins, in die das Denken als Andenken dieser Geschichte, von ihr selbst ereignet, gehört. Das Andenken unterscheidet sich wesentlich von dem nachträglichen Vergegenwärtigen der Geschichte im Sinne des vergangenen Vergehens] (GA 9, 335).

³³⁴ *The End of Philosophy*, 77. [Die Erinnerung berichtet nicht über vergangene Meinungen und Vorstellungen vom Sein. Sie verfolgt auch nicht deren Einflußverhältnisse und erzählt nicht von Standpunkten innerhalb einer Begriffsgeschichte ... dies Denken die hörende Antwort, die sich auf den Anspruch des Seins ereignet] (GA 6.2, 483).

³³⁵ *On the Way to Language*, 12. [Das Bleibende im Denken ist der Weg. Und Denkwege bergen in sich das Geheimnisvolle, daß wir sie vorwärts und rückwärts gehen können] (GA 12, 94).

history of being. The thinking that goes on in the work of art, in other words, is not a subjective projection and expression of the artist's intentions, ideas, or worldview. It is rather, as was stated above, a response to the call of being.

As I discussed in the introduction, after the turning, Heidegger claims that Dasein's understanding of being is dependent on, or rather, claimed by being's "self-establishing of openness in the open."³³⁶ Art, as a mode of truth, is thus a way in which the truth of beings as a whole establishes itself in the open, as the setting-into-work of truth, i.e. as the work of art. The truth of being, however, Heidegger claims is sent [schickt] by being itself, and is thus historical [Geschichtlich]. As truth's self-establishing in the work of art, art – as poetizing/poetry – grounds history. Thinking takes place in the work of art when the work articulates the historical variable limit of intelligibility (i.e. the historical understanding of being; the *epochal* truth of beings). In this way, the thought-being of the work of art is the first step towards an understanding of the relation between the history of art and the history of being – and from there, Heidegger's unthought art history of being.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, I have discussed Heidegger's understanding of truth – unconcealment – as the strife between world and earth; Heidegger's understanding of the work of art as the happening of truth; and finally, the relation between thinking and art, along with my suggestion that also in works of art *thinking* goes on. In my view, that artwork can be seen as a mode of thinking – i.e. that thinking, too, goes on in works of art – opens for investigating the relation between art and the history of being. Indeed, Heidegger claims that artworks do not only occur "within" history, but that art is a way in which unconcealedness, and thus history, *originates*. Before turning to my discussion of Munch's paintings in the second part of this thesis, however, I will further discuss the implications of Heidegger's writings on art and history for how we can think art historically from the perspective of the art history of being.

In this respect, a key passage that will guide my attempt of thinking along Heidegger's unthought history of art, occurs in the epilogue to "The Origin of the Work of Art." It reads:

The essential transformation of truth 'cor-responds to' [lit. 'speaks out from'] the essential history of Western art.

³³⁶ "The Origin," 59. [das Sicheinrichten der Offenheit in das Offene] (GA 5, 59).

[Dem Wesenswandel der Wahrheit entspricht die Wesensgeschichte der abendländischen Kunst].³³⁷

Provisionally put, this sentence says that through the historical changes in what and how Western art *is*, the transformation of the truth of beings takes place. What I will suggest this to mean is that (in the case of the pictorial arts) throughout the history of the West, the different modes of pictorial intelligibility, and the essential alterations of *poietics*, can be seen as manifestations of the historically variable *metaphysical* understanding of being, and with them different interpretations of the concept of truth. The history of art, in other words, belongs closely to the history of being. Exactly how this belonging can be understood from the perspective of Heidegger's thinking, however, I will turn to in the next chapter.

³³⁷ GA 5, 69-70. Translation mine. Compare, "the history of the nature of Western art corresponds to the change of the nature of truth" in "The Origin," 79.

CHAPTER TWO

THE METAPHYSICS OF ART

AND THE HISTORY OF BEING

Dasein, as the being that understands being, exists in an open clearing in which that which is understood – the truth of beings – has always already established itself in beings. In the previous chapter, I discussed Heidegger’s claim that art is an essential way in which this self-establishing occurs. Through art, the limit of intelligibility prescribed by the strife between world and earth inscribes itself in beings, and as such, contributes to hold open the openness of the clearing in which Dasein stands. In this way, Heidegger suggests that “the essential transformation of truth *cor-responds* to the essential history of Western art.”³³⁸ But what does Heidegger mean by “the essential transformation of truth” and “the essential history of Western art”? And what does it mean that the one *corresponds* to the other? In this chapter, I will continue my attempt at sketching out and establishing a perspective from which I will subsequently approach Edvard Munch’s paintings *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*, namely what I will call Heidegger’s unthought art history of being. In order to arrive at the place from which a recollection and exploration of this art history of being can be ventured, however, I will in the following take Heidegger’s claim of the *correspondence* between the essential transformation of truth and the essential history of Western art as my point of departure.

³³⁸ GA 5, 69-70. Translation mine.

However, in the previous chapter, I discussed how Heidegger argues that the essence of truth is unconcealment – *aletheia* – while the essence of art is truth’s setting-itself-to-work. But by claiming that the essential *transformation* of truth corresponds to the essential *history* of Western art, Heidegger now appears to suggest that both the essence of truth and the essence of art *as such* transform and have a history. What then is the relation between the essence of truth as unconcealment and these essential *transformations* of truth? And what is the relation between the essence of art (as truth’s setting-itself-to-work) and the essential *history* of Western art? The crucial distinction I contend can clarify this possible confusion was also mentioned, although briefly, in the previous chapter. In “The Origin,” Heidegger makes a distinction between *inessential* essences, and *essential* essences.³³⁹ In the former case, essence designates the *metaphysical* essence, i.e. *essentia*. In the latter case, essence is meant in Heidegger’s sense as the way in which something holds sway – how it *is*.

Thus, insofar as Heidegger claims that ‘truth’ essentially means ‘truth of being,’ I suggest that “the essential transformation of truth” must be taken to mean the transformation of the *metaphysical* understanding of being. This is so, as was argued above, insofar as unconcealment (truth) must always be established in beings in some way – and, as I mentioned, throughout the history of the West since Plato, unconcealment has established itself as metaphysics. “The essential transformation of truth,” therefore designates the essential history of the truth of beings as a whole, i.e. the history of metaphysics, and thus what Heidegger calls *the history of being*.

Likewise, “the essential history of Western art” means the history of the metaphysical essence of Western art. That is, how art (as truth setting-itself-into-work) has been at work throughout the history of the West. Moreover, then, the implication of the previous chapter is that Heidegger’s claim that the essential transformation of truth *corresponds* to [entspricht, lit. *speaks out from*] the essential history of Western art, is exactly that the history of art is one of the essential ways the fundamental, historical transformations in the history of being takes place. In a lecture course on Hölderlin’s hymn “The Ister” from 1942, Heidegger argues:

To the rich inner transformation of the essence of metaphysics, which for us follows an as yet concealed law of a concealed history and is in no way the monstrous outgrowth of arbitrary and changing views of individual thinkers and their “particular” standpoints, *to this transformation of the essence of metaphysics*

³³⁹ “The Origin,” 49. (GA 5, 37).

*there also corresponds a transformation of art in terms of its essence as symbolic image.*³⁴⁰

Thus, in order to sketch out the perspective from which Heidegger's art history of being can be approached, I will in the first section of this chapter discuss Heidegger's claim concerning the metaphysical essence of art as "symbolic image," which despite its brevity will be significant in the coming chapters. As intimated in the previous chapter, Heidegger does not write much on the essential history of Western art – which he claims *corresponds* to the transformation of the essence of metaphysics. Rather, his focus is on how the transformation of the essence of metaphysics is articulated in the essential thinking throughout the history of philosophy.

As such, in the second section, I will turn to Heidegger's history of being, and first discuss Heidegger's notions of history and epochs, before turning to an overview and discussion of the determinations of the various epochs – from the pre-Socratic epoch until the contemporary, late-modern epoch. This rather laborious reading of Heidegger's history of being will be crucial for my discussion in the next two chapters. More accurately, in my discussion of Munch's art, the modern and late-modern epochs – and the transition between the two – will be of special importance. For this reason, I will focus my discussion on these epochs.

Finally, I will conclude the first part of the thesis with some remarks concerning Heidegger's unthought art history of being, which will enable my turning to the second part of the thesis.

³⁴⁰ Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister", 24-5. Emphasis mine. [Dem reichen inneren Wandel des Wesens der Metaphysik, der einem uns noch verborgenen Gesetz einer verborgenen Geschichte folgt und keineswegs die Ausgeburd beliebig wechselnder Ansichten einzelner Denker und ihrer „sonderbaren“ Standpunkte ist, diesem Wesenswandel der Metaphysik entspricht auch der Wandel des sinnbildlichen Wesens der Kunst] (GA 53, 28).

Section One | The Metaphysical Essence of the Work of Art

In “The Origin,” Heidegger claims that the traditional, i.e. metaphysical, interpretation of the work of art is that it is primarily a produced object which “makes public something other than itself.”³⁴¹ A painting, for instance, is a material thing which expresses, renders, or in some other way displays content or a meaning which is “more” than the material thing. Insofar as it manifests something other than itself, Heidegger claims that the work of art is *allo agoreuei*, “it is an allegory.”³⁴² The work, however, brings together this other meaning with the material thing, and is in this sense a symbol (“to bring together,” Heidegger writes, “is, in Greek, *sumballein*. The work is a symbol”³⁴³). In “The Origin,” this understanding of the work of art is taken as point of departure for the inquiry into the question concerning the essence of the work of art. Heidegger’s approach, however, is not to examine the various ways in which the history of philosophy has understood the work of art. Rather, as mentioned in the previous chapter, insofar as the metaphysical interpretation of the artwork is that its most conspicuous reality is to be a thing (from which something “more” emerges), Heidegger examines three historically variable interpretations of what a thing is, only to ultimately discard them all as inadequate for understanding the work’s reality – its work-character. Hence, “The Origin” then proceeds to describe the “essential essence” of the work of art (art: truth setting itself into work; poetizing: founding).

The conclusion I have drawn from Heidegger’s writings on art so far, however, would imply that the “inessential essences” or rather, the metaphysical *essencing* of Western art as “symbolic image” is what occurs through the essencing of the work of art as truth setting-itself-into-work. In other words, the work’s capacity for *instigating* the strife between world and earth – i.e. to establish a new limit of intelligibility by fixing the rift in place in figure – designates the historical transformations of the metaphysical essencing of the work of art. Throughout history, the work of art has founded, in the threefold sense previously discussed, the limits of how art is intelligible, and as such contributed in transforming the

³⁴¹ “The Origin,” 19. [aber es sagt noch etwas anderes, als das bloße Ding selbst ist] (GA 5, 4).

³⁴² “The Origin,” 19. [es ist Allegorie] (GA 5, 4).

³⁴³ “The Origin,” 19. [Zusammenbringen heißt griechisch *συμβάλλειν*. Das Werk ist Symbol] (GA 5, 4).

limits of intelligibility in general. Taking into account, then, the significance Heidegger places on the metaphysical essencing of the work of art – the essential history of Western art is what “grounds history”³⁴⁴ – it is somewhat surprising to see how little Heidegger actually wrote on the essential history of Western art.

One thing that would seem to explain this is that Heidegger, despite claiming that art grounds history, seems to see this grounding as secondary to the history of metaphysics as such. In “The Origin,” he explicitly claims that “building and plastic creation...always happen already, and happen only, in the open of saying and naming.”³⁴⁵ That is, in language (“the happening in which for man beings first disclose themselves to him each time as beings.”³⁴⁶ I.e. as a happening of truth); which is to say, that the metaphysical essencing of the work of art merely expresses and reflects a change that has already happened in the essential history of truth (“which has already happened unnoticed in language”³⁴⁷). This, however, seems to me to run counter to Heidegger’s explicit claim, in his example of the Greek tragedy, that *the work* “transforms the people’s saying.”³⁴⁸ Moreover, the work’s character as founding in the sense of instigating a beginning designates exactly the work’s capacity for sending a thrust into history – to transform Dasein’s understanding of being as such. What I suggest to be Heidegger’s point, then, is that this transformation always occurs within the openness of being – the work of art is not a creation *ex nihilo*, but a response to the call of being: “it lets what is already coming to presence arrive.”³⁴⁹ Truth establishing itself in the work of art is an essential way in which the history of being occurs.

This, however, points to a second possible reason for the brevity of Heidegger’s writings on the essential history of Western art. According to Dennis J. Schmidt, Heidegger attempts to align “this history and the history of metaphysics, so that the overcoming of one can be seen of a piece with the overcoming of the other.”³⁵⁰ In this sense, the task of overcoming aesthetics – metaphysics in art – is subsumed under the task of overcoming metaphysics. Remembering that Heidegger’s explicit point of departure for writing “The Origin” was the task of overcoming *aesthetics*, the following statement from *Contribution* is illuminating:

³⁴⁴ “The Origin,” 75. [Geschichte gründet] (GA 5, 65).

³⁴⁵ “The Origin,” 72. [Bauen und Bilden dagegen geschehen immer schon und immer nur im Offenen der Sage und des Nennens] (GA 5, 62).

³⁴⁶ “The Origin,” 72. [die Sprache jenes Geschehnis ist, in dem für den Menschen jeweils erst Seiendes als Seiendes sich erschließt] (GA 5, 62).

³⁴⁷ “The Origin,” 72. [die schon und unbeachtet in der Sprache geschehen ist] (GA 5, 62).

³⁴⁸ “The Origin,” 42. [verwandelt das Sagen des Volkes] (GA 5, 29).

³⁴⁹ Nietzsche: *Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 82. [sondern Ankommenlassen: das schon Anwesende] (GA 6.1, 80).

³⁵⁰ Dennis J. Schmidt, *Between Word and Image: Heidegger, Klee, and Gadamer on Gesture and Genesis* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2013), 74.

The question of the origin of the work of art does not aim at a timelessly valid determination of what is ownmost to the work of art, which could simultaneously serve as the guiding-thread for a historically retrospective explanation of history of art. This question is most intimately connected with the task of overcoming aesthetics and that means simultaneously with overcoming a certain conception of beings as what is objectively representable. Overcoming of aesthetics again results necessarily from the historical encounter with metaphysics as such. This metaphysics comprises the basic Western position toward beings and thus also the ground for what is heretofore the ownmost of Western art and its works.³⁵¹

At first sight, this statement might seem to undermine the very aim of this thesis, but at closer reading, however, I suggest that what Heidegger rejects is that the question of the origin of the work of art aims at describing a new *inessential essence* (“a timelessly valid determination”), that is, a new metaphysical *essentia*. In the concluding sentence, he explains that any such determinations of the work of art belong to the history of metaphysics. Therefore, overcoming aesthetics becomes equal to overcoming metaphysics: “What is true in general of “metaphysics” also fits the mindfulness of the “origin of the work of art.””³⁵² And the main focus for Heidegger’s engagement with metaphysics occurs through his interpretation of the history of Western philosophy, not the history of Western art. Regardless of whether Heidegger himself saw the task of overcoming aesthetics as second to the overcoming of metaphysics, the claim of this thesis is nevertheless that his thinking on art and the history of being opens up for an unthought way in which a “historical encounter with metaphysics” can take place through an investigation of the essential history of Western art.

Notably then, a significant case where Heidegger *does* discuss the history of Western art, is the lecture course *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister.”* In the introduction to the course, he argues that the metaphysical essence of the work of art as “symbolic image” stems from Plato’s metaphysics, and its inception of the fundamental divide between the suprasensuous, true world, and its sensuous manifestation. The work of art “counts as something sensuous that does not exist just for itself; rather, what is sensuous about the artwork is as it is in the artwork: it exists for the nonsensuous and suprasensuous.”³⁵³ This fundamental divide, Heidegger claims, determines the entire history of Western art from Plato until today. Not

³⁵¹ Heidegger, *Contributions*, 354. [Appendix VI] (*GA* 65, 503-504).

³⁵² *Contributions*, 355. [Was von der „Metaphysik“ überhaupt gilt, trifft denn auch zu für die Besinnung auf den „Ursprung des Kunstwerks“] (*GA* 65, 504).

³⁵³ *Hölderlin’s hymn “The Ister”*, 17. [Das Kunstwerk gilt in aller Metaphysik als etwas Sinnliches, das freilich nicht für sich ist, sondern das Sinnliche des Kunstwerkes ist, was es im Kunstwerk ist für das Nichtsinnliche und Übersinnliche] (*GA* 53, 19).

incidentally, Plato's metaphysics is thus claimed to be the beginning of the aesthetic understanding of art.³⁵⁴

Based in Plato's distinction, all art, Heidegger claims, is metaphysically determined by the bringing-together of the sensuous and the suprasensuous, and is as such *symbolic*. But, as was written above, the essential history of Western art undergoes the same transformations as the history of the truth of being; i.e. also art belongs to the historical transformations of metaphysics. "This is why," Heidegger writes:

for example, Greek vase paintings [image 7], wall paintings from Pompeii [image 8], Reichenauer frescoes from the Ottonian era [image 9], the paintings by Giotto [image 10], a painting by Dürer [image 11], and a picture by C. D. Friedrich [image 12], are not only different according to their style, for the style is itself of a different metaphysical essence. What actuality *is* in Dürer's picture "The Columbine" [image 11] is determined differently from what is actual in a medieval fresco; more precisely, the two works of art bring what is actual to appear in an image in different senses of actuality.³⁵⁵

The observation Heidegger makes is that the works do not merely represent the identical reality in different ways, or from different "perspectives," but that the works articulate fundamentally different understandings of what it means that something is real or actual. At the most general level, what guarantees the accuracy and correctness of Dürer's painting of the flower is the *subject's* self-certainty of the correspondence between its observation and the objective reality. In the case of the

Reichenauer frescoes, in contrast, the actuality of the actual is determined by God's revelation, not the self-certainty of subjective representation. Roughly put, the frescoes show the actuality of the actual when it lets God's will be shown, insofar as the actuality of the actual is grounded in God's act of creation, not the subject's self-certainty.

Despite rendering different senses of reality, however, Heidegger contends that the works are all fundamentally determined by the same basic distinction between the sensuous (*existentia*) and suprasensuous (*essentia*); that is, by the interpretation of the question of being [Seinsfrage] as the question of the being of beings as a whole; and hence, by the essential oversight – oblivion – of the question of the truth of being as such. In other words, that all the

³⁵⁴ See *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 80. (GA 6.1, 78).

³⁵⁵ Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister", 24-25. Emphasis mine. [Appendix VII] (GA 53, 28).



7. Andokides, *Terracotta amphora*, ca 530 B.C.
H: 57.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



8. *Wall Painting of Ulysses and the Sirens*, ca 50-75.
Unknown dimensions. British Museum, London.



9. **Fresco by unknown painter, ca 1000.**
Unknown dimensions. St. Georg Church, Oberzell.



10. **Giotto di Bondone, *The Ognissanti Madonna*, 1310.** Tempera, 3.25 x 2.04 m.
Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



11. Albrecht Dürer, *Columbine*, 1526.
Watercolor, 35.5 x 18.7 cm.
Albertina Museum, Vienna.



12. C. D. Friedrich, *The Abbey in the Oakwood*, 1808-10.
Oil on canvas, 110.4 x 171 cm.
Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

works are determined by metaphysics. Moreover, Heidegger claims that this is so even in explicitly anti-idealistic, and seemingly anti-metaphysical, renderings of reality:

Yet these essentially different kinds of actuality still maintain themselves within the fundamental traits of the metaphysical structuring of the world. Whenever, for example, in contrast to Plato, the individual, actual thing, which can be perceived sensuously, is grasped as what is properly “real” and art sets itself the task of bringing what is actual to appear “realistically,” “naturalistically,” in its particularity and proper peculiarity, then even in the most extreme naturalism the first and sole matter of concern is not to depict an actual, individual thing, but rather to depict precisely *actuality* as it is. The actuality of the actual, of a landscape, for example, is not something that comes to the fore within the landscape, like the individual tree or the individual stone or the individual wisp of cloud; rather, the actuality of the actual is itself something nonsensuous. Even where the Platonic “devaluation” of the sensuous does not take place, there still is Platonism, there still is metaphysics.³⁵⁶

In other words, even the most “realistic” painterly representation of beings fundamentally works to proscribe what constitutes the reality of the real, i.e., to show and let an understanding of being appear. And I have argued that it is through this showing, this articulation of an understanding of being, that *thinking* goes on in the work. As a work of art, it does not only hold open the openness of the world (poetizing), it also brings to light the openness itself (thinking).

Summary and Transition

In summary, Heidegger claims that “since Plato, all Western conceptions and interpretations of the world have been “metaphysical.” Since that same period, the essence of art...has been determined in accordance with metaphysics.”³⁵⁷ The implication of Heidegger’s claim of the correspondence between the essence of art and metaphysics, however, is the opening up of the possibility of approaching the history of art as a way in which the fundamental question of what is and what matters is artistically, or rather, *pictorially* thought. The crucial claim is that works of art do not merely *reflect* or *express* the historical changes in our understanding of being (as is the implication of the traditional art historical notion of *Weltanschauung*), but that works of art are sites where these changes occur. It is not a question, then, about endowing art

³⁵⁶ Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister", 24-25. Emphasis mine. [Appendix VII] (GA 53, 28-29).

³⁵⁷ Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister", 17. [Alle abendländische Weltauffassung und Weltauslegung ist seit Platon „metaphysisch.“ Seit derselben Zeit bestimmt man auch das Wesen der Kunst (τέχνη) und somit auch das Wesen der Dichtkunst im Sinne der Metaphysik] (GA 53, 19).

with philosophical significance,³⁵⁸ but to recognize that in works of art, an original mode of thinking – “thinking without science, without philosophy”³⁵⁹ – takes place. Furthermore, in line with Heidegger’s critique of art history as a modern science, this thinking is not available through “scientific” study, i.e. through historiological representation; but only through what Heidegger calls *recollection*.

Before turning to the demonstration of how such a recollection of pictorial thinking can be thought in the case of Edvard Munch’s two paintings *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*, it is first necessary to further clarify a second aspect of Heidegger’s claim that “the essential transformation of truth corresponds to the essential history of Western art.”³⁶⁰ For if art is determined in accordance with metaphysics, that is, the historical transformations of the essential truth of beings as a whole, it is necessary to understand what these historical transformations are – what Heidegger calls *the history of being*.

³⁵⁸ In contrast, consider for instance Robert B. Pippin’s reading of Hegel, where he claims: “There is something of philosophical importance at stake in pictorial achievements even if they are not – just because they are not – philosophy themselves. That is to say, the claim is not that such artworks are works of philosophy, or philosophy manqué, but that they embody a distinct form of aesthetic intelligibility, or an aesthetic way of rendering intelligible and compelling a variety of issues *of the deepest importance to philosophy*.” Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*, 2-3. Emphasis mine.

³⁵⁹ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 61. [gedacht...ohne Wissenschaft, ohne Philosophie] (GA 12, 154).

³⁶⁰ GA 5, 69-70. Mine translation.

Section Two | History of Being

The history of being emerges as one of the most significant issues in Heidegger's thinking in the 1930s and 40s. For instance, Heidegger writes in *Introduction to Metaphysics* that the question concerning being "must maintain itself within the *history of being* if it is, in turn, to unfold and preserve its own historical import."³⁶¹ The historical approach to the question of being is, however, predated in *Being and Time*'s call for a "the destruction of the history of ontology."³⁶² But as Joan Stambaugh argues, there are significant differences between *Being and Time*'s call for a *phenomenological* destruction of the history of *ontology*, and the history of being.³⁶³ As such, it is worth noting that this destruction was never conducted within the framework of *Being and Time*, as Heidegger later stated that the thinking in *Being and Time* "did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics."³⁶⁴ As was written in the previous chapter, *Being and Time* argues that the possibility of answering the question of the meaning of being in general must first go through the analysis of Dasein. After *Being and Time*, Heidegger comes to claim that the priority of the question must be thought inversely, because any understanding of being is always already granted by being to Dasein. That is to say, that any Dasein's understanding of its own being is conditioned by how being essences historically, i.e. is historical. This essencing of being is what Heidegger calls the history of being.

In this section, I will first discuss Heidegger's understanding of the notions of history and epochs, both of which are crucial for his understanding of the history of being. Following this, I will outline and briefly discuss the various being-historical epochs, from the pre-Socratic to the late-modern epoch. As I wrote in the introduction of this chapter, I will focus especially on the modern and late-modern epochs, as they will be of special significance for the second part of this thesis.

³⁶¹ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 97. Emphasis mine. [muß sich selbst in der Geschichte des Seins halten, um ihrerseits die eigene geschichtliche Tragweite zu entfalten und zu bewahren] (*GA 40*, 99).

³⁶² *Being and Time*, 41-49. (*GA 2*, 27-36). Translation modified. See footnote 253.

³⁶³ First and foremost as both 'phenomenology' and 'ontology' belong to the language of metaphysics, according to the later Heidegger. See Joan Stambaugh, "Introduction," in *The End of Philosophy*, vii-x. See also Charles Guignon, "The History of Being," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 392-406 (Malden: Blackwell, 2006).

³⁶⁴ Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 250. [so mit Hilfe der Sprache der Metaphysik nicht durchkam]. (*GA 9*, 328).

History

According to Thomson, Heidegger's notion of the history of being can be conceived as the history of our implicit sense of what is and what matters.³⁶⁵ In repetition, as Dasein, everything we do, make, say, or think is guided by an implicit understanding of what it means for something to be.³⁶⁶ 'The history of being' designates the observation that this implicit understanding is not stable throughout history. Everything *is*, but our understanding of "is-ness" changes.³⁶⁷ And, as this understanding of what it means for something to be guides everything we do (and the understanding of what we ourselves *are*), the history of being is "itself the manner and mode in which we stand or move, in which we *are*."³⁶⁸

The history of being is in other words not the history *about* being, as if being was a thing situated in an otherwise neutral historical time-span. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, being is the event or occurrence *that* beings occur in truth. "The clearing itself is being,"³⁶⁹ Heidegger writes. That is to say, being is *that* beings emerge as beings;³⁷⁰ which is simultaneously to say that being is that understanding-of-being takes place. And in the history of the West, this emergence of beings *as* beings (understanding of being, i.e. existence) has been determined by metaphysics. Heidegger's approach for understanding the history of being, then, is through an interpretation of the *thinking* that has taken place in the history of Western philosophy.

Again, it is important to remember the distinction between philosophy and thinking made in the previous chapter. Philosophy thinks when it articulates and brings to light an understanding of being. The history of the West, however, has been characterized by being's withdrawal, which results in the already mentioned "oblivion" of the question of the truth of being. Despite being's withdrawal, the thinking that goes on in the history of philosophy articulates and shows the historical constellations of intelligibility that has prevailed throughout history. As such, Heidegger's history of being is not simply an interpretation of

³⁶⁵ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 43.

³⁶⁶ "Western humankind, in all its relations with beings, and even to itself, is in every respect sustained and guided by metaphysics." (Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 205). [Das abendländische Menschtum wird in allen seinen Verhältnissen zum Seienden, d. h. auch zu sich selbst, nach allen Hinsichten von der Metaphysik getragen und geleitet] (*GA* 6.2, 343).

³⁶⁷ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 8.

³⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 48. [selbst die Art und Weise, wie wir stehen und gehen, wie wir *sind*] (*GA* 6.2, 86).

³⁶⁹ "Letter on Humanism," 253. [Die Lichtung selber aber ist das Sein] (*GA* 9, 332).

³⁷⁰ Heidegger does not, in other words, claim that beings' "existence" is dependent on Dasein ("Some elephant in some jungle in India is in being just as much as some chemical oxidation process on the planet Mars, and whatever else you please." *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 4. [Irgendein Elefant in irgendeinem Urwald in Indien ist ebenso gut seiend wie irgendein chemischer Verbrennungsvorgang auf dem Planeten Mars und beliebig anderes] (*GA* 40, 5)), but he does claim that beings' emergence in truth – being – is dependent on Dasein. Although it is beyond the scope of the present text to discuss this in depth, I would contend that Heidegger's thinking of being does not fully discard the possibility of other modes of "clearings" than Dasein.

the history of philosophy. Moreover, the history of being does not lay claim to map and (scientifically) establish the socio-historical mentalities or beliefs regarding the constitution of the world held by a historical group of people or a culture. As was discussed in the introduction, any such attempt to establish what a group or culture “actually” believed through a scientific, methodological approach is dependent on a historically contingent way of understanding history as historiology [Historie]. This specifically *modern* interpretation of history as historiology, however, implies that a certain interpretation of being is given precedence and used as measure for the historiological inquiry. For instance, the very idea of studying various pre-modern “cultures” becomes problematic, insofar as the specifically modern notion of ‘culture’ establishes in advance the measure of social, intellectual, and artistic organization to be studied. As such, the notion of ‘culture’ is what both enables and delimits the field of study (the “projected ground plan”³⁷¹), and therefore establishes and forms in advance what is to be explored.

In this way, the history of being is simultaneously both more limited and broader in scope than any historiological inquiry into the history of cosmological and theological beliefs. More limited, insofar as it will never reach the establishing of detailed facts and knowledge about the past (i.e. *exactly* what different groups or cultures believed). Broader, because it claims to deconstruct the very possibility of establishing such facts by attempting to describe and reveal the historical movement of change in the limits of intelligibility as such. Historiology receives its directive from the self-certainty of the subject – i.e. all knowledge about the past must confirm to the subject’s (historically determined) limits and standards of judgement and comprehension (i.e. rationality, logic). History, in Heidegger’s sense, receives its directive from being. To repeat, this is not to say that historiological knowledge is not “true” in the sense of correctness, only that the correctness of the establishment of historiological facts presupposes a specific modern understanding of being. And this understanding of being, Heidegger argues, is itself liable to change – in accordance with the history of being.

Thus, Heidegger draws on the conceptual distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* in German, the former designating historiology and the latter history – the historicizing of being itself. Heidegger shows the affinity between the words *Geschick* [destiny] and *schicken* [to send], and thus claims, in Michael Allen Gillespie’s words, that history is “the collection of what has been sent and delivered into the present. As this sending, history [*Geschichte*] is the destiny [*Geschick*] in which being gives itself [*es gibt Sein*] to man as the disclosure, as

³⁷¹ See “The Age of the World Picture,” 118. [Entwurf des Grundrisses] (*GA 5, 77*).

the truth or how of being.”³⁷² This, I suggest, is what is meant by Heidegger’s statement: “The history of being is being itself.”³⁷³ The occurrence of truth – i.e. of a clearing in which Dasein stands – “is” due to being’s sending of itself as history. Dasein stands in an open which is shaped by being’s destining; Dasein is always historical. In other words, being is the historical opening in which senses of *what is* and *what matters* occur.

In this sense, the history of being is “reckoned neither by the calendar nor in terms of world-historical occurrences.”³⁷⁴ The history of being is “reckoned” only by the prevalence of specific constellations of intelligibility; that is, by the way in which being historically shapes the changing limits of intelligibility – the clearing of Dasein. But how, if not through historiological study of the past, can one know *what* understanding of being has prevailed?

As has been discussed, the metaphysical presupposition of the historiological study of the past is that history is an object (or rather, a collection of objects and objective events) situated in a previous space-time. As such, the historical past is something that is distinct from us, and is in this way more or less alien. The historian’s task could be thought of as to create a “bridge” between the contemporary subject and the historical object or event. How to bridge this temporal gap is the question of historiological methodology. In contrast, Heidegger’s claim that the history of being is being itself implies that we are *not* isolated, as it were, from history and thus in no need of “bridging.” The history of being is the history that we *are*. Dasein cannot be but historical, and the history of being is the history to which Dasein belongs. We, as Dasein, cannot but find ourselves within the withdrawing current of being’s history – we cannot stand “outside” this history in order to scientifically observe it. In this way, the history of being is available for our *recollection*.³⁷⁵

Despite denying, then, that the history of being can be “reckoned” by the calendar, Heidegger claims that the historical changes in the limits of intelligibility – our implicit understanding of what is and what matters – obtain relatively stable, historical constellations, what he calls *epochs*.

³⁷² Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, 152. Punctuation modified.

³⁷³ Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, 82. [Die Seinsgeschichte ist das Sein selbst] (GA 6.2, 489).

³⁷⁴ Nietzsche: *Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 195. [weder gerechnet nach dem Kalender noch gerechnet nach den weltgeschichtlichen Begebenheiten] (GA 6.2, 254).

³⁷⁵ See also, *The End of Philosophy*, 75-83.

Epochs

The history of being is epochal, which means that even though the meaning of what is and what matters changes, it is not simply constantly in flux, but obtains a certain stability. Heidegger's choice of naming the various ages as *epochs* is a reference to Husserl's term *epochê*, Greek for "holding back," or "bracketing."³⁷⁶ Indeed, Heidegger writes, "the history of being [is] the *epochê* of being itself."³⁷⁷ The epochs are, in a sense, the holding back, or the withdrawal of being; which makes possible, in Thomson's words, "historical constellations of intelligibility."³⁷⁸ Indeed, Heidegger writes, "epoch does not mean here a span in time in occurrence, but rather the fundamental characteristic of sending, the actual holding-back of itself,"³⁷⁹ that is, of being. As such, Heidegger emphasizes that these epochs are not – and cannot be – invented or instigated by a single person or collective (which, again, would be to give precedence to the representing capacities of the subject). As I have argued, philosophical and artistic thinking is always *responsive* to the history of being, and let it come to be by articulating and founding it; they let "what is already coming to presence arrive."³⁸⁰

From the *epoche* of being comes the epochal essence of its destining, in which world history properly consists. When being keeps to itself in its destining, world suddenly and unexpectedly comes to pass. Every epoch of world history is an epoch of errancy.³⁸¹

The *epoche* of being, that is, being's keeping to itself, allows for the emergence of world. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Heidegger once drew an illustration of Dasein as five arrows pointing towards a withdrawing horizon [image 6]. The emergence of the horizon and the open clearing towards which the pointer points, *is* due to being's withdrawal, its keeping to itself. To this day, Heidegger claims, the thinkers of every epoch of world history have not paid attention to the withdrawal itself – the opening of the clearing itself – the truth of being as such, and rather paid attention to that which emerge from the withdrawal: the truth of *beings* as a whole.

³⁷⁶ See Haar, *The Song of the Earth*, 2. See also Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 9. And Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, 152.

³⁷⁷ Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 239. [bestimmt als die *ἐποχή* des Seins selbst je eine Epoche der Geschichte des Seins] (GA 6.2, 383).

³⁷⁸ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 9.

³⁷⁹ Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," 9.

³⁸⁰ *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 82. [sondern Ankommenlassen: das schon Anwesende] (GA 6.1, 80).

³⁸¹ "The Anaximander Fragment," 592. [Aus der Epoche des Seins kommt das epochale Wesen seines Geschickes, worin die eigentliche Weltgeschichte ist. Jedesmal, wenn das Sein in seinem Geschick an sich hält, ereignet sich jäh und unversehens Welt. Jede Epoche der Weltgeschichte ist eine Epoche der Irre] (GA 5, 338).

Thus, I arrive again at what was said above, that throughout the history of the West being has been understood metaphysically. The beingness of beings has been understood through the fundamental distinction expressed by the notions of *essentia* and *existentia*.³⁸² As Thomson points out, Heidegger claims that metaphysics is *ontotheologically* constituted.³⁸³ This means that any metaphysical understanding of what is and what matters consist of a highest or Supreme Being (the theological aspect) and the most fundamental being (the ontological aspect). Although the term is most often associated with Scholastic philosophy, Heidegger claims that this dualistic constitution of metaphysics is equally valid for every interpretation of the being of beings in the history of the West.³⁸⁴ Even, as we will see, Nietzsche's "overturning of Platonism"³⁸⁵ Heidegger claims to posit a most fundamental being (*will to power*) and a highest being (*eternal recurrence of the same*). In the West, the history of being is, in other words, the essential history of metaphysics. And each epoch, each age of world history, is grounded in metaphysics. Indeed, "metaphysics grounds an age," which means that "through a specific interpretation of what is...it gives the age the ground of its essential form."³⁸⁶ What are these ages – these epochs? And what are their essential forms?

According to Thomson, Heidegger's history of being can be discerned into five relatively distinct but overlapping epochs: the pre-Socratic, Platonic, medieval, modern and late-modern.³⁸⁷ Gillespie, on the other hand, claims that the history of being should be understood as three epochs, each with two subdivisions: The Greek (Plato/Aristotle), Christian (Roman/Christian) and the Modern (Early Modern/Nihilism). In addition, the pre-Socratic age is suggested to predate the inception of the history of being.³⁸⁸ Michael E. Zimmerman suggests five epochs: the Greek, Roman, medieval, Enlightenment, and technology.³⁸⁹ In my view, the exact distinction and naming of the epochs is not what is significant. The most

³⁸² Nietzsche: *Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 210. (GA 6.2, 348-349). And *The End of Philosophy*, 81. (GA 6.2, 488).

³⁸³ Nietzsche: *Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 209. (GA 6.2, 348). See also "The onto-theological constitution of metaphysics," [Die Onto-Theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik], in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, 42-74 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969; reprint, 2002; or. published, 1957). (*Gesamtausgabe 11: Identität und Differenz*, 51-79).

³⁸⁴ Nietzsche: *Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 209-210. (GA 6.2, 348-349).

³⁸⁵ Nietzsche: *Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 200. [Umdrehung des Platonismus] (GA 6.1, 202).

³⁸⁶ "The Age of the World Picture," 115. [Die Metaphysik begründet ein Zeitalter, indem sie ihm durch eine bestimmte Auslegung des Seienden...den Grund seiner Wesensgestalt gibt] (GA 5, 75). Translation in line with Iain D. Thomson in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, 7.

³⁸⁷ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 8.

³⁸⁸ See Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, 136, for Gillespie's schematic representation of the history of being.

³⁸⁹ Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990), xiv.

important claim is that throughout the history of the West, different fundamental conceptions of the understanding of being have occurred, and these obtain relatively stability, only to give way to new understandings.

Nevertheless, I will follow Thomson's five-partite interpretation, simply because it puts the most emphasis on the modern and late-modern epochs which are the most relevant for the present study.³⁹⁰ This implies a rather cursory treatment of the first three epochs. However, it is crucial to remember that Heidegger's project is not a historiological mapping of the history of philosophy. The history of being is, as always, a reply to the question of the truth of being – the question concerning “that which now is.”³⁹¹ Thus, Heidegger's claim is that any attempt at understanding the present condition depends on a recollection of the history that the present carries along with it, such that “only the way back will lead us forward.”³⁹² If it is so, as Heidegger claims, that our current, late-modern epoch is metaphysical in character, and furthermore, that it is desirable to overcome metaphysics – which is to say, to bring “out the essence of metaphysics, and only thus [bring] metaphysics back within its own limits”³⁹³ – it is necessary to go back to the inception of the history of the West in order to recollect the inception of metaphysics as such. Only through this recollection, Heidegger claims, can we put metaphysics under us, “and at the same time...put what is thus placed under [us] behind [us] as something that will henceforth have no determining power.”³⁹⁴ Such an overcoming is what Heidegger attempts to prepare for in his writings on the history of being.

The Pre-Socratic Epoch

As was written above, Heidegger argues that the inception of metaphysics is first thought in Plato's metaphysics. It was, however, prepared by the very emergence of philosophy in ancient Greece. Heidegger describes the pre-Socratic epoch as being's opening “itself out as

³⁹⁰ Heidegger himself names the epochs in various ways. In *Parmenides*, a lecture series from 1942-3, he names “the Greek, Roman, medieval, modern, and contemporary.” Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides* [Parmenides], trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992; repr., 1998; or published, 1992), 96. [Griechisches, Römisches, Mittelalterliches, Neuzeitliches, Modernes] (*Gesamtausgabe 54: Parmenides* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1982), 142). In “The Origin,” he merely mentions the Greek, Medieval, and Modern. “The Origin,” 74. (*GA 5*, 64-65). Both omit the distinction between the metaphysical and pre-metaphysical Greek epochs, which elsewhere seems to be of crucial importance to Heidegger. My choice of Thomson's interpretation takes into account the pre-Socratic epoch, while omitting the Roman in order to delimit the scope of the thesis, providing the highest contrasts within the epochs of the history of being.

³⁹¹ *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing*, 7. [*das...was jetzt ist*] (*GA 50*, 97).

³⁹² *On the Way to Language*, 12. [daß sogar der Weg zurück uns erst vorwärts führt] (*GA 12*, 94).

³⁹³ *On the Way to Language*, 20. [die das Wesen der Metaphysik zum Vorschein und sie dadurch erst in ihre Grenzen einbringt] (*GA 12*, 103-104).

³⁹⁴ *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 223. [etwas unter sich bringen und das so unter-sich-Gelassene zugleich hinter sich bringen als dasjenige, was fortan keine bestimmende Macht mehr haben soll] (*GA 6.2*, 365).

emerging (*physis*) and unconcealment (*aletheia*).³⁹⁵ Being was understood as the emergence of appearances as the unconcealed open. The human being, in the pre-Socratic epoch, thus experienced being itself as the unexplained, wondrous “emergence and rising in itself and in all things,”³⁹⁶ which are disclosed in the openness of unconcealment (*aletheia*). What claimed the human were not beings, but *being* – as this unconcealed emergence. Nevertheless, despite experiencing being as unconcealed emergence, being *as such* was never thematized.

In this way, already the fragments of Thales (prob. 624-546 BC) and his student Anaximander (prob. 610-546 BC) foreshadows the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics. Both Thales and Anaximander suggested that every entity, every being, that emerges into unconcealment, is defined with reference to an ultimate foundation, or *ârche*. In Thales’ case, what serves as the *ârche* is what he claims to be the most fundamental (ontological) being: *water*. Everything that is, he suggested, can ultimately be reduced to water. Anaximander opposed this view and suggested that the *ârche* is the most supreme (theological) being: the *apeiron*.³⁹⁷ The *apeiron* is the *unlimited* or the *infinite* being, from which every discrete being emerges. Hence, already in the inception of Western philosophy, the split between *essentia* and *existentia* is anticipated. Already here, Heidegger claims, the question of being as such is overlooked, as the question of what *is* is understood as the question concerning the being of beings.³⁹⁸

The Platonic and Medieval Epochs

First in the Platonic epoch, however, the understanding of being “reaches the formulation of presence and permanence in the sense of enduring [*ousia*].”³⁹⁹ With Plato, being becomes to be ultimately defined as “whatness.”⁴⁰⁰ Being is what presences [*eidōs*];⁴⁰¹ “whatness” gives “thatness;” *that* an entity is is defined by *what* it is. The Platonic doctrine hence unifies the ontotheological interpretation of being, whereby the ideas are both the most exemplary and

³⁹⁵ *The End of Philosophy*, 4. [Im Anfang seiner Geschichte lichtet sich Sein als Ausgang (φύσις) und Entbergung (ἀλήθεια)] (GA 6.2, 403). See John Loscerbo, *Being and Technology: A Study of the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, Phenomenologica, Vol 82 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 4-10, for a discussion of Heidegger’s interpretation of ‘*physis*.’

³⁹⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 41. [Dieses Herauskommen und Aufgehen selbst und im Ganzen nannten die Griechen frühzeitig die φύσις] (GA 5, 28).

³⁹⁷ See “The Anaximander Fragment,” (GA 5, 321-373) for Heidegger’s interpretation of Anaximander and its relation to the history of metaphysics, and especially to Nietzsche. See also Carol J. White, “Heidegger and the Greeks,” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 121-40 (Malden: Blackwell, 2006) for a discussion of Heidegger’s reading of the pre-Socratics, as well as Plato and Aristotle.

³⁹⁸ See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 23-38, for a discussion of some problematic aspects concerning the inception of the history of being.

³⁹⁹ Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, 4. [her gelangt es in das Gepräge von Anwesenheit und Beständigkeit im Sinne des Verweilens] (GA 6.2, 403). See also, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 30. (GA 7, 31).

⁴⁰⁰ “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” 173. (GA 9, 225). See also, Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 33-34.

⁴⁰¹ Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” 169-170. (GA 9, 220-221). And *The End of Philosophy*, 9. (GA 6.2, 409).

highest (suprasensuous) form of beings, and what these beings fundamentally can be reduced to be. Thus emerges the inception of the ontotheological, metaphysical constitution of the history of being. Being no longer essences as emerging and unconcealment, but as presence and enduring: “*Being is presence as the showing itself of outward appearance. Being is the lasting of the actual being in such outward appearance.*”⁴⁰² This is not to say that every person living in the Greek city-states had a Platonic interpretation of the being of beings. Rather, according to Heidegger, it is to say that Plato *thought* the essential being of beings in a way that articulated the essential understanding of being which was to be determinative for the next millennia: Being is present permanence, and the true being is what shows itself in and through this presence.

The Platonic philosophy of ideas thus constitutes the decisive gap between what is taken to be the true, suprasensuous world and the derivative, un-true reflection of this ideal world in which we live. The same distinction is taken up and transformed in the medieval epoch, which reveals itself as the understanding of being in which everything is created by God, and man is created in the image and likeness of God. The true world is the mind of God (*intellectus divinus*), and our actual world is but the world created in the image of God. The actual world is thus only a reflection of the true, divine world – a sinful and transitory passageway unto the Final Judgement. In the medieval epoch, everything has its place and gets its meaning within the religious hierarchy. The religious hierarchy therefore sets the limits of what is meaningful at the same time as it is what enables anything to be meaningful as such. God (*ens increatum*) is its theological aspect (the highest being), and the cosmos, including the human being (*ens creatum*), its ontological aspect (the most fundamental being).⁴⁰³

The crucial point is that, in direct contrast to the pre-Socratic interpretation of being as unconcealed *emergence*, Plato grounds the fundamental interpretation of being as permanent presence; and with it, the fundamental distinction between the suprasensuous and the sensuous world. This ontological split is determinative also for the medieval interpretation of being through the distinction between God and God’s creation. And the same distinction determines the metaphysics of the modern and late-modern epochs.

⁴⁰² *The End of Philosophy*, 10. [*Sein ist Anwesenheit als Sichzeigen des Aussehens. Sein ist Verweilen des Jeweiligen in solchem Aussehen.*] (GA 6.2, 409). See also Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, 166-167, for a critique of Heidegger’s interpretation of Plato.

⁴⁰³ Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?,” 94. (GA 9, 119).

The Modern Epoch

According to Heidegger, the modern epoch emerges as “human reason attains predominance, and even posits itself as absolute.”⁴⁰⁴ The epoch following the medieval age, in other words, is characterized by the gradual substitution of God by the subject as theological aspect, while it based the ontological understanding of being on the subject’s capability of representing objects. As Descartes put it, subjects are suprasensuous, thinking things [*res cogitans*] opposing and mastering objects – sensuous, extended things [*res extensa*]. According to Heidegger, Descartes’ philosophy instigates “the decisive beginning of the foundation of metaphysics in the modern age,”⁴⁰⁵ and “his thought remains the ground for all subsequent thought.”⁴⁰⁶ This is not to say that all subsequent philosophy is Cartesian – nor that modern metaphysics was of Descartes’ “invention” – but that Descartes was responsive to the destining of being, and let being’s essencing arrive. Like Plato before him, Descartes articulated a new way of thinking being, which now became decisive for the modern interpretation of man as ‘subject,’ standing over against objects.⁴⁰⁷

Again, the transformation from the medieval to the modern epoch does not mean that people suddenly stopped being Christians, but that gradually, what defined and guaranteed the reality of the real was no longer God and God’s revelation, but rather the subject. Contrary, then, to the medieval epoch, in the modern epoch, “what is to be is for the first time defined as the objectiveness or representing, and *truth is first defined as the certainty of representing.*”⁴⁰⁸ Before discussing the modern epoch in more depth, however, I will first draw attention to the following statement about the history of being by Heidegger:

The history of being is neither the history of man and of humanity, nor the history of the human relation to beings and to being. The history of being is being itself, and only being. However, since being claims human being for grounding its truth in beings, man is drawn into the history of being.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁴ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 207. [damit die Vernunft des Menschen sich in die Vorherrschaft bringt, sich sogar als absolut setzt] (GA 40, 202).

⁴⁰⁵ *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 100. [Für die Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Neuzeit ist die Metaphysik des Descartes der entscheidende Beginn] (GA 6.2, 147).

⁴⁰⁶ *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 101. [daß sein Gedachtes der Grund blieb für das Nachkommende] (GA 6.2, 147).

⁴⁰⁷ See Loscerbo, *Being and Technology*, 59-75.

⁴⁰⁸ Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 127. Emphasis mine. [Erstmals wird das Seiende als Gegenständlichkeit des Vorstellens und die Wahrheit als Gewißheit des Vorstellens] (GA 5, 87).

⁴⁰⁹ *The End of Philosophy*, 82. [Die Seinsgeschichte ist weder die Geschichte des Menschen und eines Menschentums noch die Geschichte des menschlichen Bezugs zum Seienden und zum Sein. Die Seinsgeschichte ist das Sein selbst *und nur* dieses. Weil jedoch das Sein zur Gründung seiner Wahrheit im Seienden das Menschenwesen in den Anspruch nimmt, bleibt der Mensch in die Geschichte des Seins einbezogen] (GA 6.2, 489).

The quote first repeats what was already said, that the history of being is not a history occurring within the already familiar historiological representation. The history of being is *being* itself, and “being itself occurs essentially as the unconcealment in which the being comes to presence. Unconcealment itself, however, remains concealed as such.”⁴¹⁰ Again, metaphysics overlooks being itself, and gives precedence to the being of beings.

Furthermore, the quote states that man’s relation to the history of being is one in which man is *claimed* by being in order for it to ground “*its truth* in beings.” This implies “the fact that the actual essence of truth, in whose light a period of mankind experiences beings, participates in the history of being.”⁴¹¹ Or stated even more strongly: “Metaphysics is the truth of beings as such and as a whole. The fundamental positions in metaphysics therefore have their ground in the respective essence of truth *and* in their respective essential interpretation of the being of beings.”⁴¹²

What I suggest this means is that the epochal, metaphysical transformations consist of both a transformation in the understanding of being and a transformation of the essence of truth. The essential shifts in the essence of truth indicate the essential shift in the understanding of the being of beings insofar as truth is what determines the beingness of beings. In this way, along with Plato’s doctrine of the ideas, there occurs a transformation of the essence of truth from the pre-Socratic *aletheia* (unconcealment) to the *orthotic* understanding of truth (correctness between apprehension and idea).⁴¹³ Truth in the medieval epoch emerged as *veritas* (correspondence between the *intellectus humanus* and the *idea* of the *intellectus divinus*),⁴¹⁴ while ultimately becoming *certainty* in the modern epoch (truth as certainty of representation).⁴¹⁵

In anticipation of the conclusion of this chapter, I suggest that it is this “essential transformation of truth” Heidegger claims “corresponds to the essential history of Western art.”⁴¹⁶ Insofar as the essence of truth is what determines the reality of the real, and thus the limits of what is intelligible as such, art as truth setting-itself-to-work is a way in which the

⁴¹⁰ *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 213-214. [Das Sein selbst west als die Unverborgenheit, in der das Seiende anwest. Die Unverborgenheit selbst jedoch bleibt als diese verborgen] (GA 6.2, 353).

⁴¹¹ *The End of Philosophy*, 20. [daß das jeweilige Wesen der Wahrheit, in dessen Licht ein Menschentum das Seiende erfährt, an der Geschichte des Seins einen Anteil hat] (GA 6.2, 421-422).

⁴¹² *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 139. Emphasis mine. [Metaphysik ist die Wahrheit über das Seiende als solches im Ganzen. Die Grundstellungen der Metaphysik haben daher ihren Grund im jeweiligen Wesen der Wahrheit und der jeweiligen Wesensauslegung des Seins des Seienden] (GA 6.2, 193).

⁴¹³ "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," 177. (GA 9, 230-231). See also Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 160.

⁴¹⁴ Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," 138-139. (GA 9, 179-182). See also *The End of Philosophy*, 23-24. (GA 6.2, 425-427). And *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 120. (GA 6.2, 169-170).

⁴¹⁵ "The Age of the World Picture," 127. (GA 5, 87). See also *The End of Philosophy*, 25. (GA 6.2, 428-429). And *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 120. (GA 6.2, 169-170).

⁴¹⁶ GA 5, 69-70. Mine translation.

being of beings (i.e. the historical mode of revealing; truth) is established in beings. In the modern epoch, beings are what they are insofar as they are representable by the human being, understood as subject. The subject becomes the guarantee, the one whose certainty ascertains the reality of the real, in place of God.⁴¹⁷

In the essay “The Age of the World Picture,” which was already discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Heidegger claims that the modern epoch is characterized by the understanding of the world as picture. The world becomes the object of our representation, which in turn enables us to have world-views [Weltanschauungen] or life-views [Lebensanschauungen]. That the world becomes picture does not mean that subjects represent or create picture *of* the world, but that the world is graspable only *as* set up and represented by the subject. What is *as* such *is* only insofar as it is represented by the subject.

As mentioned in the introduction, the essay lists five “essential phenomena,” of the modern epoch: Modern science, machine technology, aesthetics, culture, and the loss of the gods. Each of these phenomena reveals the fundamental ontological position in which the world is the object of man’s subjective representation: The loss of the gods occurs as religion is made into an issue of subjective religious experience [Erlebnis]; culture emerges as the differentiated realm of the realization of man’s highest values; art becomes the object of subjective aesthetic experience; and machine technology subjects the objective world to man’s dominance. Finally, modern science⁴¹⁸ institutionalizes the world as objective representation by founding experimental and calculative reasoning as the guarantee of intelligibility *as* such. Modernity emerges as man’s ongoing attempt of establishing itself “as midpoint and measure in a position of dominance; that is, to pursue the securing of such dominance.”⁴¹⁹ The world is no longer the creation of God *given* to the rule of man, but eventually becomes the domain of the human subject who “exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth.”⁴²⁰

The continually growing establishing of man as the lord of the earth, as the sole dominating power, is possible only on the basis of the understanding of man as subject. The emergence of man’s self-understanding as subject, however, Heidegger claims must be

⁴¹⁷ See Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, 124-128, for an exposition of Heidegger’s critique of modernity. And Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 26-36.

⁴¹⁸ The essence of which was described in the introduction as the projection of a ground plan, method and ongoing activity.

⁴¹⁹ Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 100. [als die Mitte und das Maß in die Herrschaftsstellung zu bringen, d. h. deren Sicherung zu betreiben] (*GA* 6.2, 146).

⁴²⁰ “The Question Concerning Technology,” 27. [Indessen spreizt sich gerade der so bedrohte Mensch in die Gestalt des Herrn der Erde auf] (*GA* 7, 28). Compare with Genesis 1:26-28.

understood historically, as emerging from a series of transformations and translations of the Greek word *hypokeimenon*. Indeed, *hypokeimenon* means to Aristotle that which “lies present of itself,”⁴²¹ and is what presences by means of workness [*energia*]. The medieval epoch translates *energeia* to *actualitas*, and hence the *hypokeimenon* becomes *ens actu* (actual thing) and *subiectum*. ‘Subiectum’ means ‘that which underlies,’ and designates that which bears (underlies) *accidens*.⁴²² In the medieval epoch, in other words, *subiectum* was not the name for human beings, but for any actual being which carried *accidens*, and means the same as *substans*.⁴²³ The *subiectum* or *substans* designates what is constant, upholding the transitory *accidens* (but ultimately still as *ens creatum*).

Hence, Heidegger claims that the metaphysical change from the medieval to the modern epoch took place as the decline of God as the guarantee of the reality of the real, necessitating the need for a new absolute fundament that could guarantee this reality. Thus, a *subiectum* placed itself as that which already lies present – always underlies – the objective reality.⁴²⁴ This *subiectum* becomes the human *res cogitans* characterized as *ego cogito*. Representational thinking becomes the fundamental characteristic of the human being, and the reality of the real becomes secured by the certainty of the *self*-certainty of representative thinking (*cogito ergo sum*).⁴²⁵ The *ego cogito* founds the subject of the subject-object relation and becomes the self-founding and self-certain guarantee of the objectivity of the objective world. The understanding of the human being as subject and the world as objective representation (picture), however, does not imply that the world is a product of the human mind. Rather, it designates that the human being is the ultimate guarantee of the reality of the real. The real is defined as what is representable for the subject, and its reality (its properties, characteristics, and functionality) is ultimately subject to man’s judgement; no-longer is the actual what is revealed to the human being as God’s creation (as is witnessed in the institutionalization of modern science as the ultimate measurer of the reality of the real).⁴²⁶

Placing the reality of the real under the domain of the subject’s representative capacities, however, implies the very change in the essence of truth described above, from the medieval *veritas* to the modern certainty. And as was intimated above: *what truth is*

⁴²¹ *The End of Philosophy*, 26. [Das Jeweilige liegt von sich aus vor, ist das eigentliche ὑποκείμενον] (GA 6.2, 429).

⁴²² Loscerbo, *Being and Technology*, 63-64.

⁴²³ Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, 27. (GA 6.2, 430).

⁴²⁴ See *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 96-97. (GA 6.2, 141-143).

⁴²⁵ See *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 111-118. (GA 6.2, 158-168).

⁴²⁶ See also "The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought," 122-125. ("Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens," 140-144).

determines what is in truth. In the modern epoch, what is in truth is determined by the subject's standards, i.e. the certainty of its representation.

The establishing of the subject as the guarantee of objectivity occurs as the emergence of the growing self-assurance of man's dominance, such that "it is necessary that he assure himself more and more of his own capacity for and means of dominance, and that he continually place these at the disposal of an absolute serviceability."⁴²⁷ This capacity for and means of dominance eventually culminates in Nietzsche's formulation of beings as will to power, along with the danger of the "absolute serviceability" coming to claim the subject *itself* as a serviceable resource in the late-modern epoch.

The Late-Modern Epoch

Our current understanding of being, Heidegger claims is characterized by the gradual, still on-going transformation from the understanding of beings (as a whole) as subjects and objects, into an understanding of beings as *resources* [Bestand].⁴²⁸ The emerging late-modern epoch makes all beings ontologically equal as resources, followed by the emergence of a *technological* understanding of truth. And the essence of this "technology" [Technik] is what Heidegger calls *Gestell*.⁴²⁹ Thus, contrary to any ordinary meaning of the word technology, Heidegger claims that technology names how beings come to be revealed in the late-modern epoch. It has in other words no explicit relation to specific technologies or technological objects.⁴³⁰ The question concerning the truth of (late-modern) beings is thus posed by Heidegger as the question concerning technology.⁴³¹

⁴²⁷ Nietzsche: *Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 100. [Dazu ist nötig, daß er immer mehr seiner eigenen Vermögen und Herrschaftsmittel sich versichert und sie zu einer unbedingten Verfügbarkeit stets neu bereitstellt] (GA 6.2, 146).

⁴²⁸ I prefer to translate 'Bestand' into 'resources' aware of the more common translation of 'standing-reserve,' which keeps the root-meaning of "standing" found in 'Be-stand.' My reason is that 'Bestand' resonates with the contemporary tendency of naming anything as resource – such as nature, services, knowledge, and human beings. In this way, I contend that the translation clarifies rather than obfuscates the meaning of the term. And contrary to Mitchell, I see the difference between mere 'stock' and 'resources' as the difference between the discrete objects of the modern epoch, and the immediately available, essentially *serviceable*, resources of the late-modern epoch. Likewise, Zimmerman's translation as 'raw material' ultimately obscures the distinction between the discrete objects and the immediately available resources. See below for further discussion.

⁴²⁹ Like Zimmerman, I choose to leave 'Gestell' untranslated. Of 'enframing' (Lovitt), 'positionality' (Mitchell), 'world technology,' (Gillespie) or 'World Order' (Haar) only the translation as 'positionality' keeps resemblance to the root meaning of –stellen (to place or set), but it is in my opinion no more clarifying, and no less awkward than leaving the term untranslated. See Lovitt's footnote 14 and 17 in Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 15 and 19. See also Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 49-51.

⁴³⁰ See for instance Don Ihde, *Heidegger's Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives* (New York: Fordham UP, 2010), 18-19, and 114-127, for a critique of Heidegger's distinction between the essence of technology and concrete technologies.

⁴³¹ "The question concerning technology is the question concerning the constellation in which revealing and concealing, in which the essencing of truth, comes to pass." Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology,"

The question concerning technology is posed in one of four lectures from a lecture-series held in Bremen in 1949.⁴³² The lecture was originally named “Das Gestell,” and later expanded and renamed as “Die Frage nach der Technik” [The Question Concerning Technology] in 1955. As the two titles indicate, the notion of Gestell is thought intimately close to the notion of technology. Among the issues taken up in Heidegger’s later thinking, technology is by far the one which has gotten most attention in the literature.⁴³³ In terms of Heidegger’s oeuvre, it seems to me that technology appears as a *metaphysical* issue as a direct result of his engagement with Nietzsche in the 1940s, and occurs in distinction from the “machine technology” briefly mentioned in “The Age of the World Picture” from 1938.⁴³⁴ Indeed, for Heidegger, Nietzsche’s metaphysics stands to the technological epoch as Descartes stands to the modern epoch; Nietzsche could equally be said to articulate the “decisive beginning of the foundation” of late-modern metaphysics. Moreover, it is worth noting that it is in connection with the Nietzsche-lectures that the very notion of the history of being is most clearly formulated, such as in the essays “Die Metaphysik als Geschichte des Seins” [Metaphysics as History of Being], written in 1941, along with “Die seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus” [Nihilism as determined by the History of Being] from 1944-46 – both originally published in the two Nietzsche-books in 1961. Thus I agree with Thomson, who argues that Heidegger’s thinking on technology must be understood as his attempt at critically confronting Nietzsche’s “unthought” metaphysics,⁴³⁵ and is as such intimately connected to Nietzsche’s metaphysical interpretation of being as the *will to power as the eternal recurrence of the same*; or simply, will to will.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger argues that technology is a mode of revealing – a historical mode of truth. The aim of the essay is to understand the

33. Translation modified. [Die Frage nach der Technik ist die Frage nach der Konstellation, in der sich Entbergung und Verbergung, in der sich das Wesende der Wahrheit ereignet] (GA 7, 54).

⁴³² See *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*. GA 79.

⁴³³ See for instance, Arnfinn Bø-Rygg, “Den Sene Heidegger,” in *Okios og Techne*, ed. Arnfinn Bø-Rygg, 130-52 (Oslo: Johan Grundt Tanum Forlag, 1973); Loscerbo, *Being and Technology*; Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*; Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon, 345-72 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993); Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, 37-62; Albert Borgmann, “Technology,” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 420-32 (Malden: Blackwell, 2006); Richard Rojcewicz, *The Gods and Technology: A Reading of Heidegger* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Ihde, *Heidegger's Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives*; Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 44-77; *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 15-25; Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 24-70.

⁴³⁴ Both Zimmerman and Ihde argue, however, that Heidegger’s later views on technology have their roots already in the tool-analysis of *Being and Time*. See Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*, 137-143. And Ihde, *Heidegger's Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives*, 28-55.

⁴³⁵ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 18.

essence of this mode of revealing in order “to prepare a free relationship to it.”⁴³⁶ And insofar as the late-modern epoch is the final epoch of metaphysics, such a preparation amounts to the preparation for the overcoming of metaphysics as such.

The essence of technology Heidegger names Gestell. In German, the colloquial meaning of the word is frame, chassis, or rack – in the sense of a bookrack, for instance. Avoiding these common ways of using the word, Heidegger contends that Gestell names the way in which (the essencing of) the technological mode of truth holds sway. In order to clarify what Heidegger means by Gestell, I suggest to distinguish between two different senses of the term in “The Question.” In the first sense, Gestell is the extreme possibility of modern metaphysics. In the second, Gestell is the “danger.”

Gestell as the Extreme Possibility of the Modern Epoch

As any fundamental metaphysical position, late-modern metaphysics answers to two main questions: What is the being of beings? What is truth? And as intimated above, the latter question also means: What guarantees the beingness of the being? In the modern epoch, the subject’s self-certainty of representation (that is, truth as *certainty*) is what guarantees the beingness of beings as objects. What fundamentally is, are subjects and objects; and as was written above, subjects continually strive towards domination (subjection) of their objects. In the late-modern epoch, this strive towards domination is made into the very mode of revealing as such. While the subject, in the modern epoch, guarantees the being of beings by its representations, man in the late-modern epoch is challenged and ordered by Gestell to reveal the being as resources. Gestell, in this sense, means the “challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as resources.”⁴³⁷ In other words, Gestell is the claim put upon man to reveal, treat, and order any being as resources.

Indeed, we still talk about objects [Gegen-stände], but they are gradually losing their character of standing *against* [gegen] subjects, and becoming immediately available resources [Be-stände]. The objects of the modern epoch had the characteristic of being autonomous and discrete, which necessitated the subject’s continual striving for dominance and control. Resources, on the other hand, are *available for immediate ordering*.⁴³⁸ Where the technological mode of revealing prevails, entities do not exist as objects for subjects, but

⁴³⁶ Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 3. [eine freie Beziehung zu ihr vorbereiten] (GA 7, 7).

⁴³⁷ “The Question Concerning Technology,” 19. [das den Menschen stellt, das Wirkliche als Bestand zu bestellen, so nehmen, wie es sich zeigt] (GA 7, 20).

⁴³⁸ See Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 36-49, for an in-depth analysis of the characteristic of ‘resources’ as ‘available for immediate ordering.’

emerge – exhaustively – as being totally at disposal. There is no-longer any intrinsic, metaphysical *essentia* to the entity, nothing hidden or held in reserve; it is fully deployed and exhausted in its serviceability. Reality itself becomes resource. Thus, the river and forest, even the atoms, become mere resource for the supply of energy; animals and plants become nutritional resources; education, knowledge, and skills become resource for effectively solving problems; nature and culture become resources for leisure and recreation.

It is correct, Heidegger claims, to observe that we can still represent beings as objects, but when we do so, we now conceal the essencing of the being.⁴³⁹ The airplane is no longer simply an autonomous object, independently standing in itself – as it would have been in the modern epoch. It is now a resource, something that stands ready for immediate use and ordering. Its being is fully deployed in being immediately available for transportation, for serving the need that is demanded from it from the transport industry of goods, tourists, or business people. It *is* only insofar as it serves the need that is demanded from it.

In the modern epoch, the subject was posited as absolute; but the extreme possibility of the modern epoch is that *serviceability* becomes absolute.⁴⁴⁰ What defines an entity's being is not guaranteed by the self-certainty of the subject, but its serviceability. What works – serves – is; what works is valuable; what serves is true. What does no longer serve the absolute serviceability is pushed to the margins and will eventually be irrelevant and later deprived of its being as such. If the telos of the modern epoch was dominance, the telos of the late-modern epoch becomes growth, and growth for the sake of growth. This claim stems from Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will to power, which was claimed to be the most decisive thinking of the late-modern epoch.

For Nietzsche, beings are no longer thought of as stable entities, but as eternally struggling to enhance and overcome themselves. "To *stamp* Becoming with the character of Being – that is the supreme *will to power*," Heidegger quotes Nietzsche.⁴⁴¹ Being, to Nietzsche, *is* becoming. Becoming does not merely "add" a temporal character to individual beings, but fundamentally transforms beings *as* temporal, as will to power, that is – as what continually strives to grow, or rather, *the* continual striving to grow. But will to power has no other supreme goal than itself; for Nietzsche, there is no ultimate end-point towards which history is heading. If the medieval epoch's ultimate end-point was defined by the Last Judgment (that is, by God's will); the modern epoch's goal was the achievement of man's

⁴³⁹ See Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 17. (GA 7, 17).

⁴⁴⁰ See *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 100. (GA 6.2, 146).

⁴⁴¹ *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 19. [Dem Werden den Charakter des Seins aufzuprägen - das ist der höchste Wille zur Macht] (GA 6.1, 16).

total dominance; the late-modern, technological and nihilistic epoch has no end-point, but is rather characterized by *the eternal recurrence of the same*.⁴⁴² Hence, Heidegger argues, Nietzsche's two doctrines – the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same – are not to be thought separately, but are essentially saying the same.⁴⁴³ The will to power wills only itself, eternally recurring as the ever-overcoming of itself. Thus, the will to power as eternal recurrence is unified in the simple shorthand of “will to will.” According to Thomson, Nietzsche's doctrine of the *will to will* says the same as Heidegger's *Gestell*.⁴⁴⁴ *Gestell*, in this sense, is the ever-growing demand of growth as such. Everything that is should enhance and overcome itself; it must be better, more flexible, and more serviceable. If not, it will stagnate and be destroyed by other beings in their continual will to grow.

Gestell, thus, is the extreme possibility of modern metaphysics insofar as the subject's drive towards dominance is inscribed in the beingness of the being itself. For beings to be, they must not be represented as objects (i.e. as world-picture), but revealed as available for immediate ordering, as resource. In “The Question,” Heidegger contrasts this technological mode of revealing with the earliest mode of revealing that he discusses, namely *poiesis*. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Heidegger translates *poiesis* as *bringing-forth* [Hervorbringen]. *Poiesis*, then, is the mode of *aletheia* (unconcealment) which brings forth beings by *letting* them be. In contrast, the technological mode of revealing, however, Heidegger names *challenging-forth* [Herausfordern]. The demand that *Gestell* puts to man is that beings must be challenged-forth as resources, i.e. that the mode of revelation demands of the being to succumb to absolute serviceability.

Gestell as the Danger

In the first sense of *Gestell*, man is demanded to be the one who challenges forth beings as resources. Thus, “precisely because man is challenged more originally than are the energies of

⁴⁴² Without endpoint, i.e. by conceiving of calculable time as ∞ , all possible configurations of will to power have always already taken place, and are as such infinitely repeating itself. That is to say, all possible variants of the universe have already been and will always be eternally recurring. Despite the immensity measured from a human scale, this means that the eternal recurrence of the same denotes the highest, most comprehensive being – all recurring universes as a whole.

⁴⁴³ Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 20. (GA 6.1, 17).

⁴⁴⁴ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 18, and *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 52-57. Moreover, I contend that the equation of *Gestell* and the will to will is justified by Heidegger's statement about the coming age of nihilism “in which the *essence* of modern technology – the steadily rotating recurrence of the same – will come to light.” (Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 109). [wenn das Wesen der modernen Technik ans Licht kommt, das heißt: die ständig rotierende Wiederkehr des Gleichen] (GA 8, 112).

nature, i.e., into the process of ordering, he never is transformed into mere resources.”⁴⁴⁵ Less and less a subject, man *is* as the one who challenges-forth beings as resources; the one who performs the demand of Gestell. As every metaphysical epoch, the challenging demand of Gestell (as the late-modern truth of beings) needs man to ground its truth in beings.

What is unique to the late-modern epoch, however, is what Heidegger calls the *danger*. The late-modern, technological mode of revealing, the essence of which is Gestell, i.e. the challenging-forth of beings as resources, is itself *danger*, indeed “the supreme danger.”⁴⁴⁶ The danger, however, is twofold.

First, Gestell – as the extreme possibility of modern metaphysics – by setting the demand upon man to challenge forth beings as resources, leads to a waning of both objectivity and subjectivity. Increasingly, however, as everything is understood as resources, there is nothing that will stop man from understanding other human beings and eventually itself as resources.⁴⁴⁷ Gestell, the absolute serviceability as such, might eventually demand man to stand available for immediate ordering, to provide itself at its disposal. Despite the fact that Heidegger does not claim that man has yet fully become a resource among other resources, he mentions the tendency of naming human beings as “human resources”⁴⁴⁸ – a tendency which can hardly be said to have decreased in the past 60 years. The danger, however, is the complete ontological leveling of beings as resources. Significantly, this “flat ontology” is what is implied in Nietzsche’s notion of beings as will to power. That is to say, not only “objective” beings, but beings *as such* – including the human being – are fundamentally characterized as will to power. “Everything counts as equal.”⁴⁴⁹ Considered as resource, the human being is no longer Dasein, and as such, as I will argue in chapter four, obstructed from its ownmost essencing.

Second, Gestell, by demanding beings to be revealed as resources, “drives out every other possibility of revealing.”⁴⁵⁰ As the continuous growth of the absolute serviceability, no being is excepted from the demand of Gestell. Indeed, Heidegger claims that contrary to any other epoch of the history of being, the late-modern metaphysics is not regionally limited to

⁴⁴⁵ "The Question Concerning Technology," 18. [Doch gerade weil der Mensch ursprünglicher als die Naturenergien herausgefordert ist, nämlich in das Bestellen, wird er niemals zu einem bloßen Bestand] (GA 7, 19).

⁴⁴⁶ "The Question Concerning Technology," 26. [die höchste Gefahr](GA 7, 27)

⁴⁴⁷ "The Question Concerning Technology," 27. (GA 7, 28).

⁴⁴⁸ "The Question Concerning Technology," 18. [Menschenmaterial] (GA 7, 18). Consider also: “Man becomes human material, which is disposed of with a view to proposed goals.” “What are Poets For?,” 109. [Der Mensch wird zum Menschen-material, das auf die vorgesetzten Ziele angesetzt wird] (GA 5, 289).

⁴⁴⁹ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 49. [Alles gilt gleich] (GA 79, 52).

⁴⁵⁰ "The Question Concerning Technology," 27. [vertreibt es jede andere Möglichkeit der Entbergung] (GA 7, 27).

the West, but is increasingly global. As has been repeatedly stated, the history of being which Heidegger recollects is what he terms as the *Western* history. Although understated in Heidegger's writings, this implies in my view that there are other histories of being, in which other modes of revealing have taken place.⁴⁵¹ By being increasingly globalized, the technological understanding of being, in other words, is not only closing the possibility of understanding being from out of Western history; it also blocks off other, non-Western understandings of being. But what Heidegger claims is even more severe, namely that the danger of Gestell is that it "is the complete forgetting of the truth of being."⁴⁵²

As I have discussed, metaphysics overlooks the *question* of the truth of being, but it still *thinks* the truth of beings by articulating the historical variable constellations of intelligibility that makes up the epochs. Despite not questioning the truth of being as such, Heidegger claims that the pre-Socratics experienced beings as emergent unconcealment. In the previous chapter, I discussed how truth is understood as the strife between world and earth, and that every epoch is a certain configuration of the "crossing through" of world and earth. The history of being, in this sense, begins by the first opening of a world in which the earth is allowed to emerge as earth. Earth is, as was pointed out, the unexplained, self-concealing emerging of all things. The pre-Socratic's understanding of being as emergent unconcealment (physis and aletheia), Heidegger claims, is such an opening: it lets the earth be earth. By the inception of metaphysics in the history of being, however, world is increasingly dominating.

Plato's crucial distinction between the sensuous and the suprasensuous realms explicitly deems the self-rising appearance of earth as the mere reflection of the "true" world of ideas. Likewise, the suprasensuous realm of God is higher than the sinful, sensuous world. The modern subject – the suprasensuous *res cogitans* – is what guarantees the reality of the real, and thus dominates the object. But would not Nietzsche's "overturning of Platonism"⁴⁵³ – which claims that the suprasensuous is the un-true, while the sensuous world is the true world – restore to earth its dignity?

Quite the opposite, Heidegger claims. Because the will to power ultimately undermines anything but its own willing and its own overcoming of itself, there is nothing that remains unexplained and undisclosed. Through the challenging-forth of Gestell, the advent of the total revelation of beings as resource would simultaneously be the final victory

⁴⁵¹ This seems for instance to be the implication of Heidegger's claim that insofar as language is "the house of being," "we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man." *On the Way to Language*, 5. [wir Europäer vermutlich in einem ganz anderen Haus als der ostasiatische Mensch] (GA 12, 85).

⁴⁵² *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 50. Translation modified. [Ge-Stell ist die vollendete Vergessenheit der Wahrheit des Seins] (GA 79, 53).

⁴⁵³ *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, Vol I, 200. [Umdrehung des Platonismus] (GA 6.1, 202).

of world over earth. Truth, *a-letheia*, means *un-concealedness*. Concealedness, in other words, belongs to truth. Truth, thus “essences only when and only for as long as concealment, *lethe*, takes place.”⁴⁵⁴ What this implies is that the history of being – which has been characterized by an “oblivion of being”⁴⁵⁵ – occurs essentially as the gradually increasing withdrawal of being, whereby beings appear increasingly less mysterious. Thus, the history of being is the history of the *gradual* oblivion of being; the mystery *that* unconcealment “is” is forgotten in favor of the (gradually declining) mystery *that* beings *are*.

Thus, Heidegger contends that the danger of Gestell is the advent of the possibility of a *double* oblivion – or the “full forgetting”⁴⁵⁶ – of being, in which neither the mystery of unconcealment nor the mystery of beings comes to matter. Beings – that is, resources – are, but not as autonomous, real, and objective entities. Rather, they are fully deployed and exhausted in their serviceability. Nothing is held in reserve by the challenging-forth of Gestell. Although Gestell has not yet provided the total prevalence of the technological mode of revealing, its emergence poses the very *danger* of this double oblivion. That is, the danger of the impossibility of any other mode of revealing; the danger of man becoming nothing but a resource; the danger that both the mystery of the being of beings, and the mystery of being as such, becomes irrelevant, insignificant and in the end meaningless and unreal.

Summary and Transition

In conclusion, the history of being designates the changing modes of revealing which grants the historically specific understandings of what is and what matters. These modes of revealing are epochal, and become relatively stable constellations of intelligibility; these constellations both enable intelligibility, and limit what is intelligible and sensible. This dual enabling and limiting of intelligibility are the changing senses of Dasein’s understanding of the being of beings and the essence of truth, which is granted by the destining of being.

From the Platonic to the late-modern epoch, the understanding of being is metaphysical in character. The truth of beings is understood ontotheologically, by being interpreted through the duality of the most fundamental, ontological being (*eidōs*, *ens creatum*, object, will to power, resources) and the highest, theological being (*eidōs*, *ens increatum*/God, subject, eternal recurrence of the same, Gestell). Ending on a rather bleak note, Heidegger

⁴⁵⁴ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 47. [A-λήθεια, Unverborgenheit des Anwesenden als eines solchen, west aber nur dann und nur so lange, als Verbor-genheit, Λήθη, sich ereignet] (GA 79, 49).

⁴⁵⁵ "Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture "Time and Being", " 29. [Seinsvergessenheit] (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens*, 37).

⁴⁵⁶ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 50. [die völlige Vergessenheit] (GA 79, 52).

claims that the Gestell of the late-modern epoch is the danger of a double oblivion of being, along with the annihilation of Dasein. For this thesis, it is crucial to take into account Heidegger's writings on the late-modern epoch, technology and Gestell, insofar as it shows how much is at stake for Heidegger when he appoints himself the task of preparing for the overcoming of metaphysics and aesthetics. Aesthetics is metaphysics in the realm of art, and as such one of the essential ways which prepares for Gestell's installation in beings. Significantly, Heidegger writes:

Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and *decisive confrontation* with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. *Such a realm is art.*⁴⁵⁷

The essence of art and technology is "akin" insofar as both, most fundamentally, are ways of revealing. But while the essence of art is poetry, which as such reveals in the sense of *poiesis*, understood as bringing-forth; technology – the essence of which is Gestell – reveals in the sense of challenging-forth. The danger is "above all," that "Gestell conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiesis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance."⁴⁵⁸ Under the reign of Gestell, *poiesis* is concealed, and as such, art is no longer possible. And as was discussed, Heidegger claims that "art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history."⁴⁵⁹

In "The Question," Heidegger quotes Hölderlin: "But where danger is, grows / the saving power also."⁴⁶⁰ That is to say, along with the danger of Gestell, the saving power – the possibility of overcoming metaphysics – is present. As intimated in the previous chapter, Heidegger's approach is to prepare for a "decisive confrontation" with the essence of technology through his interpretation of the art of poetry. I have, however, argued that his thinking also opens up for the possibility of approaching the historical transformations of metaphysics through the realm of the pictorial arts, by claiming that in pictorial works, too, thinking goes on.

⁴⁵⁷ "The Question Concerning Technology," 35. Emphasis mine. [Weil das Wesen der Technik nichts Technisches ist, darum muß die wesentliche Besinnung auf die Technik und die entscheidende Auseinandersetzung mit ihr in einem Bereich geschehen, der einerseits mit dem Wesen der Technik verwandt und andererseits von ihm doch grundverschieden ist. Ein solcher Bereich ist die Kunst] (GA 7, 36).

⁴⁵⁸ "The Question Concerning Technology," 27. [Vor allem verbirgt das Ge-stell jenes Entbergen, das im Sinne der ποιησις das Anwesende ins Erscheinen her-vor-kommen läßt] (GA 7, 28).

⁴⁵⁹ "The Origin," 75. [Die Kunst ist Geschichte in dem wesentlichen Sinne, daß sie Geschichte gründet] (GA 5, 65).

⁴⁶⁰ "The Question Concerning Technology," 28 and 34. [Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / das Rettende auch] (GA 7, 29 and 35).

Conclusion | From an Unthought Art History of Being

In the previous chapter, I argued that the work of art is capable of not only founding truth by fixing in place the rift in figure, but also of articulating and showing – *thinking* – the truth of beings as such. Insofar as the work’s establishing of the historical limits of intelligibility is itself brought to light by the work, it thinks. It is available for our recollection. As we have seen, Heidegger claims that “the essential transformation of truth corresponds to the essential history of Western art.”⁴⁶¹ In my view, this also implies that corresponding to the history of being as thought through the thinking of the history of philosophy, there is a history of being thought through the history of art. If art is an essential way in which the metaphysical understandings of being establish themselves in beings throughout the history of being, then understanding the essential history of art might help prepare for the “decisive confrontation” with the essence of technology mentioned above. Regardless, however, of whether one shares Heidegger’s interpretation of the contemporary condition, I suggest that Heidegger’s unthought history of art opens for the possibility to see and appreciate the historical work that art has done in “shaping history,”⁴⁶² that is, in shaping the historical limits of intelligibility as such.

Like the essential transformation of truth, the essential history of Western art has been characterized by metaphysics. As I discussed above, then, the metaphysical interpretation of the work of art as “symbolic image” emerges in line with Plato’s distinction between the sensuous and the suprasensuous realms. Most generally, by naming the metaphysical essence of the work of art as symbolic image, Heidegger claims that the traditional understanding of the artwork is the bringing-together of a sensuous being and a suprasensuous meaning or content. As such, considered in the language of modern metaphysics, the pictorial history of art is a history of the essential “modes” of pictorial “representation.” But the Heideggerian objection to this understanding of the history of art is that the various “modes of representation” do not simply designate dissimilar representations of an otherwise identical, stable, and unchanging reality. Nor do they merely “express” different *Weltanschauungen*, as is Panofsky’s view. Rather, the various “modes of representation” (i.e., the metaphysical

⁴⁶¹ GA 5, 69-70. Translation mine.

⁴⁶² "The Origin," 66. [Geschichte mitgestaltet] (GA 5, 56).

essencing of works of art) bring to light the historically contingent understanding of the actuality of the actual, and the reality of the real; that is, the being of beings as a whole, i.e. the historical truth of beings. Thus, the history of pictorial art – or rather, the history of pictorial thinking – is a history of how the being of beings is brought to appear in beings.

Like all beings, the work of art is determined by an epoch's fundamental metaphysical position. And, notably, only because the work *is* determined by metaphysics can it found metaphysics, both in the sense of strengthening and challenging the limits of intelligibility. Contrary to the being of beings (which itself is not a being), the work of art *is* a being – and as such, it can let the being of beings be shown and be established in a being. The work founds the truth of beings by inhabiting the very limits of intelligibility – by setting up a world and setting forth the earth, it holds open the openness of the epoch's world. The Greek vase paintings and the wall paintings at Pompeii worked to hold open their ancient Greek and Roman worlds; the Reichenauer frescoes held open its medieval world; paintings by Giotto, Dürer, and Friedrich each founds and as such holds open their modern worlds. But today, all these worlds are mostly gone. Although we still have one foot in the world held open by Giotto, Dürer, and Friedrich's works, we are increasingly less familiar with the understanding of being that these works sustain and, in turn, are sustained by. Indeed, works of art are increasingly becoming mere “objects of the art industry,”⁴⁶³ Heidegger writes. And increasingly becoming resources, available for immediate ordering of the tourist industry, I might add.

Nevertheless, in line with my argument in the previous chapter, I suggest that the Greek vase painting and the wall paintings at Pompeii still attest to the limits of intelligibility they once helped to form. The Reichenauer frescoes still display themselves as the figure that once arose from the rift that was set back into the work material. As such, these works articulate their own limits of intelligibility, and as they do so, they allow for the recollection of the openness of the world they once held open. They allow for the thinking-along of the essential *showing* of the truth of beings that takes place in the work.

In line with this conception, I suggest that the claim that the essential history of Western art corresponds to the essential history of the transformation of the truth of beings, implies that changes in pictorial idioms are of metaphysical significance.⁴⁶⁴ Basically, it claims that changes in the *way* in which the work of art is meaningful (what I in the previous

⁴⁶³ "The Origin," 39. [die Gegenstände des Kunstbetriebes] (GA 5, 26).

⁴⁶⁴ Considered in terms of etymology, the very word *idiom* seems surprisingly apt in the present context: “from Latin *idioma* ‘a peculiarity in language,’ from Greek *idioma* ‘peculiarity’... from *idioumai* ‘to appropriate to oneself,’ from *idios* ‘personal, private,’ properly ‘particular to oneself.’” “Idiom,” URL: <http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=idiom>. (Retrieved: 06.10.16).

chapter called the work's *poietics*: the work's idiomatic mode of poiesis, i.e. of bringing-forth) bears upon the understanding of being that sustains the intelligibility of the work. As determined by an epoch's metaphysics, the work of art is (as any being) meaningful in accordance with this metaphysics. When the work of art, then, transgresses the limits of a certain pictorial idiom – i.e. changes the limits of what is intelligible in painting – this is not a question of “mere” style (in a superficial sense), but a challenge towards the understanding of being which sustains the idiom it transgresses: “The style is itself of a different metaphysical essence,”⁴⁶⁵ Heidegger writes.

Hence, as Nowell Smith claims, the work “shifts the limits of intelligibility as such.”⁴⁶⁶ In most cases, this challenge is what founds (in the sense of grounding) the epoch's metaphysics. That is, it brings out, clarifies, and extends the openness of the epoch's understanding of being. In rarer cases, works of art found in the sense of beginning, and their challenging of the pictorial limits of intelligibility contribute in establishing an entirely new epoch in the history of being. Maybe the clearest example of the latter is the emergence of central perspective in the 15th century, which contributed in establishing the subject as the guarantee of the correctness of the representation of the objective world, pre-dating Descartes by over two centuries.

If the essential history of Western art corresponds to the history of being, the historical recollection of art's pictorial thinking amounts to recognizing the metaphysical significance of the historical changes in the essencing of works of art. This means to ponder the metaphysical significance of the historical shifts in pictorial idioms, styles, or as I will prefer to say, the work's *poietics*. Thus, recollection takes place through the following questions: What is the understanding of the being of beings that is brought forth in the work? What is the essence of truth that sustains this understanding? Which means: What is the truth (of beings) that is set-into-work in and by the work?

But questioning *what* truth is set-into-work means simultaneously to ask *how* truth is set-into-work. In the case of artworks in the modern epoch, this is to say, *how* does the work bring forth the reality of the real? How does the being of beings essence through its being established in the figure that the work is? What and how is the works' idiomatic mode of bringing-forth – it poietics? What is considered intelligible within the limits of intelligibility that the work proscribes, and how is this shown?

⁴⁶⁵ Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister", 24-25. (GA 53, 28).

⁴⁶⁶ Nowell Smith, *Sounding/Silence*, 29.

In the introduction, I wrote that Heidegger claims that to overcome metaphysics means to bring “out the essence of metaphysics, and only thus [bring] metaphysics back within its own limits.”⁴⁶⁷ Insofar as the essential history of Western art corresponds to the history of metaphysics, Heidegger’s unthought history of art – recollections in the art history of being, if you will – must therefore be seen as an essential way of carrying out the task of *overcoming* metaphysics as such. The scope of this thesis, however, is limited to the attempt to think along with and be guided by the pictorial thinking of two works of art. In order to understand “that which now is,”⁴⁶⁸ Heidegger seems to argue that we must begin by placing ourselves on the way of being, and attempt to understand the historical transformations in the history of being that determines the current epoch. And I choose to enter this path through the works of a painter who more than most challenged what and how pictorial works of art provides intelligibility, and whose works were so deeply engaged in rendering “the modern life of the soul”⁴⁶⁹ that his works was considered to be “almost a painted philosophy.”⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁷ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 20. (GA 12, 103-104).

⁴⁶⁸ *Introduction to Philosophy - Thinking and Poetizing*, 7. [*das...was jetzt ist*] (GA 50, 97).

⁴⁶⁹ Munch, *MM N 31*, 2.

⁴⁷⁰ “Es ist geradezu die gemalte Philosophie.” Przybyszewski, *Das Werk Des Edvard Munch*, 21. English translation in “Psychich Naturalism,” 1048.

Part II

CHAPTER THREE | THE SICK CHILD

DEATH AND THE PILLOW

In the previous two chapters, I argued that Heidegger's thinking on art and history outlines an unthought history of art. In this *art history of being*, artworks are happenings that work to clarify and strengthen the epochs' understanding of being, while harboring the possibility of challenging and thus participate in reconfiguring this understanding as well. I have argued that although the works' historical *founding* always belongs to their epochs, and is as such something past, works of art might still articulate and show an understanding of beings as a whole. This essential *showing* I argued to be the intersection between *thinking* and *poetizing* that led me to the suggestion that also through the history of art, a thinking of being takes place. Indeed, analogous to what Heidegger names "poetic thinking,"⁴⁷¹ I suggest a *pictorial* thinking – a "thinking without science, without philosophy."⁴⁷² This thinking is available for what Heidegger calls *recollection*. Recollection in the art history of being, then, I suggested to be a perspective on the history of Western art that explores the historical ways in which the

⁴⁷¹ Heidegger, "What are Poets For?," 93. [dichtenden Denkens] (GA 5, 273).

⁴⁷² *On the Way to Language*, 61. [gedacht...ohne Wissenschaft, ohne Philosophie] (GA 12, 154).

essential transformations of the truth of being has taken place in, or *corresponds* to, the essential history of Western art. Recollection thus “may still offer to the work a place from which it joins in shaping history.”⁴⁷³ According to Heidegger, understanding this history is crucial for understanding the still emerging late-modern epoch, which he claims poses the “supreme danger”⁴⁷⁴ of “the complete forgetting of the truth of being.”⁴⁷⁵ Thus, what motivates Heidegger’s writings on the history of being – and by implication his unthought *art* history of being – is the attempt of understanding our contemporary age through its being-historical emergence, and from this, facilitating the hope of “overcoming” it. However, what is clear from the previous two chapters is also that Heidegger himself scarcely touches upon concrete pictorial works of art (with the exception of Van Gogh’s *Shoes*), let alone subjects them to any thorough discussion in light of his thinking. Indeed, his art history of being remains unthought.

In this chapter, I will turn to Edvard Munch’s painting *The Sick Child*⁴⁷⁶ (1885-6) and question how it might be understood from the perspective of Heidegger’s unthought history of art. The chapter, in other words, is first an approach to Munch’s art that takes seriously Przybyszewski’s claim that it is “almost a painted philosophy,” and hence, a contribution to the existing literature on Munch. Second, it is a contribution to the study of Heidegger’s philosophy, as it approaches his unthought history of art, and explores some of the possible paths it might open.

In the following, I will argue that *The Sick Child* is a particularly illuminating case for the Heideggerian art history of being. The artwork is not an example of how works of art strengthen and clarify their epochs’ understanding of being, but most significantly, how a work of art can challenge and thus contribute to reconfiguring the limits of intelligibility in general. Indeed, I will suggest that *The Sick Child* reveals how artworks can respond to the

⁴⁷³ "The Origin," 66. [Geschichte mitgestaltet] (GA 5, 56).

⁴⁷⁴ "The Question Concerning Technology," 26. [die höchste Gefahr] (GA 7, 27)

⁴⁷⁵ *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 50. Translation modified. [die vollendete Vergessenheit der Wahrheit des Seins] (GA 79, 53).

⁴⁷⁶ *The Sick Child* is generally seen as Munch’s first major work, and it is among his most celebrated and discussed paintings. As Reinhold Heller puts it, “no other painting in the entire previous history of Norwegian art matches *The Sick Child* in quality or significance, and only Munch’s own works equal it later.” (Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 21). *The Sick Child* was first exhibited at the Norwegian State’s annual Autumn Exhibition in Kristiania (Oslo, from 1925), Norway, in 1886. It is one of Munch’s most repeated motifs, resulting in six painted versions in total and several printed editions, all executed at various points throughout his whole career. (See Woll, *Edvard Munch: Complete Paintings*.no. 130, 392, 790, 791, 1561, and 1631. As well as, *Edvard Munch: Collected Graphic Works*.no. 7, 59, 72, and 73). After a swap of editions with the art collector Olaf Schou in 1931, the first edition has since been on display in the National Gallery in Oslo, except for a few years during WWII. On this, see Tone Skedsmo, "Tautrekking om Det syke barn," in *Kunst og Kultur*, 184-94 (Oslo: 1985), and Øystein Ustvedt, "The Story of a Masterpiece," in *Edvard Munch: The Sick Child*, ed. Øystein Ustvedt, 105-33 (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, 2009), 129-130.

call of being, and as such, that its thinking is of consequence to the history of being. More concretely, the work reveals a slight but significant shift in the understanding of the subject's privileged position as the guarantee of truth in the transformation between the modern and late-modern epochs. Seen in this way, the work does not merely "illustrate" or "express" a change in the understanding of being, but is a being in which the essential transformation of the truth of being is established, and can indeed be understood as a "happening of truth."⁴⁷⁷ In turn, my analysis of *The Sick Child* will feed back into Heidegger's account of the history of being, and show the significance of the "philosophical" *work* – the pictorial thinking – that goes on in the work of art; but also, in a way I will clarify shortly, intimates Heidegger's interpretation of *death* as an existential phenomenon.

Because of the Heideggerian perspective of this thesis, the usual historical-biographical and socio-historical contexts of Munch's painting will be held at some distance. However, a crucial point I will bring along from the research history is the widespread claim that *The Sick Child* is seen as Munch's break with the pictorial idiom of Naturalism,⁴⁷⁸ and in this way as shifting the emphasis of pictorial representation from the visually observable reality to "psychological realities."⁴⁷⁹ As has been repeatedly claimed (also by Munch himself),⁴⁸⁰ and problematized,⁴⁸¹ *The Sick Child* paved the way for Munch's later Symbolist works, and most significantly, *The Frieze of Life*.⁴⁸² Many of Munch's most well-known works from the 1890s, such as *The Scream* [image 13], *Puberty* [image 14], *Melancholy* [image 15], *Anxiety* [image 16], *Madonna* [image 17], and *Jealousy* [image 18], for instance, were in various versions exhibited as part of *The Frieze*.⁴⁸³ As I will return to in the next chapter, what was characteristic of Munch's idiosyncratic Symbolism in the 1890s was not that it intimated a "higher" reality, as was the aim of many continental Symbolist

⁴⁷⁷ Heidegger, "The Origin," 59. [Wahrheitsgeschehens] (GA 5, 49).

⁴⁷⁸ As phrased, for example, by Eggum: "In *The Sick Child*, Munch seems to burst open the limits for what could be expressed in a naturalist pictorial idiom." [I *Det syke barn* synes Munch å sprengre grensene for hva som kunne uttrykkes i et naturalistisk formspråk] Arne Eggum, *Edvard Munch: Malerier - Skisser og Studier* (Oslo: J.M. Stenersens Forlag AS, 1983), 45.

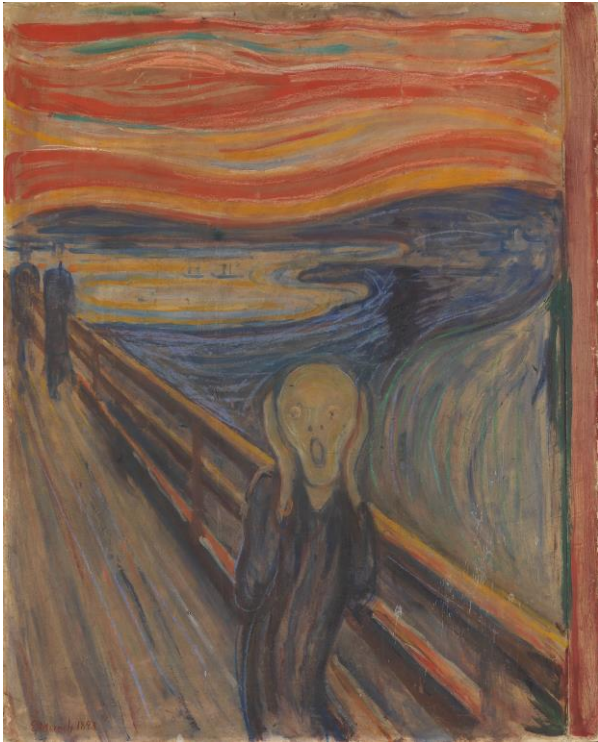
⁴⁷⁹ "The Theme of Death," 148.

⁴⁸⁰ "– In the sick child I paved new roads for myself – it was a breakthrough in my art. – Most of what I have done since had its genesis in this picture." [I *det syke barn* brøt jeg mig nye veie – det var et gjennombrudd i min kunst. – Det meste av hvad jeg senere har gjort fik sin fødsel i dette billede] Munch, *Livsfrisens tilblivelse*, 10.

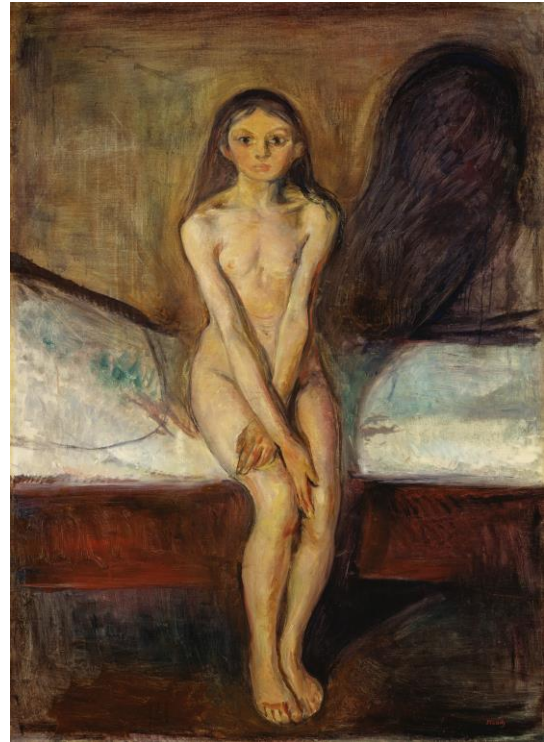
⁴⁸¹ Grøgaard discusses the tendency of explaining *The Sick Child* in light of his later works instead of seeing it as a result of concrete artistic and aesthetic issues pre-dating *The Sick Child*. See Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 34-121.

⁴⁸² See chapter four.

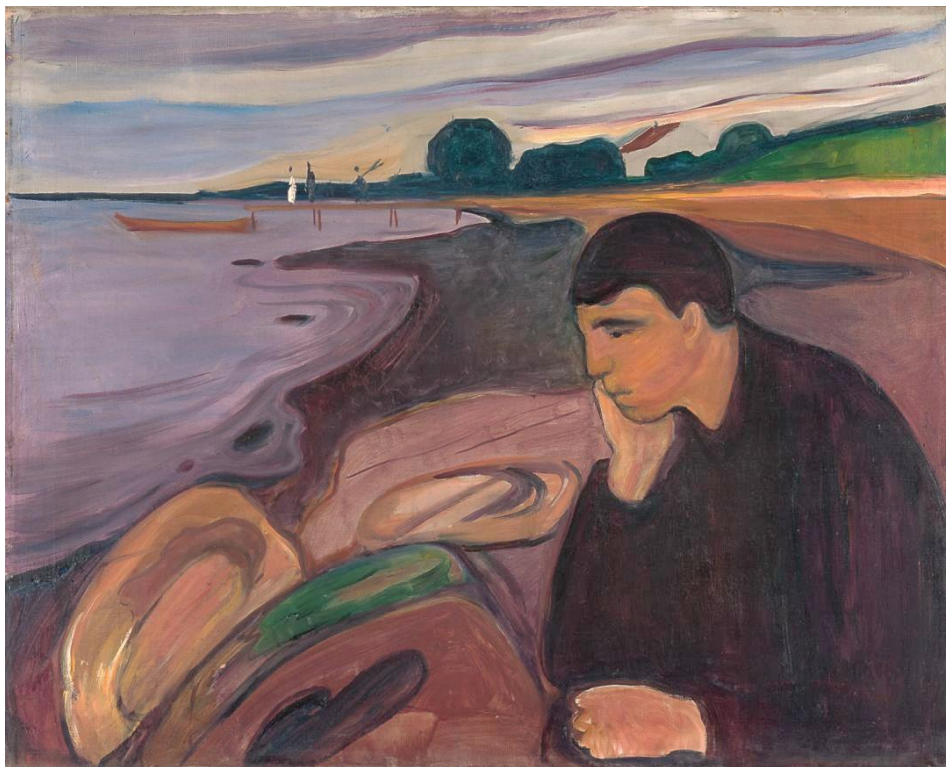
⁴⁸³ See for instance, Arne Eggum, "*Livsfrisen* som den var utstilt hos Blomqvist i 1918," in *Edvard Munchs Livsfrise: En rekonstruksjon av utstilling hos Blomqvist 1918*, ed. Karen Lerheim and Gunnar Sørensen, 13-36 (Oslo: Munch-Museet and Labyrinth press, 2003).



13. **Edvard Munch, *Skrik*, 1894-95.** [The Scream] Woll 333. Tempera and crayon on unprimed cardboard, 91 x 73.5 cm. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.



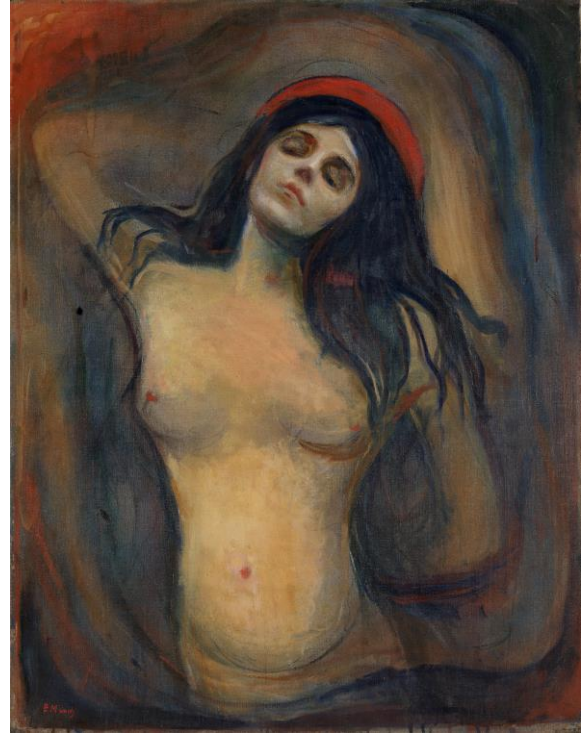
14. **Edvard Munch, *Pubertet*, 1894-95.** [Puberty] Woll 347. Oil on canvas, 151.1 x 110 cm. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.



15. **Edvard Munch, *Melankoli*, 1894-95.** [Melancholy] Woll 360. Oil on canvas, 81 x 100.5 cm. KODE Art Museums, Bergen.



16. **Edvard Munch, *Angst*, 1894.** [Anxiety] Woll 363. Oil on canvas, 94 x 74 cm. The Munch Museum, Oslo.



17. **Edvard Munch, *Madonna*, 1894.** Woll 365. Oil on canvas, 90 x 68.5 cm. The Munch Museum, Oslo.



18. **Edvard Munch, *Sjalusi*, 1895.** [Jealousy] Woll 379. Oil on canvas, 66.8 x 100 cm. KODE Art Museums, Bergen.

painters,⁴⁸⁴ but that it was – in Przybyszewski’s words – a “psychic naturalism.”⁴⁸⁵ Indeed, an intimation of the “lower” reality of affectivity, one might say. From the perspective of this thesis, I will suggest that *The Sick Child*’s bursting of the limits of the pictorial idiom of Naturalism can be seen as a transgression of the *limits of pictorial intelligibility* – and thus the *poietics* (the way a work means) – of Naturalism. In this way, it establishes a new limit of pictorial intelligibility, which in turn opens up for and enables the intelligibility of Munch’s later, Symbolist works. I hope to show that the work, thus considered, can be understood as what Heidegger calls a happening of truth, or rather, a pictorial thinking of truth (unconcealedness). The central aim of this chapter is, in other words, an attempt to understand the transgression of *The Sick Child* – and its metaphysical consequences – along with what called to be brought forth so that the Naturalist pictorial idiom needed to be transgressed.

In this respect, a core argument of the chapter is that *The Sick Child* essentially concerns the reality of death. This is not an undermining of the work’s contribution to the pictorial history of sickness and diseases in general, or tuberculosis in particular, nor to say anything about the usual historical-biographical interpretation of the work. Rather, it is a consequence of Heidegger’s thinking of art, where what is significant about the work is not primarily the beings or entities that are depicted by the work, but what the work discloses essentially. In the following, I will suggest that what the work essentially shows is not a particular sick child and her mother, but a way death appears in “reality” – namely, as affect. Or, in Heidegger’s terminology, that it shows a “mood” [Stimmung] of death. As I will return to in the next chapter, Heidegger claims in *Being and Time* that death is an *existential phenomenon*. As such, death is not a point in time, or a biological process, but the horizon of Dasein’s being-in-the-world, which I will argue is always disclosed in some way. Following this, my claim will be that *The Sick Child* is a work of art that discloses an understanding of death – it lets death *essence*.

As discussed in the previous chapters, Heidegger claims that all phenomena – and by consequence, also death – is determined by the history of being. What death “is,” that is, how death is disclosed as meaningful to Dasein (i.e. the essence of death), belongs to the epochal transformations of the history of being. Therefore, in order to grasp *how The Sick Child* discloses the reality of death, and to see and experience the significance of the way the essence of death is disclosed, it is in my view necessary to explore the work’s being-historical

⁴⁸⁴ As will be discussed in chapter four.

⁴⁸⁵ Przybyszewski, “Psychich Naturalism,” 1044. (*Das Werk Des Edvard Munch*).

emergence; that is, the history of pictorial thinking to which *The Sick Child* belongs. But to what history does *The Sick Child* belong?

Death – in all its modes and variations – is and has been among the most central themes of Western art. The scope of this chapter, however, is limited to the history of the pictorial thinking of death to which *The Sick Child* belongs. It is generally recognized that in terms of its subject matter, the painting is far from unique. Almost four decades after painting *The Sick Child*, Munch wrote (in a letter to Jens Thiis, dated 1933) that the work was painted in the “age of pillows.”⁴⁸⁶ Indeed, a sick and dying child, resting against a pillow was a cherished theme for many painters in Munch’s time, usually exemplified in the literature on Munch by Hans Heyerdahl’s *The Dying Child* [image 21] and Christian Krohg’s *Sick Girl* [image 35], both from 1881. Thus, in terms of its motif, *The Sick Child* has been argued to be a genre painting with roots in Dutch 17th century painting.⁴⁸⁷ However, in light of Heidegger’s unthought art history of being, I am neither concerned with the motif, genre, or iconography of the work, nor with any speculations concerning Munch’s sources of inspiration or influence; rather, I am concerned with the pictorial thinking of death that goes on in the work. My suggestion, then, is that we can see *The Sick Child* as belonging to a central trail of the history of Western art, which concerns what I call the theme of *death and the pillow*.

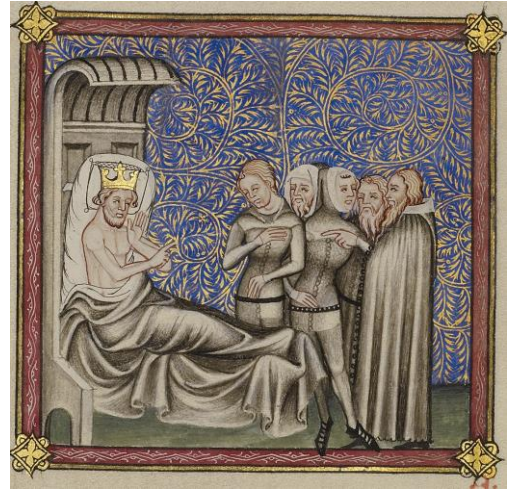
The pillow has been a central feature of Western depictions of death at least since the Geometric period (ca 900-700 B.C). As I will argue in more depth in the second section of this chapter, the ancient Greek funerary rite *prothesis* [πρόθεσις] was the most common theme for depictions of death in ancient Greece until the end of the 5th century. Significantly, it shows the dying person placed on a bier, with his or her head resting on a pillow (*proskephalaia* [προσκεφάλαια]) [image 23 and 24]. Moreover, in the Middle Ages, depictions of the deathbed became increasingly widespread, showing the dying person in its bed, covered by blankets and supported by a pillow [image 19 and 20]. Finally, the deathbed and the public viewing of the dead remained themes for artworks in the Modern Age, and was eventually followed by depictions of the sickchair as in Munch and Krohg’s works. Throughout this history, however, death is disclosed differently. What and how death essentially “is” is articulated and shown differently in the art of the ancient Greeks, of the Christian Middle Ages, and of the

⁴⁸⁶ [Putetiden] Edvard Munch, *Brev til Jens Thiis (MM N 3120)* (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1933), 3.

⁴⁸⁷ Ustvedt, “The Story of a Masterpiece,” 121-122.



19. Unknown artist, *Initial E. Abishag before David on his Deathbed*, Ca. 1270. Tempera colors, black ink, and gold leaf on parchment. Leaf: 47 x 30.8 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



20. Master of Jean de Mandeville, *Alexander the Great with His Generals*, Ca. 1360-70. Tempera on parchment. Leaf: 34.9 x 26 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



21. Hans Heyerdahl. *Det døende barn*, 1881. [The Dying Child] Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 70 cm. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

increasingly secular Modern epoch. Thus, the theme of death and the pillow can be seen as a mode of the pictorial thinking of death, and that works depicting this theme belong to the essential, historical disclosure of death, as it is allowed to appear and establish itself in beings.

However, I do not claim that the pillow is an overarching symbol or that it carries a specific, unchanging meaning throughout this history. Nevertheless, its permanence throughout Western art history does seem to reveal a shared sense of the care and attention put to the dead or dying human being. Although pillows in general can be found in many different works that have nothing to do with death, I see the pillows in the works I will discuss as contributing to the works' showing of death's (changing) essence through its depicting of the vulnerability of the dead or dying human being. My point is that although the theme of death and the pillow is only one among the several ways (for instance violent deaths, symbolic personifications of death, and burials) in which death is depicted throughout the Western history of art, it allows us to see *The Sick Child* as emerging out of a history of pictorial thinking that reveals the essential transformations of death. It allows us to see that Munch's *The Sick Child* belongs not only to "the age of pillows," but to the *ages* of pillows, and in this way as belonging to an over two and a half thousand years long history of pictorial thinking of death.

This chapter is structured in three sections. In the first section, I will describe *The Sick Child* with a particular emphasis on the work's surface. In my view, one of the most peculiar aspects of the work is the many scratches and incisions on the surface, which appear to distort or diffuse the beings that are depicted in the work. I will, however, argue that the attempt to understand *what* or even *where* these scratches are, leads to questions concerning the poetics of the work (*how* it provides intelligibility) and what it essentially shows – which I will suggest is an understanding of the reality of death.

The second section explores the history of pictorial thinking of death in Western art, through the theme of death and the pillow. In order to bring out the broad strokes of the essential transformations in the pictorial thinking of death, its relation to the essential changes in poetics and the truth of being, I will focus my discussion on three works of art. First, in order to exemplify the pre-Socratic epoch's understanding of death, I will discuss an Archaic pinax (a funerary plaque) from ca 520-510 B.C, depicting the ancient Greek funerary rite, *prothesis*. Second, in order to show the medieval epoch's essence of death, I will discuss an engraving from a 15th century *Ars Moriendi*-book. And finally, as an example of the modern

epoch's understanding of death – bringing us closer to *The Sick Child* – I will discuss Krohg's painting *Sick Girl*. These three works are chosen because they clearly bring out three different ways the essence of death is thought pictorially throughout the history of Western art, while echoing the epochs in Heidegger's history of being. Obviously, I do not claim exhaustiveness in scope, as the essential transformations in the pictorial thinking of death are far more nuanced than what can be shown through three examples. Moreover, I will only briefly mention the Platonic epoch. Nevertheless, I contend that my discussions of these works will bring out an outline of the broad strokes of the different fundamental positions in the history of pictorial thinking of death for appreciating the scope of my discussion of *The Sick Child*.

In the third and final section, I will return to *The Sick Child* and discuss the way it discloses the affective reality of death, along with the metaphysical significance of its transgression of the poietics of Naturalism that was necessary for its disclosure of death.

Section One | *The Sick Child*

The Sick Child shows a girl sitting in a chair, covered with blankets [Image 1]. At her side, we can see a grieving woman, her mother, with her head bent in sorrow and despair.⁴⁸⁸ The painting, which today hangs permanently in the National Gallery in Oslo, Norway, is almost square in shape (120 x 118, 5 cm), and surrounded by a heavy, golden frame. The girl and her mother are set in a semi-lit, shallow pictorial space, with what looks something like a curtain to the right and, beyond the picture frame, a window that lets pale light enter the room. A few simple items are present, a dresser, a table, a glass with some liquid, and a flask of medicine. The painting draws attention to the head of the girl, which is shown in profile against a large white pillow. The colors of the painting is dominated by a play of red (the hair of the girl, the dresser, the liquid in the glass, the curtain again, and the stain of paint on the mother's head and on the pillow), green (the curtain, the blankets), and grey (the wall, the pillow and the mother's dress).

The surface of the painting appears rough, coarse and messy. Every square centimeter appears overworked, scratched out and repainted again.⁴⁸⁹ According to Aslaksby, the work was painted and re-painted over several months, possibly splashed with varnish which again was overpainted with thick strokes of paint, making a coarse and thick, encrusted surface sometimes consisting of over 20 coats.⁴⁹⁰

Accounting for all the various layers and strokes of the painting is simply impossible. It is an abundance and excess of painterly textures, ranging from the simplistic and naïve glass in the lower right corner, to the leathery dissolving of the pillow to the left, to the strange, thin myriad scratches and incisions in the paint found in the curtain and pillow but also more intensely in and around the face of the sick girl and on the head of the mother.

⁴⁸⁸ As the biographically informed reader will know, the models for the painting were the girl Betzy Nilsen and Munch's aunt Karen Bjølstad. Usually, the painting is interpreted as Munch's memory of his dying sister, Johanne Sofie, which requires the woman to be interpreted as portraying Aunt Karen; Sofie and Edvard's mother died 9 years earlier. See Eggum, "The Theme of Death," 143-153. For further discussion, see below.

⁴⁸⁹ For a historic discussion of the reception of the painting regarding its formal and material aspects, see Bjerke, "Edvard Munch, *The Sick Child*: form as content,"

⁴⁹⁰ See Trond E. Aslaksby, "The Sick Child: NG.M.00839. A Painting in Transformation - Techniques and Treatment," in *Edvard Munch: The Sick Child*, ed. Øystein Ustvedt, 57-85 (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, 2009), for a technical analysis of the painting.

Almost everywhere one can find surprising spots of colors not entirely at home on, in, or at the canvas, such as the bright blue at the right edge of the dresser, and the little signal red dot on the mother's head; a little, vague blue patch is on the wall above the mother's head, reflected in the strange, dirty blueish shadow underneath the girl's arm, side by side with some greenish yellow, fading into the musty green of the blanket.

What does the work show? At the outset, it is easily recognizable: a sick – dying – girl is placed as comfortably as possible within the confinements of the home. Her mother sits at her side and is crushed by the weight of the imminent death that is about to strike her family. The sick girl stares out of her eyes. They appear not to be fixed on anything particular, as if the gaze is turned inwards, rather than outwards. For some reason, this seemingly recognizable scene is executed in a way that seem to distort and diffuse what is depicted: the heavy, sketch-like application of paint, the unclear contours of the figures, the static composition, and most significantly the scratches and lines that seem so cover the entire surface. Maybe we can come closer to understand the execution of the work by taking a closer look at these scratches.

Scratches and Incisions

Among the most conspicuous and peculiar features of *The Sick Child* are the many scratches, incisions, or scrapings that are found all over the surface of the painting. Almost everywhere, there are either deep or shallow lines or marks in the paint. Some are long and rough, others are hardly perceptible. Some are either completely painted over and are discernable only as slight cavities beneath the dry paint; others again, are painted but then wiped over, leaving some pigments of paint in the hollow of the scratches. Initially, it seems like the scratching is employed to erase or distort, or at least to make the appearance of the work less defined. But looking more closely, we can see that the way the scratches appear in the work is hardly uniform. Occasionally, the lines seem to highlight or outline certain aspects of the work. Other times, they cross out and run counter to what is depicted. In both cases, maybe paradoxically, they nevertheless seem to disturb or diffuse our perception of the girl and the mother; the pillow, the walls, and the blanket; and most especially the face of the girl and the hair of both are all covered with these thin and thick lines or incisions. The thick blanket, however, shows only a few light, almost swishy cuts, except for close to the girl and the mother's hands. The clothes of the two figures, moreover, appear to be almost untouched by scarring, but the paint is nevertheless heavily craquelured. The areas with the least scraping,

however, is the bright wall above the mother's head, which consists of a mixture of reds, light yellows and patches of sky-blue. Likewise: the glass and table to the lower right, and the entire section of the painting to the left (the dresser, the flask and the leather-like textures in which the pillow disappears), are left almost untouched.

However, also in the repainted,⁴⁹¹ right-hand part of the painting, the surface is still scarred and scratched. The incisions on this repainted part are, nevertheless, quite different from the scrapings scattered across the surface elsewhere. The lines are far longer, and begin at the top with shorter, close-to horizontal strokes, which grow somewhat longer before abruptly stopping. They are crossed out with a dominance of a few vertically emphasized lines, as well as a multitude of thin lines gathered at one point that appears to mark the transition from the repainted part to the original parts. Notably, there is one, single white line, drawn from this tighter area which runs downwards, along the darker color-field, and loosely doubling the silhouette of the mother's left arm, then disappearing into what seems to be two dry cracks in the paint close to her elbow.

The thin lines contrast the bold and heavy strokes of paint that are put on the canvas during the repainting, but seems to clumsily repeat the pattern of these strokes, which, though vertically emphasized, forms a loose grid which works to hold together the area texturally without making it into a uniform field. The long, singular incision, however, contests this gathering movement, and makes the separateness of the repainted area and the rest of the painting more pronounced, while simultaneously establishing some sort of a unity between the silhouette of the mother's arm and the strokes suggesting a curtain. What occur in the incisions of the repainted area, in other words, are two different things: first, the lines seem to emphasize the very texture of the work's surface, highlighting the grid-like quality of the heavy brush strokes. On the other hand, the long, singular line almost echoes the outline of the mother's arm, which is thus emphasized by this line.

Indeed, the slightly tighter assembly of horizontal lines further above do not to bring out a textural quality, nor do they outline anything. They seem to attempt to cross out or to diffuse the border between the dark, repainted strokes, and the brighter wall. They obviously fail to create a soft transition from dark to pale, but to demand this is (I suggest, equally obvious) to fail to pay heed to what and how the work shows itself to be. Nevertheless, I am

⁴⁹¹Parts of the painting were repainted sometime in the 1890s. See for instance Øystein Ustvedt, "The Story of a Masterpiece," *ibid.*, 105-33, 125-126. And Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 56-57. Eggum, "The Theme of Death," 145. Aslaksby claims that the right hand side of the painting was initially paler compared to the repainted edition. Moreover, he claims that the painting was changed and re-painted in four phases between 1885 to as late as 1895-6. See, Aslaksby, "The Sick Child," 137-143.

drawn to ask: But where do these tight, hurried, horizontal lines and incisions *belong*? Do they depict the wall, or are they drawings as if superimposed upon the wall that is behind it? Or are they merely marks “on” the canvas?

Moreover, the mother’s head – which is bent down, and as such making most of her hair and the tight bun in her neck visible – is heavily scratched. To the top of the head, a series of horizontal and slightly angular scratches are applied, which reveal different layers of paint beneath, ranging from nuances of white and light red-brown, to darker and dirtier blue-grey or green-grey tones, occasionally reminiscent of the mother’s dress. These lines, however, seem to both emerge from the head and in this way lie on top of the hair, as it were; and to withdraw into a blunt and dull mixture of colors and textures. Along with all the craquelures in the paint, the scratched surface of the part of the canvas that shows the mother’s head seems almost, unsuccessfully, to dissolve and submerge the head of the mother in its own materiality. The bun in the mother’s neck is even more forcefully distorted and diffused by a multitude of very thin scratches that seems to have been applied in wet paint, mixing the light brown shades into the darker. Further along the neck, there are more angular, white strokes that cross over the skin-tones and the darker red-brown hair. Further to the left, there are some slightly longer but still thin vertical lines drawn from the pillow into the mother’s head. These vertical incisions continue further left, into the pillow towards the face of the girl.

Turning to the girl’s head, the scratches take different shapes. The rusty red hair of the girl is covered with horizontally inclined, thick and bloody scars, as it were, placed in an almost rhythmical successive pattern. A few of the lines reaches into the girl’s pale face, but the incisions takes on a different shape here. The lines become thinner but also tighter, still mostly horizontal, but a few, light vertical and angular lines is placed on the girl’s cheek and forehead. Close to her mouth, there is a tiny scratched area consisting of five or six small lines, almost shaping a circle between them. But one of the angular lines is more pronounced, almost touching the lips. Underneath the nose, there are a few lines that cross – and thus cross out – the almost non-existent boundary between the upper-lip and the pillow at the back.

Contrasting the scars of the hair and the face are those lines found around the head. The silhouette of the face, from the forehead to the end of the nose, is outlined by a few, soft lines imposed into the surface. The pillow and the face, which otherwise are almost impossible to distinguish, are separated through a common boundary, which somehow seems to neither belong to the pillow, nor to the face. This is contrary to the tip of the chin, which is marked by a painted soft, red line, continued in something that almost looks like a red shadow

on the pillow, before turning into a cold, steel grey-blue further down. The top of the girl's head, the red hair, is delimited from the warm, white tones of the pillow with a pronounced, thick and dark red scratch, which hovers as if above her head, but is connected through tiny vertical lines, as if spiked. Likewise, the chin and the shoulder to the girl's left are marked by an area of especially intense scratches and scrapes which together form an almost unified, textural shape. Here, the lines seem again to be something like a drawing, superimposed on top of the painted canvas; or rather, drawn unto or into the painting on the canvas. Are these lines the girl's shoulder? Do they outline or emphasize the shoulder? Or are they on top of the shoulder? On the other shoulder as well, the boundary between the tips of the hair and the dark and dirty-green-blue dress is blurred by heavy scratches, both horizontal and vertical, a few of them following the movement of the hair, others abruptly interrupting. Again, are the scratches placed on top of the hair, or do they depict the hair? What, or rather *where*, are they?

Emerging from the back of the girl's head there is again a different series of scratches or lines. The lines begin tightly knit together in the green-grey shadowy area close to the girl's neck, only to spring forth and divide into two separate streams of lines, the one following closely around the head, the other stretching up to the top of the pillow, hence connecting the neck and the outline of the pillow. Further left, a mixture of thick and thin horizontal incisions runs from the pillow and down, along the right arm of the girl. Similar to the single, long line along the arm of the mother, a few centimeters left of the girl the outline is echoed but now in what looks like a mixture of thin, transparent white paint, which seems to be painted on top of a heavily scratched area.

The thick lines and the thin incisions, the scrapes and scratches, are, in summary, distributed unevenly across the canvas' surface in different ways. What is striking, however, is that some lines seem to engage more explicitly in showing the girl and her mother by contributing to outline, for instance, the girl's face or the neck of the mother. Other again cross, and cross out, or cross over, and diffuse the color-fields depicting the two human beings and their surroundings. And some – such as the myriad lines of the pillow – are both outlining and crossing out, mixing the colors, and diffusing, distorting, and intensifying the surface texture, and making the painting covered with an incomprehensible array of forms, figures, lines, and shapes. It is clear, however, that despite my attempt at describing the scratches and scrapes on the canvas, it is simply impossible to grasp and describe all the thousands upon thousands of both thin and thick, deep and shallow lines and incisions of the painting. Nevertheless, the very attempt at doing so has opened for the question of what, exactly, these scratches are? Or rather, *where* they are? In order to further focus the question,

let us take a closer look at one, single line that is drawn into the surface of the work: the dark red line that is discernible at the top of the girl's head [image 22].

The Dark Red Line

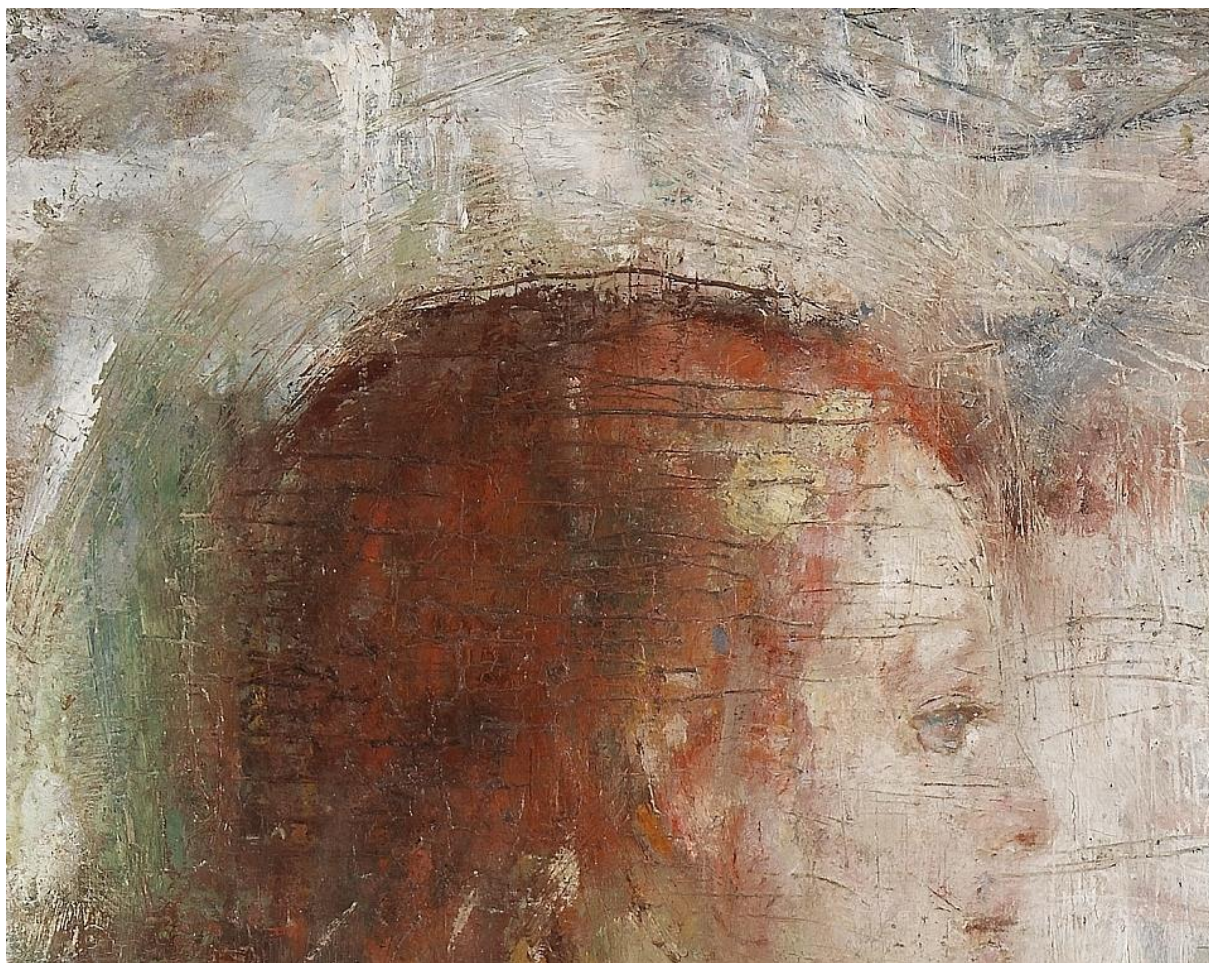
It is a heavy line, maybe imposed on the painting with the shaft of a brush, brushed with rusty paint and wiped out again, leaving pigments of red in the rift.⁴⁹² The rusty red color seems to belong to the hair, but the scratch merely connects to the rest of the head through thin, brief lines. Where exactly does this dark red line belong? Where is it? Merely *on* the surface? Or *in* the painting? Is it *inside* the pictorial space? Does it belong to what might be called the “formal” aspects of the painting? Or is it indicative of “content”? Is the head already there with the thick red scar added on top of it as a surface effect, a superfluous stroke that easily could have been omitted without further consequence? Or is the line *itself* the top of the head? Does it really outline anything? Or is it simply a single strand of hair? But if so, why is it not simply painted so as to look like a “real” strand of hair?

Indeed, the heavy line provokes the question: what *is* this line? How *is* it? What is its reality? Initially, as I wrote above, what the painting shows is easily recognizable: a dying girl placed as comfortably as possible within the walls of the home. Her mother, sitting at her side, is crushed by the weight of the imminent death that is about to strike the family. But where, within the world of the girl and the mother, does the heavy dark red line belong?

What is it that is asked about in this question? The belonging of the line to the work. But if that is the case, it is presupposed by the question that the line somehow is separate from the work, or at least that it is possible to conceive of the line in separation from it. But the line is obviously not separate from the work. Questioning the being of the heavy line, then, amounts to questioning the working of the work itself: What is really shown by the work? What is *truly* rendered visible?

Maybe what provoked the question – namely, the way the work seemed to be *distorted* or *diffused* by the scratches in or on the surface – arose due to the hastiness of the initial description of what the work shows. Indeed, the work opens up the world of the sick girl and her mother. But more fundamentally, what is let appear in the work? According to Heidegger, all beings emerge within the strife between world and earth, but only the work of art instigates the strife and brings the strife explicitly to the fore. A work sets up a world and sets forth the earth. As I wrote in chapter one, however, a world is not merely a

⁴⁹² "The Sick Child," 145.



22. Edvard Munch, *The Sick Child* (detail).

collection of beings; the world of the work is not reducible to the beings that are rendered visible by the work. World is that through which beings as a whole are intelligible; that is, the way in which beings as a whole essences. The world *worlds*, and is the “wherein” that focus, gathers, and structures what is meaningful and sensible for Dasein to do, make, say, and think as such. As Heidegger writes, it is “the ever non-objective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into being.”⁴⁹³ It is the openness of the clearing in which Dasein stands; an openness, always in strife with the concealedness of the earth. And as was discussed in the previous chapter, the clearing in which Dasein stands belongs to the history of being; the world of Dasein belongs to the world of the world-historical epochs; and also the world of the *work* belongs to the world of the world-historical epochs.⁴⁹⁴

But a world does not “exist” in itself, apart from beings. It always takes place through beings; or rather, it provides the place for beings’ essential emergence. In the Van Gogh example of “The Origin,” Heidegger claims that the painting opens the world and earth of a peasant woman – who is nowhere to be seen in the work itself. Hence, what he describes is not the representation of a particular peasant woman, or a particular pair of shoes in the painting, but the *way* in which the shoes arise as meaningful within the world and earth of a peasant woman – i.e. as equipment. The shoes are beings that are intelligible within the crossing through of a peasant woman’s world and earth. This is why Heidegger claims that Van Gogh’s work is not the reproduction of a particular pair of shoes “that happens to be present at any given time,” on the contrary; it is a reproduction [Wiedergabe], a giving-again, or a “passing on,” of the shoes’ “general essence.”⁴⁹⁵ This essence, then, is not a property of the “objective” shoes, but designates the way the shoes essence as equipment, how they *are*. To recall, Heidegger’s use of the term essence [Wesen] (or essencing, as I will occasionally write) does not designate the metaphysical *essentia* of something. What something essentially is, is *how* it is, how it “holds sway” and is meaningful or intelligible for the Dasein of an epoch. And as discussed previously, the essencing of any being is granted by the essencing of being, i.e. the history of being.

With this in mind, I ask again: what does the work let appear? What does it *essentially* disclose? It is difficult to answer the question, however, because that which is shown by the

⁴⁹³ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 43. [Welt ist das immer Ungegenständliche, dem wir unterstehen, solange die Bahnen von Geburt und Tod, Segen und Fluch uns in das Sein entrückt halten] (GA 5, 30-31).

⁴⁹⁴ As Heidegger writes in *Mindfulness*, the non-symbolic, non-metaphysical work of art “has the character of *Da-sein*.” It clears an openness of being and in this way, as providing a clearing, “is *there*.” See *Mindfulness*, 27. [Die Kunst hat jetzt *Da-seins*charakter] (GA 66, 37).

⁴⁹⁵ “The Origin,” 36. [allgemeinen Wesens] (GA 5, 22).

work is not visible; it is not itself a being. Despite being withdrawn and refusing to reveal itself, however, it makes itself known in the work. The work opens the world of the sick girl and her mother, while it sets forth the earth. Through its work-material beings are shown, and through this showing the work-material is let appear. However, what focuses, structures, and saturates the world of the girl and the mother – indeed, what characterizes the “wherein” that is offered by the work and is thus brought to appear – is death. Thus, the painting does not merely depict a girl and her mother who “happens to be present,” it first and foremost opens up a world of death. This world of death is the “non-objective” horizon to which the girl and the mother are subjected. This shift of emphasis, from the beings that are portrayed to that which is essencing through the work’s world and earth, is a step that is necessary for understanding how the history of being relates to *The Sick Child*, but also, I will argue, to understand the significance of the scratches, incisions, and lines in the work.

Indeed, the claim that the work is a distortion of what is depicted is a normative claim concerning the work’s bringing-forth. For is it so that the beings of the world that is opened by the work would be clearer and easier to perceive if the earth was less intently set forth? Or is the opposite the case, that the work’s world is worlding as it is just because of the force of its opponent? In other words, what is significant by *The Sick Child*’s showing of death is not that it represents a sick girl and her mother, but the specific way a limit of intelligibility – the strife between world and earth – is allowed to essence in the work. Indeed, the *showing* of *The Sick Child* – its idiomatic mode of bringing-forth – is what is peculiar about it. That is, its poietics. However, the work’s bringing-forth occurs in *what* the work is bringing forth, i.e. through that which is shown by the work, namely death.

The Question of Death

What and how is death, so that it can be said to be disclosed in the work? From the modern age, death has growingly been understood to be a biological process. As such, the exact determination of the event of death has been a matter of dispute. It has been defined variously as the cessation of breathing, of the heartbeat, or of brain activity.⁴⁹⁶ In any case, it is primarily a biological fact. This biological fact, then, is what occasions the social and cultural event of *dying* – defined by Allan Kellehear as “a self-conscious anticipation of impending death and the social alterations in one’s lifestyle prompted by ourselves and others that are

⁴⁹⁶ See for instance Kellehear, “Dying as a Social Relationship: A Sociological Review of Debates on the Determination of Death,”

based upon that awareness.”⁴⁹⁷ In light of this definition, a social history of art, for instance, could approach *The Sick Child* as a representation of *dying* in Norway in the 1880s. And more particularly, as a representation of the social impact of tuberculosis, which was one of the most usual reasons of death from the 1870s until the turn of the century, especially among children.⁴⁹⁸ In Munch’s Kristiania, few, if any, families were spared of either direct or indirect contact with the disease. Furthermore, a historical-biographical approach could approach the painting in light of Munch’s own acquaintance with the disease; a disease which in periods was suffered by the artist himself, and which claimed the life of his mother (1868) and sister (1877).⁴⁹⁹

From within the art history of being, however, what is to be questioned is not the social or biographical phenomenon of dying, but the essencing of death. That is, the way in which death is rendered intelligible, meaningful, or “real;” or rather, the way in which death “is” or holds sway. More accurately, what is to be questioned is the work as a pictorial thinking of death; how the essencing of death is brought to appear in the work, and in this way shown to us for our thoughtful consideration. As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, and as I will discuss and clarify in more depth in the next chapter, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes death not as a biological but as an essentially *existential* phenomenon; it belongs to the essential constitution of Dasein as an existential structure he names *being-towards-death*. Death, in this essential sense, is thus not a biological process or event, but what Heidegger calls Dasein’s ownmost possibility of the impossibility of its being-in-the-world. Leaving the details of Heidegger’s account for the next chapter, the point I would like to emphasize now is that the *way* in which death is disclosed for Dasein, is – as everything that is in being – determined by the history of being. Notably, in his discussion of the essencing of equipment in Van Gogh’s *Shoes*, Heidegger disregarded “the possibility, however, that differences relating to the history of being may yet also be present in the way equipment *is*.”⁵⁰⁰ In order to understand how death is essencing in *The Sick Child*, however, I contend that it is crucial to take into account exactly that differences relating to the history of being are present in the way death “is.”

⁴⁹⁷ *A Social History of Dying*, 2.

⁴⁹⁸ Anne Gro Pedersen, “Dødelighetsmønstret i endring: Fra infeksjoner til livsstil,” in *Historisk helsestatistikk: Dødsårsaker 1850-2004*, 30-51 (Oslo: Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2004), 32.

⁴⁹⁹ An approach Munch encouraged himself (at least from the 1930s), and which has been the dominant way to approach the painting to this day. Ustvedt, “The Story of a Masterpiece,” 126-128. See also, for instance, Eggum, “The Theme of Death,” 146; Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 35.

⁵⁰⁰ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 32. [Wir sehen jedoch von der Möglichkeit ab, daß auch noch in der Weise, wie das Zeug ist, wesensgeschichtliche Unterschiede walten] (GA 5, 17).

Summary and Transition

In this section, I first suggested that what is rendered visible by Edvard Munch's painting *The Sick Child* is easily recognizable: a deadly sick girl and her mother. The painterly execution of the work, however, seems to distort or diffuse the visible appearance of the two human beings. Taking this diffusion as a clue, I proceeded to describe the way in which the different scratches, lines, and incisions works to outline or cross-out the visual rendering of the beings in the work. Through this description arose the question of what the lines and incisions "are" and where they "belong." The question revealed the insufficiency of the initial description of the work and led to a reconsideration of what the work shows. Finally, I suggested that what is essentially brought to appear by the work is not primarily the sick girl and her mother, but a world of death. Although it is not rendered visible as *a* being, death is disclosed through the work.

But what does it mean that the work discloses death? I contend that an important point in Heidegger's unthought history of art is that it allows for the perspective of art's contribution to the history of being. And insofar as all phenomena are determined by the history of being, the essential disclosure of the work – the truth that happens in the work – must also be understood in light of the history of being. Thus, in order to see and understand the pictorial thinking of death that goes on in *The Sick Child*, I will now turn to the history of pictorial thinking of death to which the work belongs.

Section Two | From the History of *The Sick Child*

In the previous section, I argued that *The Sick Child* can be understood as opening a world of death. Yet, it also sets forth the earth through the thick, encrusted, and scratched work-material of the work, which strives to retain the world within its material opaqueness. The appearance of the work *is* this particular intersection between the openness of world and the closedness of earth. It is a concrete being, in which a tracing of the strife between world and earth is set in place. In this way, the work *means* – it is intelligible. The historically contingent *way* the work means – its style in the essential sense – I have named the work’s poietics.

So far, I have suggested that *The Sick Child* sets up the “there” of the sick girl and her mother, a “there” that is saturated by the presence of the girl’s approaching and inevitable death. Death is present as the withdrawn horizon that enables or provides the meaningfulness (or rather, meaninglessness) of the world of the sick girl and her mother. But in what way is death disclosed by the work? What “is” the withdrawn horizon that is made present in the world of the sick girl and the mother? What understanding of death is let appear by the work?

In my view, the consequence of the Heideggerian understanding of the work of art is that the question concerning the work’s essential disclosure of death is simultaneously a question concerning the work’s poietics. What the work shows is contingent upon the way in which the work is intelligible, and thus, upon the limits of pictorial intelligibility that the work establishes. Furthermore, as I will discuss in the next chapter, Heidegger’s thinking on death as an existential phenomenon implies that the essencing of death is determined by the epochal transformations of the truth of being. Our implicit sense of what it means for everything to be relates essentially to our understanding of what death is and what happens after. Likewise, the poietics of the work is determined by the same epochal transformations of the truth of being; how the work *means* relates essentially to an understanding of beings as a whole. In the third section, I will suggest that *The Sick Child* can be understood as a contribution to the reconfiguring of the modern understanding of being. Its way of doing this is by taking a stand against, and challenging a specific mode of pictorial intelligibility, in order to disclose the reality of death. Therefore, *The Sick Child*’s pictorial thinking of death must be seen not only in relation both to the poietics of the work and its *corresponding*

truth of being, but also in relation to its belonging to and emerging from a history of pictorial thinking of death.

In order to intimate an understanding of *The Sick Child's* pictorial thinking of death – to see and grasp its contribution to the historically changing understanding of death, which will lead to its contribution to the history of being – I will think along the history of the work. The history of *The Sick Child*, however, is not the history *about* the artwork, but the history to which *The Sick Child* belongs. It is also the history that belongs to and resounds through the work. In the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that we can see *The Sick Child* as belonging to a mode of the pictorial thinking of death which concerns what I called the theme of death and the pillow. Thus, in order to provide an outline of the essential transformations in the pictorial thinking of death – in relation to the essential transformations in poietics and its *corresponding* truth of being – I will focus my discussion on three works of art, all of which concerns the theme of death and the pillow.

First, an ancient Greek pinax (funerary plaque), which brings us in touch with a pre-Socratic understanding death and truth of being. Second, an engraving from a 15th century *Ars Moriendi*, a “handbook” of dying which shows a late-medieval understanding of death and truth of beings as a whole. Finally, a work by Munch’s contemporary, Christian Krohg’s *Sick Girl* – in which a modern understanding of death and the truth of beings as a whole is brought to appear. The three works are chosen because I think they exemplify, in a clear manner, the way in which the distinct differences in the epochal transformations of the essence of death, as well as the poietics and metaphysics of art, are brought to appear by the work of art itself. In turn, the three works are used as lenses for a brief, but broader discussion of the ancient Greek, medieval, and modern understanding of death. In repetition, the aim of this section is not to present a comprehensive account of the changing meanings of death throughout Western history, but to highlight three examples, which together will give a sense of the world-historical significance of the issue that is at stake in *The Sick Child*.

Prothesis and Proskephalaia

A black-figure terracotta funerary plaque from ca. 520-510 B.C. [image 23] shows a man lying on a bier – his head resting on pillows [προσκεφάλαια; proskephalaia] – surrounded by four women who violently tear their hair in grief. One of the women caresses the head of the

dead man. To the left, there are two men who raise their arms in farewell;⁵⁰¹ to the right, a tiny girl is sitting.⁵⁰² The pinax [πίναξ], which once was placed in the darkness of a burial chamber, renders visible the ancient Greek funerary rite prothesis [πρόθεσις]. The prothesis was the first of the three main parts of the traditional Greek funerary rite: the viewing of the body of the deceased.⁵⁰³ It was followed by the funeral procession [ἐκφορά; ekphora], and finally, the cremation or inhumation of the body.⁵⁰⁴

Depictions of the *prothesis* are the most usual renderings of death in what historiologically is called the Archaic period of art history.⁵⁰⁵ It was, however, also familiar to the Classical period, until the end of the 5th century, “after which,” John H. Oakley claims, “the scene virtually disappeared from Greek art.”⁵⁰⁶ Its emergence is traced as early as the 8th century B.C. – in the Geometric period.⁵⁰⁷ For instance, a terracotta krater – itself a burial marker, measuring over a meter in height – from ca. 750-735 B.C., shows the prothesis of a man; again, with the head resting against a pillow [image 24]. Like the Archaic plaque, the krater shows a chariot race beneath the prothesis, which usually is seen as a reference to the funeral games Achilles held in honor of Patroklos in the *Iliad*.⁵⁰⁸ Interestingly, in his discussion of this krater, John Boardman argues that through the way in which the artist has rendered visible the prothesis, “the painter is not attempting a composition in which spatial relationships are meant to represent reality.”⁵⁰⁹ If measured against the modern understanding of the reality of the real, and the metaphysical interpretation of the work of art as representation, this might be “correct.” Yet, in line with Heidegger’s thinking, we could say

⁵⁰¹ See John H. Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens: The Evidence of the White Lekythoi* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 76-77.

⁵⁰² H. A. Shapiro, "The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art," in *American Journal of Archeology*, 629-56 (Archeological Institute of America, 1991), 639.

⁵⁰³ For a general description of the Greek funerary ritual, see Jon D. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 134-6. See also, Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens*, 11-13. And Donna C. Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971). For a thorough discussion of the shifting attitudes towards death in ancient Greece, see Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, *Reading Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). For a discussion of the Archaic grave monument, see *ibid.*, 140-302.

⁵⁰⁴ In addition to the prothesis, the ekphora was also a usual theme in Geometric art, but became “virtually never represented” after the 6th century. See Shapiro, "The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art," 630-631.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 655.

⁵⁰⁶ Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens*, 86.

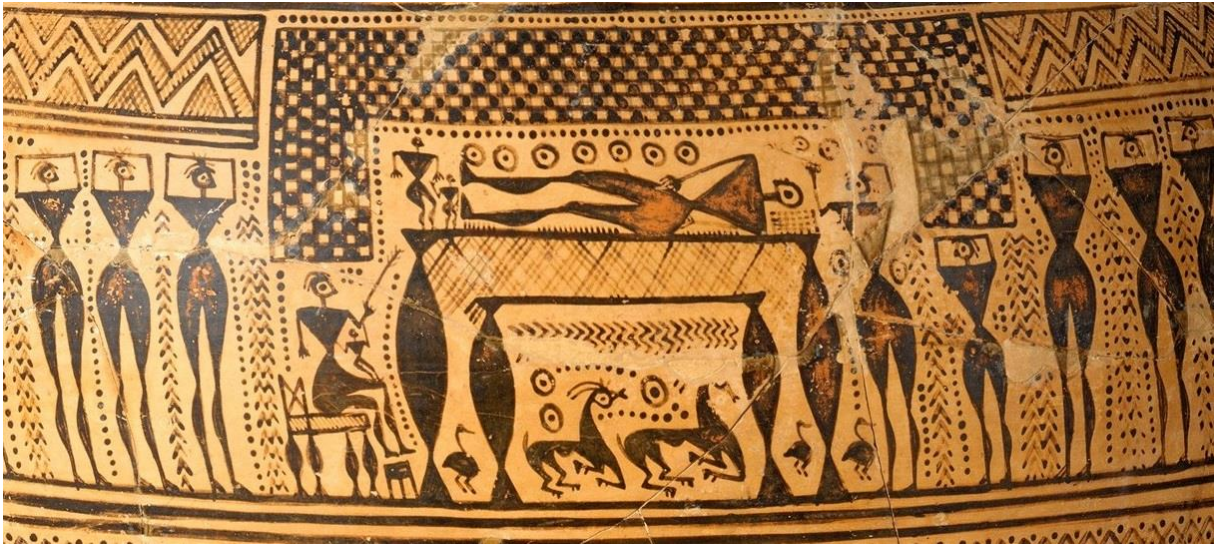
⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 76. For a collection of renderings of *prothesis* and *ekphora* in Geometric art, see Gudrun Ahlberg, *Prothesis and Ekphora in Greek Geometric Art*, vol. XXXII, *Studies in Mediterranean Archeology* (Göteborg: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1971). For a general and broader introduction of early Greek vase painting, see John Boardman, *Early Greek Vase Painting: 11th-6th Centuries BC* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998). For an introduction to Archaic and Classical vase painting in general, see *Athenian Red Figure Vases: The Archaic Period - A Handbook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), and *Athenian Black Figure Vases: A Handbook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974).

⁵⁰⁸ Shapiro, "The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art," 642.

⁵⁰⁹ Boardman, *Early Greek Vase Painting: 11th-6th Centuries BC*, 27.



23. Unknown artist, funerary plaque (Pinax), *Prothesis*, ca. 520-510 B.C.
Terracotta, 26 x 36.2 x 0.9 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



24. Attributed to Hirschfeld Workshop, krater, *Prothesis*, ca. 750-735 B.C.
Terracotta, H: 108.3 D: 72.4 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

that it does not reach the truth of the work. But what truth, then, is setting itself into the work? What understanding of the being of beings does the work bring forth?

Both the Geometric krater and the Archaic funerary plaque attest to an understanding of the being of beings that is essentially different from the modern understanding of the reality of the real against which Boardman measures the “representation” of the krater. In line with Heidegger’s argumentation, I suggest that we must attempt to approach and recollect these works from the understanding of being that is offered by the works themselves, despite the fact that the world that they once contributed in holding open is long gone. In this sense, the Geometric krater cannot be understood as representing “abstractions” of “real” human figures. And the Archaic plaque does not offer a comparably more “realistic” rendering of the real than the krater, as it might initially seem from our late-modern point of view. Rather, it is necessary to recognize that what takes place through the krater is an originary *showing/saying* – and in this way, a founding – of the being of beings as experienced in the pre-Socratic epoch; a showing which is subsequently transformed in the funerary plaque. A full examination of the historical change of the essencing of the work of art in the pre-Socratic epoch, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis. For now, let it suffice to say that the implication of Heidegger’s interpretation of the pre-Socratic epoch is that both works of art must be seen in relation to the epoch’s fundamental understanding of being as *physis* and *aletheia*. In turning more attentively to the terracotta funerary plaque, and in order to question how it lets death essence, I suggest we must therefore pay attention to the poietics of the work, its mode of bringing-forth.

The work is executed in what is today called the black figure technique. It is a “painterly” technique which is distinct from painting, if the latter is understood as pigments mixed with a binder (or any other colored substance) applied on a supporting surface. The black figures, in contrast, are themselves made out of the same work-material as the “support,” namely clay. They emerge due to the application of a finer slip (a more liquefied clay), which reacts different to the oxidation process during the different stages of the firing than the coarser clay.⁵¹⁰ The white fields on the plaque emerge from white primary clay. Thus, the very emergence of depiction arises not as a result of the “symbolic” act of painting, i.e. of a bringing-together [sumballein] of paint and support. Rather, it emerges from a modification or

⁵¹⁰ See, for instance, *ibid.*, 11-12. Note that the red figure technique is identical, although inversed.

aiding of the self-emergence of *physis*.⁵¹¹ This aiding denotes the poetic creation of the work, based in the knowing [techne] of the artist [technites], which Heidegger calls a seeing in the widest sense, a “foresight,” into that which is.⁵¹² Through this knowing, the artist can make “visible what is otherwise invisible.”⁵¹³ This, however, I will argue is essentially different from the Symbolist and Expressionist aim to “objectify the subjective”⁵¹⁴ and to “make the invisible visible through reality.”⁵¹⁵ The making-visible of the *technites* indicates the essential belonging of the poetic creation to the essence of language as showing/saying, as discussed in the first chapter. The ‘invisible’ that the artist can render visible is not an invisible *being* – it is not some entity that “is” invisible and which the artist can subsequently represent, express, or symbolize. It denotes the emergence of beings in the open of visibility, from out of the invisible, self-enclosed concealedness. The artwork opens a world in which the *prothesis* is essentially disclosed from out of the self-rising earth (*physis*), which itself is set-forth in the work and is allowed to show itself in the dry hardness of the terracotta, with its shiny blackness, matt redness, and delicate whiteness. In other words, the work instigates the strife between world and earth: truth as truth (*aletheia*) is set-into-work. The figures are what they are in their emergence from the self-concealed earth. In modern terms, we might say that they arise against a background, but the red field is not the “background” of the figures. The red terracotta is the concealedness out of which the figures are disclosed. The women and the men are not “representations” of some “external reality” beyond the depiction; rather, the work *is* merely the bringing-forth and bringing into view of what is essencing in the work. It is the sheer happening of the appearance of meaning, of intelligibility, out of the silent hardness of the terracotta. Seen in this way, I suggest we can understand the work as a response to the address of being (as Heidegger claims it is experienced by the pre-Socratics), and that it is a pictorial thinking of the very event of truth as *aletheia*, un-concealment. That is, the essential emergence of beings as grounded in the truth of being as such, i.e. *aletheia*.

⁵¹¹ Note the similarity to both the carving of stone sculptures and the shaping of terracotta vases. Painting was also practiced during the Archaic period, but almost no examples are preserved except for the *Pitsa panels* from about 540-530 B.C. now in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

⁵¹² Heidegger, "The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought," 120. [Vorblick] ("Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens," 137).

⁵¹³ "The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought," 120. Note that in the essay, Heidegger claims that the knowing foresight of *techne* belongs to, and thus is granted by, the grace of Athena in the sign of the owl, which “can also see at night, making visible what is otherwise invisible.” [Darum gehört zu ihr als das Zeichen ihres Wesens die Eule, ἡ γλαύξ, deren Auge ist nicht nur feurig-glühend, es blickt auch durch die Nacht hindurch und macht das sonst Unsichtbare sichtbar] "Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens," 137).

⁵¹⁴ Gustave Kahn, "Response of the Symbolists (1886)," in *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, 1016-17 (Malden: Blackwell, 1998; reprint, 2013), 1017.

⁵¹⁵ Max Beckmann, "On My Painting (1938)," in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. H.B. Chipp, 187-92 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 188.

After this brief consideration of the poetics of the Archaic funerary plaque, we can turn yet again to that which is brought to essence by the work. What does the work show concerning the essence of death? How and in what way does the work think the essencing of death in the pre-Socratic epoch?

The historiological fact that the visual rendering of death in the Archaic period – indeed Archaic vase paintings *as such*, Shapiro claims – “devotes itself almost exclusively to the *prothesis*”⁵¹⁶ might indicate that the funerary plaque touches upon the most significant aspect of the way in which death essences to the ancient Greeks. Above, I wrote that the *prothesis* names the funerary rite of the *viewing* of the body. Literarily, however, the word ‘*prothesis*’ means ‘setting-forth,’ and consequently, a more accurate interpretation would be that it names the *showing* of the body of the deceased. However, this is still an interpretation that keeps too close to beings and overlooks what is essential. Setting, in the sense of “thesis,” Heidegger writes, means “to let lie forth in its radiance and presence.”⁵¹⁷ *Pro*-thesis, then, seems to indicate the need of intensifying this letting, insofar as what is to be let appear in its radiance and presence is what most of all refuses to appear in the unconcealed, namely, death. The work, then, is not a representational copy of an already, “actually” performed funerary rite, but a way of letting appear that which essentially “is” withdrawing concealing – death. The man, who lies on the bier with his head placed upon the pillows, is not a representation of a corpse, but the showing of the presencing of the withdrawing of one who is fading away.⁵¹⁸ Through the work, this presencing-withdrawing is addressed and let appear as it is. The pinax lets the human being’s withdrawing into the closedness of *physis* stand in the open of *aletheia*. The withdrawing is the occasion for both the violent lamentation of the women, and the men’s more solemn farewell gesture. In either case, however, what the work shows is not the psychological feeling, or “inner state” of the women and men understood as subjects. Rather, it shows the fundamentally shared recognition and acceptance of the presencing of death; that is, of the presencing of the withdrawing concealment, as it is allowed to be set forth by the *prothesis*.

“For the Greeks,” Heidegger writes, “death is not a “biological” process, any more than birth is. Birth and death take their essence from the realm of disclosiveness and

⁵¹⁶ Shapiro, “The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art,” 655.

⁵¹⁷ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 82. [Vorliegenlassen in seinem Scheinen und Anwesen] (*GA* 5, 71).

⁵¹⁸ A fading which is furthered in the funeral procession [ekphora, carrying out], and completed in the interration or inhumation; itself shown, however, by a funerary marker.

concealment,⁵¹⁹ that is, from the realm of truth as *aletheia*. According to Heidegger, the common conception of the ancient Greek’s “religious beliefs” concerning death is erroneous.⁵²⁰ The view that the Greeks believed their “souls” [σκιά, *skia*; shadow. Or ψυχή, *psyche*] were to be transported, literally, into the underworld [Ἅιδης, *Háidēs*; Hades] after death, as in the myths told in the Homeric poems, Heidegger claims must be understood as a result of the subsequent Christian interpretation of Greek thinking.⁵²¹ From the metaphysical point of view, which does not begin the questioning from out of “the Greek experience of being,”⁵²² Heidegger claims it is impossible to understand the Greek understanding of death. As he states in the form of a question, “Is not the shadowy character of being in Hades connected with the essence of the Greek experience of beings and their unconcealedness?”⁵²³ This is to say, that the Greek understanding of death essentially relates to the understanding of truth as unconcealedness.

However, not only the pre-Socratics are subject to the later Christian interpretation. In order to intimate the Greek understanding of death – which itself emerges as an elucidation of the very notion of truth as *aletheia*, unconcealedness, in a lecture from 1942-3 on Parmenides – Heidegger addresses a myth presented at the end of Plato’s *Republic*, book X. Although Heidegger repeatedly claims that Plato was the first metaphysical thinker, he also claims that Plato’s thinking has generally been interpreted in light of Christian faith and modern metaphysics, instead of from the “essential ground for the Greeks,” which here “radiates its light for the last time.”⁵²⁴ Understood in this way, Heidegger argues that the myth (of Er, who returned from the dead in order to give an account of what awaits), essentially *says* – poetically thinks – death as the withdrawing concealing of *lethe*.⁵²⁵ The myth recognizes that concealment (*lethe*) belongs to truth as unconcealment (*a-letheia*). Unconcealment arises from concealment, and “is” only in its relation to concealment. Again, we can think of the stretch of

⁵¹⁹ Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 60. [Der Tod ist den Griechen nicht, so wenig wie die Geburt, ein “biologischer” Vorgang. Geburt und Tod empfangen ihr Wesen aus dem Bereich der Entbergung und Verbergung] *GA 54*, 88.

⁵²⁰ Notably, this is also the conclusion of more recent historiological study: “The conception of the underlife that arises from [Homer and Virgil’s] accounts is quite naturally taken by many to be what the Greeks themselves believed awaited them after death, but in fact it appears to be largely a poetic fantasy.” Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 178. From Heidegger’s point of view, however, these poems are still far from *mere* “poetic fantasy.”

⁵²¹ Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 93-4. (*GA 54*, 138-140).

⁵²² *Parmenides*, 97. [Griechen erfahrenen Seins] (*GA 54*, 144).

⁵²³ *Parmenides*, 97. [Hängt das Schattenhafte des Seins im Hades mit dem Wesen des griechisch erfahrenen Seienden und seiner Unverborgenheit zusammen?] (*GA 54*, 144).

⁵²⁴ *Parmenides*, 125. [den griechischen Wesensgrund, der im Denken Platons und im Denken des Aristoteles noch einmal sein letztes Licht verstrahlt] (*GA 54*, 185). Note that Heidegger also mentions Aristoteles in this respect.

⁵²⁵ Heidegger’s interpretation of the myth includes a broader interpretation of for instance the Greek gods, the “uncanny,” and Plato’s metaphysics. A comprehensive discussion of it falls beyond the scope of this thesis. See *Parmenides*, 91-130. (*GA 54*, 135-193). For the Myth of Er, see Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968; repr., 1991), 297-303.

the bow, mentioned in the two previous chapters in relation to Heidegger's drawing of Dasein [image 6]. Indeed, Heidegger quotes Heraclitus' Fragment 48 "The proper name for bow is βίος [bios]...what it produces, however, is "death.""⁵²⁶ In ancient Greek, bow [bíos] and life [biós] are homophonic [bios], Heidegger argues, and hence, life means the "fateful life-course" like "the flight and course of the arrow...which thus lets arise, [but] may also bring down."⁵²⁷ As I see it, Heidegger's point is to emphasize that the Greek understanding of death in its essence is non-metaphysical, and that life and death belong together and *are* only through the essencing of the truth of being; the being of truth; i.e. aletheia. Thus, Heidegger claims concerning the Greek word bios: "the word is in itself ambiguous and expresses in such ambiguity precisely the essence of death-bringing life."⁵²⁸

This, however, we saw already in the Archaic funerary plaque: The prothesis of the work is not first and foremost the viewing or showing of a corpse, nor is it a representation of a "cultural" or "religious" ritual. The prothesis is the instigation of a happening of truth where death is allowed to essence – to "appear" – exactly as the presencing of a withdrawal, i.e. of the fading away of the Dasein of the man whose head is resting on the pillows. He *is* no longer together with those who surround him. Already, the plaque shows, he is leaving his being *here* (*Da-sein*) in the clearing of the unconcealed (aletheia), to the *there* [έχει; exeí], in the withdrawn concealment of oblivion (lethe).⁵²⁹ On this basis, it might be understandable that Archaic painting in general is heavily devoted to bringing the prothesis to appear: it shows the shared recognition and acceptance, sorrowful and dreadful, of the essential belonging of death to life, as the belonging of the concealed to the unconcealed.

It is worth a brief mention that the prothesis is still depicted in late 5th century white-ground *lekythoi*.⁵³⁰ These painted polychrome vases, however, increasingly transform the more traditional renderings of the prothesis, making the scene more intimate. The figures are rendered with softer lines and richer coloration in a combination of outline-drawing and dense color-fields [image 25], all of which attests to slight changes in the limits of pictorial

⁵²⁶ Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 108. [„Dem Bogen nun eignet der Name βίος“ – der Bogen heißt und "ist" im griechischen Dasein (das) "Leben" (nicht "biologisch", sondern als geschickhafte Lebensbahn); was er aber her- und beistellt, ist der "Tod."] (GA 54, 160).

⁵²⁷ *Parmenides*, 108. [Vom Bogen geht aus und auf der Flug und die Bahn des Pfeiles. Der „Bogen“, der aufgehen läßt, läßt aber zugleich untergehen] (GA 54, 160).

⁵²⁸ *Parmenides*, 108. [Das Wort βίος ist in sich zweideutig und nennt in solcher Zweideutigkeit gerade das Wesen des den Tod bringenden Lebens] (GA 54, 160-161).

⁵²⁹ On the "here" and "there," see *Parmenides*, 94-99. (GA 54, 140-147).

⁵³⁰ See Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens*, 76-87.



25. Sabouroff Painter, lekythos, *Prothesis*, ca. 450 B.C.
Terracotta, 31.8 x 9.5 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



26. Sabouroff Painter, lekythos, *Charon and Hermes*, ca. 450 B.C.
Terracotta, white-ground, 31.6 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



27. Unknown artist, Tomb Paestum del Samnite, *Prothesis*, ca. 340-320 B.C.
Painted slab, unknown dimensions. Museo archeologico nazionale, Paestum.

28. Unknown artist, Tomb Paestum del Samnite, *Charon and journey to the underworld*, ca. 340-320 B.C.
Painted slab, unknown dimensions.
Museo archeologico nazionale, Paestum.



intelligibility. The almost total disappearance of the prothesis in Greek art in the 4th century,⁵³¹ however, speaks of the broader changes in the understanding of the being of beings articulated in Plato's thinking. Indeed, we can see a late example of the prothesis from the Classical age, as it is depicted in a painted burial chamber at Paestum, from around 340-320 B.C. [image 27]. Despite its initial similarity to the Archaic prothesis, this painting speaks from a transformed understanding of being.⁵³² The painting renders visible a woman who lies on a bier, with her head supported by pillows. Two women stand at each side of the bier, performing the traditional gestures of lamentation – although without a trace of the violence of the Archaic plaque. The prothesis-painting is accompanied by several other painted fields, one of which, most significantly, depicts the same woman now entering the boat of Charon, the ferryman who brought the dead across the waters of the underworld [image 28].⁵³³ Notably, Charon – who was not a theme for Greek vase painting before the late 5th century⁵³⁴ – is here put in explicit conjunction with the prothesis. In line with Heidegger's interpretation of the myth of Er, however, I suggest that this should not be seen in the Christianized way as a rendering the "factual" travel of the individual person's soul into a realm beyond this world. Although, what it does attest to is a founding of a transformation in the understanding of death by now rendering visible that which in the Archaic was left concealed. As such, it is a broadening and extension of world at the expense of the earth, and subjects that which for the pre-Socratics "is" withdrawn concealment (i.e. death) to being rendered visible and placed within the open – in an entirely different manner than was the case in the Archaic funerary plaque.

In conclusion, the leap from *The Sick Child* to the *prothesis* of the ancient Greeks, I must emphasize, is not meant as a claim that the iconography of these works are the same, nor that a direct line can be traced chronologically up until the mid-1880s, and even less that Munch somehow was inspired by Greek art. What is at stake is the attempt to see the history of Western art's pictorial thinking of the essencing of death, and my claim that *The Sick Child* thinks out from and belongs to this history of thought; and finally, that in order to understand the pictorial thinking of death in *The Sick Child*, we must recollect in the art history of being in order to see and appreciate its contribution to this history. Hence, I have suggested that

⁵³¹ Ibid., 86.

⁵³² Note, however, that the burial chamber was not painted by Greeks, but by the Lucanians, who conquered Paestum around 400 B.C.

⁵³³ On Charon, see Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death*, 303-361.

⁵³⁴ Oakley, *Picturing Death in Classical Athens*, 116. Note the remarkable difference between the Paestum painting of Charon and the Greek vase paintings; see for instance the lekythos of Charon and Hermes attributed to the Sabouroff Painter (ca. 450 B.C.) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York [image 26].

what the prothesis-works of the ancient Greeks render visible – and indeed is a thinking of – is not first and foremost beings performing an ancient ritual, but an understanding of death which essences out of a basic experience of being which is completely different than our late-modern. Death is allowed to essence through the work of art’s poietics, its mode of bringing-forth, characterized by the emergence of the figures from out of the clay, the sheer contrasts between the black, red, and white which provides the openness in which the blackness, redness, and whiteness is let appear as the bearer of death’s essencing.

Although the prothesis disappeared from Greek art, depictions of what today is called lying in state and lying in repose (“official” and “private” public viewing, respectively) is a recurring theme in many later works of art. But it seems clear that the rituals themselves, as well as the pictorial renderings and representation of these, have their own history and are essentially different from the Greek prothesis. Leaving this trail aside, the line of thought that this dissertation attempts to follow is not the pictorial history of public viewing as such, but the mode of death’s pictorial essencing as it is bestowed by *The Sick Child*.

Hence, I will in the following bring attention to a work which historiologically is much later, but historically is near to both the ancient Greek prothesis and Munch’s *The Sick Child*, namely a work in which death is let essence in in the Christian art of the medieval epoch.

Deathbed, Judgment, and the *Ars Moriendi*

In a small, colorless engraving from 1450, measuring 87 x 65 mm, we can see a dying man, placed in his bed, supported by a large pillow [image 29]. He is surrounded by dancing and grimacing demons who attempt to flatter the dying man with crowns of glory, tempting him – in the face of imminent death – to commit the cardinal sin of vainglory. Behind the demons stands God the Father, along with three praying children,⁵³⁵ Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. Behind them, we can see a few saints, indicated by their halos. The work is one of eleven engravings made by the Master E.S. to a 15th century *Ars Moriendi*.⁵³⁶ For reasons of clarity, however, I choose to focus mainly on just one single print, the *Temptation Through Vainglory*, which in my view illuminates the medieval essencing of death in a lucid way.

⁵³⁵ Interpreted by Lionel Cust as a sign of “simplicity.” See Lionel Cust, *The Master E.S. and the 'Ars Moriendi': A Chapter in the History of Engraving During the XVth Century With Facsimile Reproductions of Engravings in the University Galleries at Oxford and in the British Museum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 17-18.

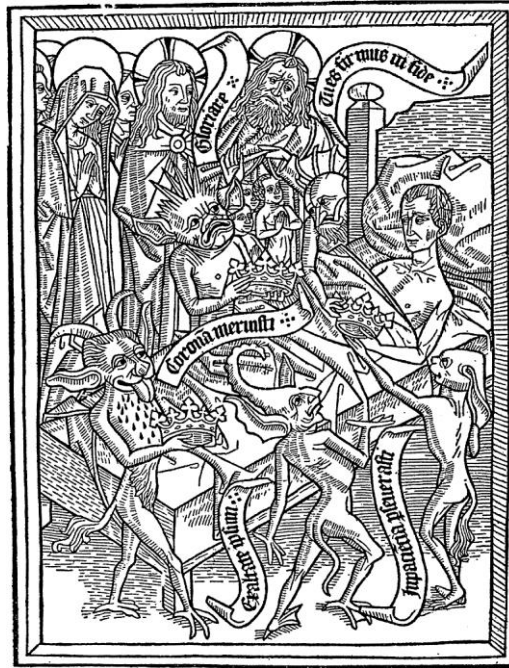
⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.



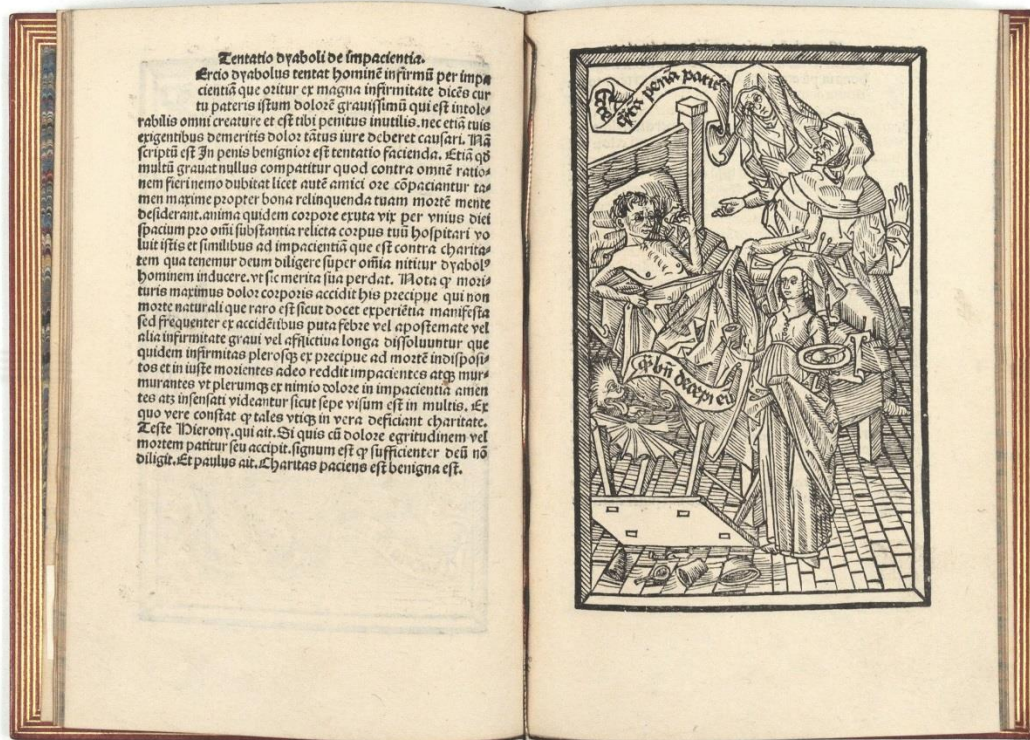
29. The Master of E.S. *Ars Moriendi*, *Temptation Through Vainglory*, 1450. Engraving, 87 x 65 mm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



30. Master of E.S. *Ars Moriendi* *Temptation Through Avarice* (top left); *Temptation Through Impatience* (top right); *Temptation Through Infidelity* (lower left); *Temptation Through Despair* (lower right), 1450. Engravings, 87 x 65 mm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



31. Unknown Master, *Ars Moriendi*, *Temptation Through Vainglory*, ca 1470. Engraving, dimensions unknown. Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.



32. Facsimile of *Ars Moriendi*, ca 1500. Edition by Melchior Lotter, Leipzig. Dimensions unknown. Southern Methodist University, Texas.

The *Ars Moriendi* is a book, probably written between 1414 and 1418 by a Dominican friar,⁵³⁷ describing the “art of dying.” The book was originally written in Latin, but was translated into several languages, copied, and was widely distributed across Europe. It has been described as a “handbook” of dying as the five chapters not only discuss the nature of death, but give advice concerning how the one dying should conduct him- or herself in the hour of death.⁵³⁸ In this way, the engravings in the book do not represent a particular man’s meeting with the terrors of the deathbed, but show a way in which the event of dying occurs as such. The *Ars Moriendi* describes that the human being, in the face of death, must first pass through five temptations: infidelity, despair, impatience, vainglory, and avarice [image 30].⁵³⁹ And the book itself provides guidance as to how these temptations are to be overcome, both in text and pictures. As such, the engravings of E.S. were not self-standing artworks in the modern sense, but part of a book combining textual and pictorial elements, created for a specific purpose. Indeed, in many of the later copies of E.S.’s works by other engravers, lines of text placed on banderoles are included in the pictures – for instance as seen in the version made by an unknown master from around 1470 [image 31]. And as we can see in a facsimile of a later edition of the book, the engravings themselves were placed on pages facing text [image 32].⁵⁴⁰ Despite it being originally presented alongside text (or maybe just because of this fact), it seems crucial to attempt to see and think along with the way in which the work as a pictorial work displays a way in which death essence in the medieval epoch. This is not to say that I will consider the engraving in isolation from its setting, but that my attention will be to attempt to see the pictorial contribution to the thinking of death. Thus, I ask: What understanding of the being of beings does the work show? What understanding of death is brought to appear by the work?

Notably, in all three of his works concerning the history of Western attitudes towards death, Philippe Ariès discuss the *Ars Moriendi*.⁵⁴¹ Significantly for the present study, he claims that in the engravings “*supernatural beings* have invaded the bedroom and are crowding around

⁵³⁷ Fernando Espi Forcén and Carlos Espi Forcén, “*Ars Moriendi*: Coping with death in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Palliative and Supportive Care*, 553-60 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 554.

⁵³⁸ The *Ars Moriendi* was published and circulated in a long and short, illustrated version. For a discussion of the short version, accompanied by the Latin original and an English translation, see Jeffrey Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi: An Examination, Translation, and Collation of the Manuscripts of the Shorter Latin Version* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1995, Master thesis).

⁵³⁹ Cust, *The Master E.S. and the 'Ars Moriendi'*, 10.

⁵⁴⁰ See also *ibid.*, 37-61.

⁵⁴¹ See Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 33-39; *The Hour of our Death*, 107-110; *Images of Man and Death*, 147-160.

[the] bedside.”⁵⁴² Again, as in Boardman’s judgment concerning the Geometric krater above, this might be correct if measured against the standard of the modern understanding of being. Indeed, from a modern perspective, the infernal and celestial beings appear “supernatural,” but such a judgment reveals a presupposed modern understanding of the essence of the work of art as such, along with an understanding of being which defines the reality of the real through the rational knowledge of the self-certain subject. The engraving of the dying man, however, still reveals *what is* in the medieval epoch – i.e. the epoch’s truth of beings as a whole.

As a work of art, it opens up a medieval world and sets forth the earth through which death is allowed to essence. By presenting the dying man surrounded by the demonic and heavenly figures, the work attests to a poietics that renders visible an understanding of the being of beings in line with the medieval epoch’s metaphysics. What the Master of E.S. brings to light is a figure, the rift of which traces a constellation of intelligibility (a strife between world and earth) where the sensuous, visually observable reality is not understood as what is truly actual. Indeed, the artwork makes “visible what is otherwise invisible.”⁵⁴³ But unlike the Greek funerary plaque’s un-concealing of the prosthesis – its emerging into the visible from the invisibility of concealedness – the engraving here makes visible *beings* that nonetheless are, only that they are invisible for the human eye. In this way, the work shows how the being of beings is neither defined by the self-rising emergence of physis in the open of aletheia, nor by the subject’s capability of representing reality. What is truly actual is not that which is visible for the human eye, but that which is over and beyond the physical world – indeed, what is truly real is *the* meta-physical being; *that* which *is* over and beyond the physical. That is, most fundamentally, God and the immortal soul,⁵⁴⁴ along with the devil. The empirical, sensory world is the transitory and untrue world spanning between the God’s act of creation and the Final Day, while the supra-sensory world of the divine and the infernal is the eternal, persistent, and true world.

The way in which the work is meaningful – its poietics – bears upon this understanding of being, and shows in alignment with and understanding of being where what *is* is fundamentally understood as the created and the uncreated being. God [ens increatum] is

⁵⁴² *The Hour of our Death*, 108. See also *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 34. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁴³ Heidegger, “The Provenance of Art and the Destination of Thought,” 120. [Vorblick] (“Die Herkunft der Kunst und die Bestimmung des Denkens,” 137).

⁵⁴⁴ On Heidegger’s interpretation of the Christian conception of the metaphysical as “a being at hand” see *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995; or. published, 1983), 41-44. (*Gesamtausgabe 29-30: Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983), 63-67).

the creator of beings [ens creatum], and is that which, over and beyond created beings, grants their being and thus guarantees their actuality. Beings are insofar as they are created by God. This is contrary to the Archaic funerary plaque, the poietics of which bears upon an understanding of being where what *is* is fundamentally understood as the self-arising and self-concealing of physis into the open of aletheia. The funerary plaque shows that the death of the human being is understood in alignment with this understanding of being – i.e. as the self-arising and self-concealing of a-letheia. The Master of E.S., then, can still be understood in light of Heidegger's description of the artist as a *technites*. That is to say that the work is a response to that which the artist has receptively seen in his "foresight." It shows and brings into appearance the dying man on his deathbed, the demons, God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary, all in alignment with the constellation of intelligibility of the medieval epoch's metaphysics. The main concern of the work, in other words, is not one of verisimilitude to the visual appearance of a particular person dying; rather, it is concerned with a *veri*-similitude in the literal sense of the word, as being similar to, and in this way showing, the truth [veritas].

The medieval concept of truth as *veritas*, as Heidegger claims, denotes the correspondence between the *intellectus humanus* and the idea of the *intellectus divinus*.⁵⁴⁵ In line with this, we can see that the work's poietics is essentially different from the Archaic work. The lines of black ink on paper, themselves traces of the artist's engravings on a woodblock, do not *mean* in alignment to the emergence of beings from out of concealment, nor do they *mean* by representing a subject's visual observation (and even less, by representing or expressing a subject's beliefs concerning death); rather, they *mean* in alignment with their correspondence to the metaphysical, supra-sensory world. The work is a depiction that claims to correspond to – and thus show, however incomplete – the true world, beyond visual appearance. Consequentially, the veritable correspondence is not between the work and the empirically observable world, but between the work and the fundamentally invisible meta-physical world. Hence, the guarantee of whether or not this correspondence reaches what truly is lies not in the hands of the creating or perceiving subject, but with the divine itself. Its truth becomes a question of divine revelation and faith, not of the emergence of beings out of concealment, nor of rational knowledge. Thus, we can see that the work not only bears upon the medieval truth of beings as a whole, but *bears* this truth by setting it into work – or rather, *thinking* it. As such, it *corresponds* [entspricht] to the medieval epoch's truth of being; or rather, the medieval truth of being speaks out from [ent-spricht] the work.

⁵⁴⁵ "On the Essence of Truth," 138-139. (GA 9, 180-182). See also *The End of Philosophy*, 23-24. (GA 6.2, 424-425). And *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 120. (GA 6.2, 169).

With this in mind, we can observe that while the demons shares the same pictorial space as the dying man, and the crowns they offer are real enough for the man to touch one of them, the heavenly entourage seems to stay somewhat more reserved in the background. The demons, who are rendered visible as small human-like creatures with animalistic features such as long ears, horns, fur, tails, claws, still remain human-like with their terrifying wide open eyes and large noses, as well as by walking on two legs. Their appearance is in direct contrast to the powerful and mighty God, the solemn Jesus, and the gracious Virgin Mary, all of whom are dressed in luxurious fabrics, and with long and delicate hair. The man lies in his bed, undressed but covered by a blanket; he is neither as crude as the demons, nor as gracious as the heavenly figures, rather, he seems simply to be “a dying man.” Describing the work, it is difficult not to use negative terms, as Cust does. He claims that the *Ars Moriendi* engravings are characteristic of the Master E.S. through their “thin dry figures, with their irregular and incorrect proportions, the stiff and angular contours of the drapery.”⁵⁴⁶ Moreover, there are “very evident faults to be discerned in the technique, perspective and composition.”⁵⁴⁷ In reply, we might choose to emphasize the sophisticated shading technique and the way in which the outline drawing is neatly varied, from the coarse and rough demons, to the powerful and mighty outlines of God and Jesus, to the softer and indeed delicate lines showing the Virgin Mary. But these descriptions nevertheless assess the work from a modern perspective, and focus either on the beings that are rendered visible by the work, or on the formal aspects of the art object. In line with what was written above, I contend that we should not understand the work’s poetics as a representation of beings, and thus to see it according to its verisimilitude to visual appearance. Rather, we must attempt to think the work in alignment with its essential belonging to a medieval experience of being.

Thus, placed among the pages of texts in the *Ars Moriendi*, I suggest that the engraving can indeed be seen as an *illustration*. Colloquially speaking, in the modern sense of the word, this would mean that the picture is appended to the text, which it so illustrates.⁵⁴⁸ Etymologically, however, the word ‘illustration’ names ‘a shining,’ or rather, a letting something emerge ‘into shining’ [in *lustrare*],⁵⁴⁹ a bringing ‘into light.’ In this sense, it is similar to ‘illumination’ – an enlightenment, a bringing ‘into light’ [in *lumen*]⁵⁵⁰ – the word used for the miniature paintings of medieval book manuscripts, the creator of which were

⁵⁴⁶ Cust, *The Master E.S. and the 'Ars Moriendi'*, 11.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁴⁸“Meaning “an illustrative picture” is from 1816.” Douglas Harper, “Illustration,” URL: <http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=illustration>. (Retrieved: 27.10.16).

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁰ “Illumination,” URL: <http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=illumination>. (Retrieved: 27.10.16).

named ‘illuminators.’⁵⁵¹ Hence, we can think of the print neither as illustrative representation of something described in the text, nor of something observed in sensuous reality; rather, we might see the *thinking* of the artwork as an illustration – a bringing into light; a showing – of the invisible and divine, meta-physical actuality. Seen in this way, the work is far from “faulty” in terms of its technique, perspective, and composition, insofar as what is at stake in the work is not to do justice to the visible, phenomenal appearance of beings, but to illustrate and bring into appearance an essential understanding of what it means to die – what death is. How, then, does the work think death? What does it show us concerning the medieval essence of death?

The work does not show that when a human being is dying, a crowd of demons will appear offering crowns, while God stands in the background, watching. As a short excerpt of the text of the *Ars Moriendi* accompanying the print clarifies: “the devil tempts the sick man through his own complacency, which is the spiritual pride through which he is more a menace to the devoted, the religious, and the blameless...the devil persistently labours to induce the man to spiritual arrogance or to complacency in himself.”⁵⁵² The work renders visible that the dying must beware of any feelings of such pride because they are always provoked by the devil, and might tempt the dying to commit the cardinal sin of vainglory.⁵⁵³ But the question, again, is not to see how *dying* is shown by the work, but the understanding of *death* that is brought to appear by the work. How does the work’s warning let death essence? As in the case of *The Sick Child* and the Archaic *prothesis*, death is not a visible being in the work, yet it is allowed to essence.

The work opens a world in which death is no-longer essencing as the withdrawing concealment against which the unconcealed life of the human being takes place, as we saw in the Archaic funerary plaque. Rather, it shows a world in which the *way* in which one dies is of crucial importance. It is shown as crucial, not primarily for one’s family or community, but for oneself – hence the warning of the work. The work shows death as it concerns the individual, because how he acts – whether or not he resists the terrible temptation of the demons – will contribute to decide the outcome of his death. In this way, the work shows that

⁵⁵¹ See, for instance, Michal Camille, *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 2. Note Camille’s reservations against “the nineteenth-century notion” ‘illustration’ in discussing medieval art, as well as the difficulty concerning the artworks’ status as independent works of art.

⁵⁵² Campbell, *The Ars Moriendi: An Examination, Translation, and Collation of the Manuscripts of the Shorter Latin Version*, 54.

⁵⁵³ For a fuller description of the literary aspects of the *Ars Moriendi* – as well as its transformation in the wake of the German reformation in the early 16th century, see Austra Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

death is not thought of as a mere endpoint or termination, but as transition. In the print of the *Ars Moriendi*, death is disclosed as the soul's transitional journey from this life to the afterlife. Like the Greeks, the Medievals did not understand death as a biological process; rather, in the words of Kellehear, "death was a place."⁵⁵⁴ Death was a journey into the beyond. This understanding of death as the soul's transition is what saturates the world of the work; it is the general essence of death that is passed on by the work. More concretely, the work shows an understanding of death that requires the one dying to die in a certain way. Indeed, the presence of the heavenly figures and the demons relates the understanding of death as transition to what is called *the particular judgment*.

Within the medieval epoch, the essential meaning of death as the soul's journey from this life unto the afterlife underwent several changes. These changes concerned not the essential fact concerning the immortal soul's journey into the afterlife, but the being of the place where and when it traveled, as well as the nature of *judgement*. This can be shown, roughly, by two examples.⁵⁵⁵ Among the first depictions of the Christian conception of the end of time is the carved relief on the tomb of the venerable Agilbert, the bishop of Dorchester and Paris from 670 [image 33]. It shows the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead on the Final Day.⁵⁵⁶ As Ariès argues, however, the depiction merely shows the rising of the dead who belonged to the Church. In the relief, we can see Christ, surrounded by a rejoicing crowd. The act of judgement is not portrayed, neither heaven nor hell is depicted, and there is no separation between those worthy and those who are not of eternal life in paradise. Upon physical death, "the dead who belonged to the Church and who had entrusted their bodies to its care...went to sleep like the seven sleepers of Ephesus..." Ariès writes, "and were at rest... until the day of the Second Coming, of the great return, when they would awaken in the heavenly Jerusalem, in other words in Paradise."⁵⁵⁷ The last day, then, was the day of the reawakening of the Christian community alone, certain of their salvation; any non-believers would simply "not awaken and would be abandoned to a state of nonexistence."⁵⁵⁸

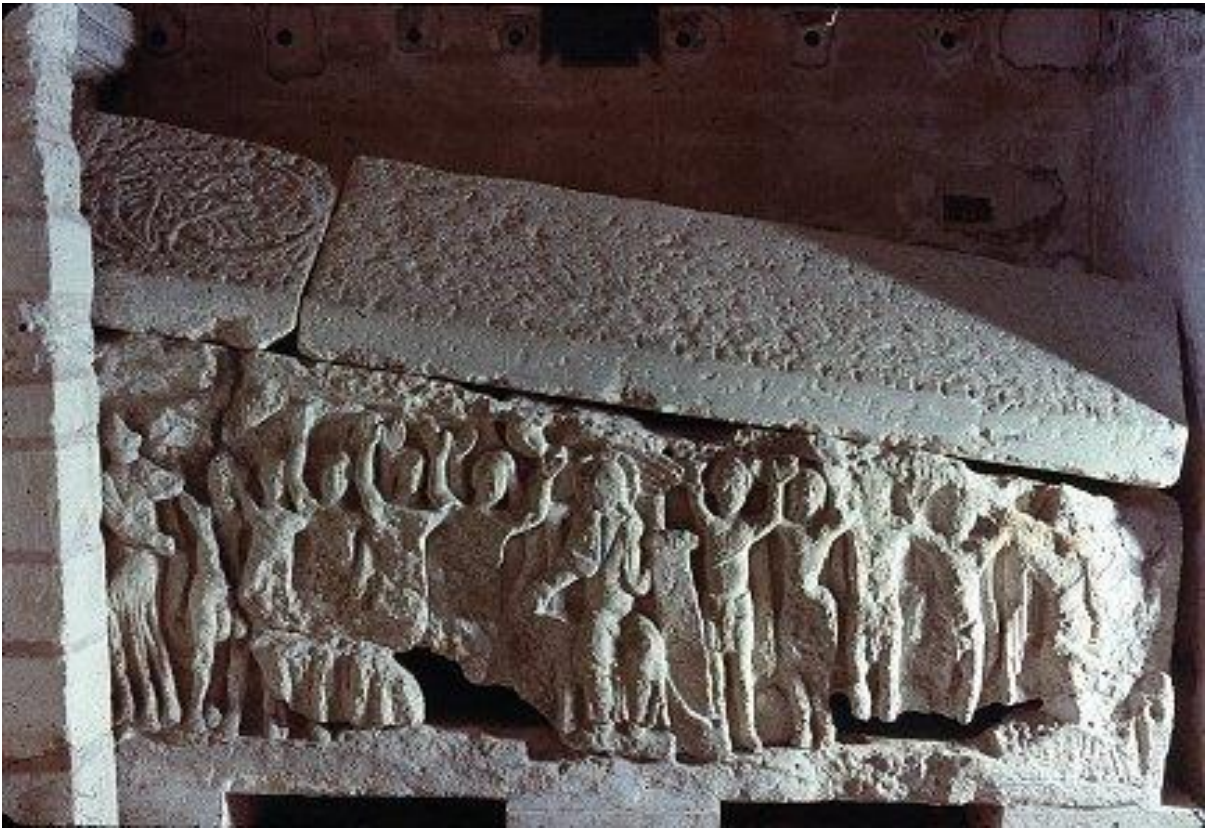
⁵⁵⁴ Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*, 177.

⁵⁵⁵ For a discussion of the historical changes in the medieval understanding of death especially concerning the emergence of the doctrine of purgatory, see Jaques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* [La naissance du Purgatoire], trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Scolar Press, 1984; or. published, 1981). For a general introduction to the topic of death in the middle ages, see Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England: 1066-1550* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-29. See also, Liepe and Aavitsland, *Memento mori*, 7-8. And Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, 5-293. Choron, *Death and Western Thought*, 81-87.

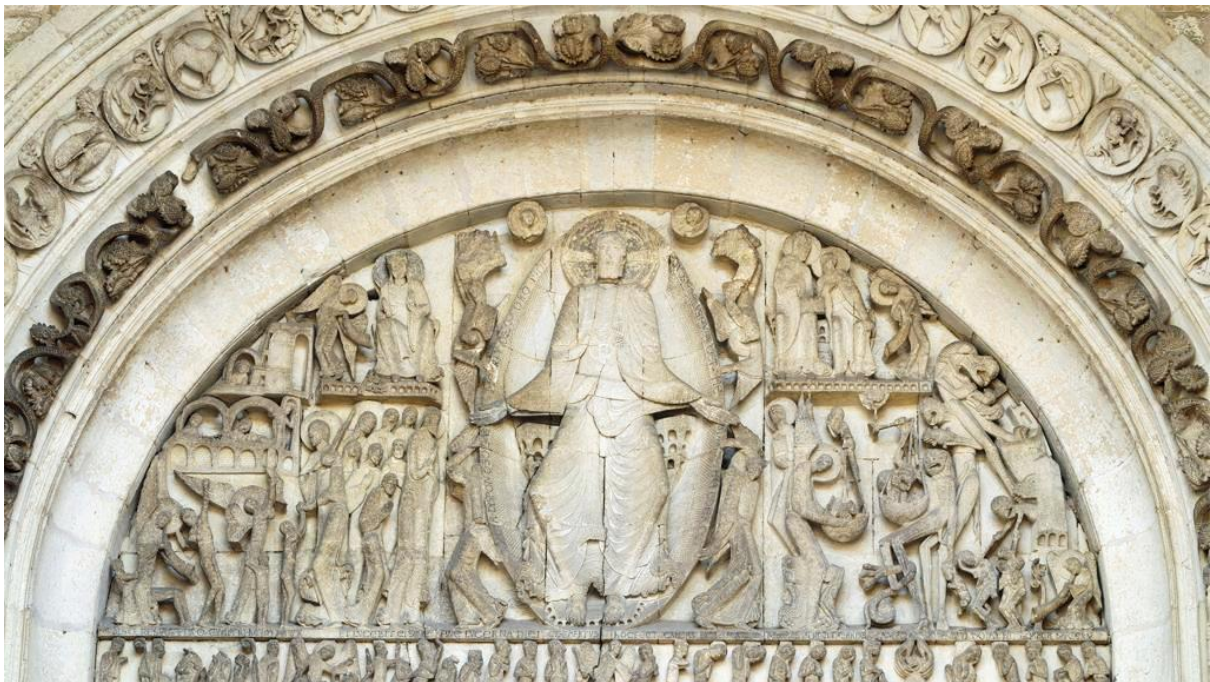
⁵⁵⁶ Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 29.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.



33. Unknown artist, *Sarcophagus of Bishop Agilbert*, ca. 670-690.
Jouarre.



34. Gislebertus, *Last Judgment (Tympanum)*, 1120-1135.
Cathedral of St. Lazare, Autun.

The tomb thus shows great contrast to later, well-known depictions of the Day of Judgment seen in the great Romanesque tympana of the 12th century. For instance, the tympanum of the Cathedral of St. Lazare in Autun [image 34] shows the Day of Judgement as an apocalyptic trial, with Christ in majesty as the great judge who sentences each individual soul to eternal life in heaven or eternal suffering in hell. Notably, both the tomb and the tympanum show the final day, but differ in terms of the nature of judgment.

The print of the *Ars Moriendi*, however, does not concern the last day or the final, *general* judgment, but what is called the *particular* judgment. Rather than showing death as a falling to sleep for then to rise on the last day, as Ariès describes it, the engraving shows an understanding of death where the one dying faces an imminent judgment. This judgment will decide where the dying's soul will be in the time-span between the death of the body and its resurrection on the Final Day; that is, whether he will ascend directly to heaven, descend into hell, or endure a purifying stay in purgatory.⁵⁵⁹ Indeed, the work renders visible that the dying man is observed by God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary, and thus that the outcome of how he behaves in the face of the demons' temptations will affect his individual, immediate fate. Contrary to the tomb, which shows the final day as the communal rising of the Christian community in its entirety; and contrary to the Romanesque tympanum which shows that all human beings will rise on the Day of Judgment to receive their individual judgment; the engraving in the *Ars Moriendi* shows that each and every individual will be judged, instantly, when they die. Rather than falling to sleep, awaiting the coming of the final day, the work reveals death as an immediate, individual transition into the afterlife.

What is taking place in the work is not, however, a fundamental re-configuration of the medieval understanding of death. Death is still essentially the soul's journey to the afterlife. My claim is, however, that the work explicitly brings into appearance the understanding of death as an immediate transfer into the afterlife, and thus lets this historically contingent, essential determination of death being fixed in a figure – in a concrete artwork. Even though we might no longer experience death as the journey of the immortal

⁵⁵⁹ In other words, particular judgment did not replace the general judgement, but relates to the alteration of the understanding of the temporal span between the death of the body and the Final Judgment of the soul (on this, see Poul Grønder-Hansen, "En sjæl efter døden. Et bidrag til Skærsildens ikonografi," in *Memento Mori: Døden i middelalderens billedverden*, ed. Lena Liepe and Kristin Bliksrud Aavitsland, 81-98 (Oslo: Novus, 2011), 84). It was accompanied by the emergence of what Le Goff has called "the third place," in addition to heaven and hell, namely purgatory. Upon death, the human being's soul was judged either directly to heaven (generally reserved for martyrs and saints), to hell, or to purgatory. On the Final Day, a second judgment was performed, which determined the outcome of each soul for eternity. For a thorough discussion of these issues, see Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*. For a brief and lucid discussion of some of these theological complexities in relation to art, see Grønder-Hansen, "En sjæl efter døden. Et bidrag til Skærsildens ikonografi," especially 85.

soul (characterized by the immediate, particular judgment), and therefore being denied to stand in the truth of being that the work contributed in holding open, the work still essentially *shows* this essential understanding of death. This showing, I contend, we can see not only as a poetizing bringing-forth that sets truth into work, but a pictorial thinking. It tells us, by showing us, what death essentially is in the medieval epoch.

In conclusion, my choice of focusing on this single print from the late Middle Ages allowed for a brief contemplation of the changes within the mediaeval epoch's understanding of death, from the communal rising of the dead who belonged to the Church, through the communal rising but individual judgment on the Last Day, to the individual and immediate particular judgment. Although all of these transformations within the medieval understanding of death share the same essential understanding of death as the immortal soul's transitional journey into the afterlife, they reveal an increasing individualization within the medieval epoch. Ariès sees this as a fundamental change in the human being's attitude towards death, from the earlier, summarized in the phrase "*et moriemur*, and we shall all die,"⁵⁶⁰ to an increased preoccupation with the death of the individual. The print can indeed be seen as showing what Ariès calls the "death of the self, the self alone before God."⁵⁶¹

We can see this increasing individualization of death in line with Heidegger's being-historical account of the rise of the subject. In this way, it shows that although the subject got its first essential determination in the metaphysics of Descartes, his thinking articulated and brought out something that was already underway in the destining of being itself. Above, I have suggested that the poietics of both the ancient Greek and medieval work of art *shows* in a way that is essentially different from the modern understanding of the artwork as representation. In line with Heidegger, I would contend that they "are not only different according to their style, for the style is itself of a different metaphysical essence."⁵⁶² The relation between the epochal truth of being, the essential style (the poietics) of the work of art, and the essencing of death they bring to appear, is what I have discussed in the foregoing. The final step before turning back to Munch's *The Sick Child*, is to consider a work that brings us in touch with the modern truth of being, a poietics which works in alignment with this, and which lets the modern understanding of death essence. In the following, I will focus on a work that brings us close to the pictorial thinking of *The Sick Child*. It is a work by one of

⁵⁶⁰ Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 55.

⁵⁶¹ *The Hour of our Death*, 201.

⁵⁶² Heidegger, *Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister"*, 24-25. Emphasis mine. [der Stil selbst ist verschiedenen metaphysischen Wesens] (*GA 53*, 28).

Munch's contemporaries, who for a period of time was his friend and teacher, namely Christian Krohg's *Sick Girl* [Syk Pike] (1881).



35. Christian Krohg, *Syk pike*, 1881.

[Sick Girl] Oil on panel, 102 x 58 cm.

The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.

Truth and Death in Christian Krohg's *Sick Girl*

The oil painting, measuring 102 x 58 cm, is on display in the National Gallery in Oslo.⁵⁶³ It shows a young girl in a white shirt, sitting in a wooden chair, resting against a large, white pillow [image 35]. She is covered by a heavy, white blanket with red seams and details. In her cold, blue hands, she holds a withering, pink flower. The girl and the chair take up almost the entire pictorial surface, and the only things visible behind her are the dirty wall, the dark floor, and the baseboard between them. The girl faces the viewer and stares directly out into the eyes of the perceiver. Indeed, the viewer is implied in the pictorial space of the work, and is situated between the girl and a wall with windows, the reflections of which we can see in the shining armrests.

As was mentioned above, almost half a century after creating the first edition of *The Sick Child*, Munch wrote about the work that it was painted in the “age of pillows.”⁵⁶⁴ Although I have attempted to show that pictorial works of death and pillows are far from unique to the end of the 19th century, it is nevertheless so that pillow-paintings of death flourished in Munch’s time [see for instance image 36-39]. Moreover, these were essentially different from both the ancient Greek terracotta works of the *prothesis*, and the engraving of the *Ars Moriendi* from the late Middle Ages. If one considers, from a modern perspective, the human beings depicted by these works, the Archaic pinax depicts a man already dead, the *Ars Moriendi* a man about to die, while *Sick Girl* depicts a sick and dying girl – a child. Although paintings of dead and dying children was not exactly unprecedented [see for instance image 40-43], it became increasingly popular in line with the emergence of pictorial Realism and Naturalism.⁵⁶⁵ In this chapter, however, I am suggesting that some of these works – exemplified by Krohg’s *Sick Girl* – not only can be seen as genre paintings of sick children, but as belonging to a certain mode of the history of pictorial thinking of death. How, then, does the work let death essence? What truth of beings as a whole establishes itself in, and is revealed by, the work?

⁵⁶³ Much has been written about the biographical and artistic relation between Munch and Krohg, but the following does not aim to be a contribution to this body of literature. See for instance Mørstad, *Edvard Munch: Formative år 1874-1892: Norske og franske impulser*, 139-169; Kirk Vandoe, "Christian Krohg and Edvard Munch," in *Arts Magazine*, 1-8 (1979); Oscar Thue, "Edvard Munch og Christian Krohg," in *Kunst og Kultur*, 237-56 (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1973); Atle Næss, *Edvard Munch: En Biografi* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2004), 46-48 and 67-73. Clarke, *Becoming Edvard Munch: Influence, Anxiety, and Myth*, especially chapter one “Munch’s anxiety of Influence.” Øivind Storm Bjerke, "Stil og teknikk som strategiske virkemidler innefor 'mellomgenerasjonen' 1882-1886," in *Munch "Blir" Munch: Kunstneriske Strategier 1880-1920*, 35-62 (Oslo: Munch Museet, 2009). Moreover, Krohg is mentioned in most scholarly articles and books concerning Munch’s life and art in the 1880s.

⁵⁶⁴ [Putetiden] Munch, *Brev til Jens Thiis (MM N 3120)*, 3.

⁵⁶⁵ See Ustvedt, "The Story of a Masterpiece," 121-123.



36. John Whitehead Walton, *Anxious moments: A Sick Child, Its Grieving Parents, a Nursemaid and a Medical Practitioner*, 1894.
Oil on canvas, 72 x 91.5 cm. Wellcome Library, London.



37. Léopold-Henri Girardet, *The Sick Child*, 1897.
Oil on canvas, 84.1 x 99.8 cm. Museums Sheffield, Sheffield.



38. **Arturo Michelena, *The Sick Child*, 1886.**
Oil on canvas, 80.4 x 85 cm. Galería de Arte Nacional, Caracas.



39. **J. Bond Francisco, *The Sick Child*, 1893.**
Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 121.8 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington.



40. C. W. Peale, *Mrs. Peale lamenting the death of her child (Rachel weeping)*, 1772-6. Retouched 1818. Oil on canvas, 93.5 x 81.4 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.



41. Italian School, *A Man Praying to a Saint to Assist in the Cure of a Sick Child, with Devils Departing*, 18th century. Oil on canvas, 65 x 67.8 cm. Welcome Library, London.



42. Unknown Artist, *A Woman Praying to Christ Crucified for the Health of a Sick Child in Bed, the Virgin Above*, 18th century. Oil on canvas, 32 x 44 cm. Wellcome Library, London.



43. Unknown Artist, *A Woman Praying to the Virgin and Child for a Sick Child in a Cradle*, 1811. Oil on millboard, 26.3 x 36 cm. Wellcome Library, London.

Contrary to the Archaic funerary plaque, with its shiny black, dry red, and delicate white burnt clay, and contrary to the *Ars Moriendi*'s simple black print on white paper, Krohg's *Sick Girl* sets forth the earth through a nuanced palette – with an emphasis on different shades of white, in contrast to the darker brown of the chair, and the dirty, green-grey of the wall. Indeed, the striving between world and earth takes a radically different configuration here than in the two former works. Consider the three main fields of white in the painting, the pillow, the shirt, and the blanket. In each case, the paint on the canvas is not only different in terms of the nuance of white (from the grey-blue of the pillow, and the crispy bright shirt, to the warm white carpet), but the texture of the paint applied on the canvas merge with the coloration. Looking closely, the blanket is shown through several layers of paint dryly brushed on top of each other, bearing minute traces of the thin hairs of the brush and so mimicking the soft texture of thick and fuzzy wool. The shirt is rendered visible through somewhat longer and thicker strokes that are heavier and give the appearance of a slightly curly cotton fabric; the pillow is shown through softer and less distinct strokes that are applied fluidly to mimic the mellow and soft appearance of the pillow. In each case, the paint on the canvas is applied as to appear as correct as possible in correspondence with the visual appearance of the fabrics that are depicted. Indeed, it seems like the earth of the work supports the world that is opened almost to the point that it disappears in the beings that it bears; as if the painterly appearance of the paint dissolves into the appearance of the fabrics. But on second thought, note that it is the pillow that occasions the appearance of the cool and matt blue-white paint, which is allowed to emerge in contrast with the brighter and indeed *whiter* whites that the shirt lets shine forth. It is the armrests of the chair that allows the mixture of red, maroon, and brown tones to appear as *that* through which the armrests appear. The work opens a world in which the oil paint on the canvas – the earthy work material – is allowed to shine forth. The way this self-showing is brought to appear, the way in which earth is set forth in its striving against the openness of the work's world, is the work's poietics. What understanding of the being of beings sustains and guides the work? How is the work intelligible?

At the most general level, I contend that the work can be seen as an example of the way in which the essential transformation of truth corresponds to the essential history of Western art. Or more concretely, of the essential transformation of the poietics of the medieval and the modern epochs. This, I suggest can be made visible through a brief comparison with the poietics of the print in the *Ars Moriendi*, which *corresponds* to or speaks out from [ent-spricht] a medieval understanding of the truth of being. That is, as was argued

above, an understanding where God, as the uncreated being, is the absolute being, on the basis of which any being is considered to be in being. God is the highest being, which determines that which is as a whole. The truth that is set into work by the print is truth in the sense of *veritas*; the correspondence between the divine reality and the work, revealed in the faithful preservation of the work. The print, in other words, explicitly concerns what is considered to be real in the medieval epoch – indeed, the highest reality itself. *Sick Girl*, on the other hand, speaks out from a modern understanding of the truth of being. That is to say, that the work prescribes its own limits of intelligibility by positing the subject as the absolute being that determines the beingness of what it represents.⁵⁶⁶ Like the print of the *Temptation Through Vainglory*, the painting concerns what is considered to be real, but here the understanding of the reality of the real is entirely different. In the print, God is the one who determines the reality of the real (the reality of which can only be experienced through divine revelation and faith). In *Sick Girl*, the work's showing is aligned with an understanding of being where the subject is the one who determines the reality of the real. In other words, the essential transformations of the history of being do not merely denote changes in the human being's beliefs about the world. Rather, as these two works reveal, the history of being denotes the essential transformations in the limits of intelligibility – that is, the fundamental way in which that which is emerges as intelligible; i.e. the fundamental way in which beings as a whole are disclosed.

This brief observation, however, does only touch upon the broadest strokes of Heidegger's unthought history of art. For as we saw in the previous chapter, Heidegger claims that even the most "realistic" or "naturalistic" artwork, in this modern sense, has as its "sole matter of concern...not to depict an actual, individual thing, but rather to depict precisely *actuality* as it is."⁵⁶⁷ Insofar as the actuality of the actual is not itself something actual and sensuous, this means that artworks of the modern epoch are no less metaphysical than the medieval, according to Heidegger. Both the medieval and the modern work of art share the same metaphysical essence as symbolic image – as the bringing together of the suprasensuous

⁵⁶⁶ According to Heidegger, "representation inspects everything encountering it from *out* of itself and with reference *to* itself, inspects it with regard to whether and how it relates to what representation – as a bringing before oneself in order to make secure – requires for its own certainty. Representation is now no longer a mere guideline for the perception of beings as such; that is to say, it is no longer perception of the permanent that comes to presence. Representation comes to be the tribunal that decides about the beingness of beings and declares that in the future only what is placed before it in and through representation and thus is secured for it may be considered a being. Nevertheless, in such placing-before-itself representation necessarily *corepresents* itself; but it does not represent itself only subsequently, and certainly not as an object; rather it represents itself first of all as that before which everything has to be mustered and within whose radius alone any particular thing can be secured." Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol III, 219. [Appendix IX] (*GA* 6.2, 295-296).

⁵⁶⁷ Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister", 24-25. Emphasis mine. [Appendix VII] (*GA* 53, 28-29).

and the sensuous. But while the medieval work intimated the suprasensuous reality of the divine and infernal forces, the modern work brings a suprasensuous understanding of the reality of the real together with a real being, namely the art object.

However, although the being of truth – and the truth of being – is radically transformed in the epochal change between the medieval and the modern epochs, the striving between world and earth does not cease. What the actuality of the actual is, or what the reality of the real is, does not cease to be an issue for the pictorial being-historical thinking once the modern epoch arises. Works of art are continuously “fighting of the battle in which the unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won.”⁵⁶⁸ The understanding of the reality of the real is continuously pondered in the pictorial thinking of the modern epoch. Seen in this way, the being-historical essence of the history of modern painting as such becomes the essential history of how the objective reality is defined and how it can accurately be represented by the subject in painting. That is, it becomes the essential history of the pictorial thinking of the reality of the real.

Therefore, although Gustave Courbet famously declared that “painting is an essentially *concrete* art and can only consist of the presentation of *real and existing things*. It is a completely physical language, the words of which consist of all visible objects; an object which is *abstract*, not visible, non-existent, is not within the realm of painting,”⁵⁶⁹ his *works of art* still fight the battle of what the *reality* of the “real and existing things” *is*. As such, also Courbet’s paintings concern the “abstract, not visible, non-existent,” i.e. suprasensuous, *being* of objective beings; also here, “there still is metaphysics.”⁵⁷⁰ As Linda Nochlin argues, many artists in the second half of the 19th century aimed to paint “a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world.”⁵⁷¹ However, this aim resulted obviously not in a uniform *pictorial* solution of how the real world is to be truthfully represented. In light of the perspective of Heidegger’s unthought art history of being, I would suggest that the “realist intent” thus resulted in a continuous painterly pondering of what “a truthful,” “objective,” “impartial,” “representation,” “of,” “the real world” *means*; that is, it resulted in a pictorial thinking of the *metaphysical* determination of the being of beings.

In light of these considerations, we can see that Krohg’s *Sick Girl* shows (in the essential sense) and in this way prescribes a certain understanding of what is possible to

⁵⁶⁸ “The Origin,” 54. [Aufstellend eine Welt und herstellend die Erde ist das Werk die Bestreitung jenes Streites, in dem die Unverborgenheit des Seienden im Ganzen, die Wahrheit, erstritten wird] (GA 5, 42).

⁵⁶⁹ Gustave Courbet quoted in Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 23.

⁵⁷⁰ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister"*, 24-25. Emphasis mine. [Appendix VII] (GA 53, 28-29).

⁵⁷¹ Nochlin, *Realism*, 13.

represent in painting – what is permitted within the limits of pictorial intelligibility – and in that sense what is permitted within the limits of intelligibility in general. In the work, the battle between world and earth is fought, through which an understanding of what “the real world” *is* is revealed. In line with the essential transformation of the truth of being, the truth that is set into work is the modern understanding of truth as *certainty*. The poetics of the work thus shows the real as what is visually observable from a single point of view. The work demands that its correctness must be judged in accordance with its claim to accuracy in its correspondence to visual appearance. In this way, the work shows that the reality of the real is determined by its observability.

However, the observation that is represented by *Sick Girl* is not merely the visual appearance of a sick girl, sitting in a chair, but the social reality of an individual victim of a sickness (historiologically considered, the ongoing tuberculosis epidemic). The work is explicit in its address to the perceiver not only by its internal spatial organization, but by its inclusion of the perceiver in its pictorial space through the angle of the point of view, the reflections on the armrests (which attest to the continuation of the pictorial space behind the perceiver), and, most explicitly, the direct gaze of the girl. But despite the directness and boldness of the gaze, the girl appears vulnerable and weak, her face is pale, and her hands are cold blue. Through the work’s address to the viewer, it shows in alignment with an understanding of the reality of the real that is not reducible to the mere visual appearance of objective beings.

What is represented in the work is represented in accordance with an understanding of reality where what matters most is the social life and interaction between human beings. Therefore, I suggest that what the work represents is not a particular sick girl by herself, but a social relation between the sick girl and the perceiver. As an elucidation of this, it is worth noting that in his theoretical writings on art, Krohg seems to be in debt to Émile Zola who claims that art should be both scientifically experimental and socially oriented – in Øystein Sjøstad’s words, that art “is supposed to be inspired by science and function as sociology.”⁵⁷² Krohg, on his side, claimed that “you should paint in such a way that you capture, touch, enrage or delight the masses *exactly by the same that has delighted, touched, enraged or captured yourself*.”⁵⁷³ In this way, we can indeed see *Sick Girl* as a representation, but first

⁵⁷² Øystein Sjøstad, *Christian Krohg's Naturalism. Art at the Intersection of Nineteenth-Century Philosophy, Science, and Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming, 2017), chapter 2.

⁵⁷³ “Du skal male slig, at du griber, rører, forarger eller glæder den store Hob *netop ved det samme, som har glædet, rørt forarget eller grebet dig selv*,” Krohg, *Kampen*, 22. For a discussion of Krohg’s art theoretical

and foremost, it is a representation of a social issue: the sadness and helplessness felt in the face of the approaching death of a child. And therefore, more accurately, how death appears in a reality understood as what is observable.

Like the Archaic funerary plaque, and the medieval engraving in the *Ars Moriendi*, *Sick Girl* does not represent a particular person dying, but concerns the essence of death as such. But unlike the previous works, *Sick Girl* brings the essence of death to appear exactly by representing the meeting between the perceiver and a sick girl *as if* she is a particular person. The work represents a meeting between two subjects in a world of death. That is, the work represents the interaction between a perceiving subject and the objectively observed subject of the girl by as accurately as possible rendering visible how such a meeting would look in reality. What, then, does this tell us about the modern understanding of death?

Contrary to the ancient Greek understanding of death as ambiguously belonging to life (as βίος) in the same sense as the concealed (lethe) belongs to the unconcealed (aletheia); and contrary to the medieval understanding of death as the immortal soul's transition into the afterlife, determined by God's judgement; *Sick Girl* is confined to show how death appears in reality. What happens after death cannot be ascertained by direct observation, and thus becomes unrepresentable. The symbolic presence of the withering flower might be seen as an indication of death as a biological necessity. But as I see it, the work shows death primarily as the termination of a person's social existence among others. The work shows that the girl soon will not be *here* anymore; the chair will be empty and her shirt and blanket will be folded together. Except for the flower, all the objects represented in the painting will outlive her: soon, her shirt will dress someone else; the chair and the pillow will provide a place of rest for someone else; the blanket will keep someone else warm. The bare, factual presence of the material objects in the work highlights the contrast with the ephemerality of the girl's life. The way in which the dying of the girl is presented does not show any hopes of an afterlife – there is no *there* in the beyond which will receive her after death.

In this way, *Sick Girl* can be seen as belonging to the changes due to the modern secularization – or “the loss of the gods” or “degodization” [Entgötterung] as Heidegger calls it.⁵⁷⁴ However, in their social histories of the attitudes towards death, both Ariès and Kellehear recognize an essential change in the meaning of death in modernity, but their understanding of the change differs. Ariès considers this emerging, modern understanding of

writings in the 1880s see, Erik Mørstad, "Christian Krohgs kunstteori i 1880-årene," in *Kunst og Kultur*, 69-107 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1991).

⁵⁷⁴ Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 116. (*GA* 5, 76).

death in contrast to the medieval understanding of death as “tame,” by which he means that death was familiar.⁵⁷⁵ The rise of modernity saw the gradual “untaming” of death – the rites and practices that previously accompanied death and made death into a familiar aspect of everyday life, gradually lost their significance. Today, Ariès claims, writing in the 1970s, death has become “forbidden”⁵⁷⁶ or “invisible.”⁵⁷⁷ That is, it is no longer a familiar and “tame” aspect of life, but increasingly considered taboo.⁵⁷⁸

Kellehear, on the other hand, claims that the changing attitudes towards death can be explained as a result of changes in the socio-economical organization of different societies. Thus, while death previously was considered a site of transition, a place as the goal of an otherworldly journey for which it made sense to make preparations, Kellehear argues that “increasing social power, education and secularisation in urban situations”⁵⁷⁹ lead to questioning of the nature of the “place” beyond life. As the belief in a life after this diminished, he argues – in line with Ariès – that the traditions of preparations in the face of death began to lose their significance. Legal and economic issues are still managed by professionals and family, but death as a place is increasingly considered as uninhabitable or wild, and thus meaningless or simply non-existent.

Kellehear makes a crucial observation while discussing the strategies of coping with death in the Middle Ages, however. He contends that it was “no blind or irrational thing but an integral part of the *cosmological understanding* of most people during that time.”⁵⁸⁰ That is to say, that the rites performed during a person’s dying were meaningful due to the medieval epoch’s fundamental understanding of being. Due to his sociological approach, which aims at explaining the link between forms of social organization and dying, he rarely touches upon the link between changing “cosmology” – or rather, metaphysics, in the Heideggerian sense – and dying. Instead, he argues that changes in cosmological understanding are contingent upon changes in social organization. In other words, Kellehear argues that change in cosmological understanding (and even the emergence of a lack of “a supporting cosmology”) is a direct result of “increasing social power, education and secularization in urban situations.”⁵⁸¹ But although this might be a tenable sociological argument for the change in attitude towards death, it seems to me not to provide a satisfactory philosophical argument for the changing

⁵⁷⁵ Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, 5-28. And *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 1-25.

⁵⁷⁶ *Images of Man and Death*, 85.

⁵⁷⁷ *The Hour of our Death*, 557.

⁵⁷⁸ See also the classic article on this topic, Gorer, "The Pornography of Death," .

⁵⁷⁹ Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*, 177.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

metaphysical understandings of death. For why should education and secularization, by necessity, lead to the questioning a dominant “cosmological understanding”?

Kellehear suggest that due to increase in power, wealth, and life-expectancy urban elites have always (that is, since the rise of cities some 10 000 years ago)⁵⁸² led to “serious questions and doubts about otherworld journeys, or at least, if these doubts do not exist, an additional anxiety about optimizing successful outcomes for that journey when dying.”⁵⁸³ But here Kellehear fails to acknowledge the differences between 1) questioning and doubting otherworld journeys, 2) wanting to optimize the outcome for that journey and 3) the fundamental lack of belief in an otherworld journey. What motivates Kellehear’s discussion at this point, however, is a polemic against Ariès, who claims that changes in attitudes towards death are contingent on factors of modernization. Kellehear opposes Ariès view that changes in the 20th century’s attitudes towards death must be understood as a break or discontinuity, rather than transformation and continuity. And based in his sociological approach, he argues strongly for the fact that the social practices of dying is simply transformed on a social level: for “while religious devices targeted souls during dying and death as a place, medical device made bodies their target, as an emerging ‘place’ of dying and death.”⁵⁸⁴ On a side note, in the pictorial arts, this could have been illustrated by the substitution of the priest [image 44] by the medical doctor [image 45] on the deathbed. For Kellehear, then, there is in other words simply a question of transformation of (the aims of) practices, but if we question the metaphysical understanding which gives *meaning* to these practices, it is difficult to agree with Kellehear. Indeed, I might add, doctors were subject to depiction long before death lost its ‘place’ [image 46].

Kellehear complicates his own argument by claiming that urban elites began to experience death as wild or uninhabitable due to the lack of a “supporting cosmology to guide [their] understanding of [death].”⁵⁸⁵ This is a far bolder claim than the one quoted above that urban elites always have questioned or wanted to optimize the outcome of an otherworld journey. For while Kellehear more convincingly claims that increase in social powers might lead to questions and doubts concerning the afterlife due to longer life-expectancy, it is in my view simply not tenable to claim that this *by necessity* leads to the lack of “a supporting cosmology,”⁵⁸⁶ and hence understanding death as termination. If that was the case, why do we

⁵⁸² Ibid., 127.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 179.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 178.



44. **Adolf Tidemand, *Sognebud, Hardanger*, 1860.**
Oil on canvas, 63 x 79 cm. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.



45. **Émile-Carolus Leclercq, *The Physician's Verdict*, 1857.**
Oil on canvas, 71.2 x 87.7 cm. Wellcome Library, London.



46. Unknown artist, *Examining a Patient* (from Claudius Galenus, *Oeuvres de Galien*), 14th century. Ms 1003 f185v. Illuminated manuscript, dimensions unknown. Bibliotheque Municipale, Reims.

not have a strong, philosophical tradition based on the premise that death is simply non-being, as most philosophers belong to the urban elites of their time? As Choron shows, nearly the entire history of Western philosophy treats the question of death as a question of the nature of the soul's eternal life, a view which is almost unquestioned until the rise of materialist philosophy in the 18th century.⁵⁸⁷ So, even though Kellehear identifies a metaphysical shift between death as a place of transition and death as termination, he is not willing to accept the implications of his identification of this shift. Namely, that the past few hundreds of years have seen the rise of a fundamentally different understanding of *death* that cannot be traced back to social organization, but to an epochal transformation in the metaphysical understanding of beings as a whole.

This change, I contend is made visible, established, founded, and thought by Krohg's painting. *Sick Girl* does not merely express or illustrate (in the colloquial sense) this transformation, but is itself a being in which the modern understanding of death has established itself, and thus brought to appear and allowed to essence. In line with Heidegger's argument, artworks do not reside in an autonomous sphere but is, as any other being, guided and sustained by the history of being. But contrary to any other being, the work of art sets truth into work, and reveals and shows an understanding of beings as a whole. *Sick Girl* is a work in which death is allowed to essence. In this sense, the work grounds its epoch's understanding of being, by showing death as termination, through the representation of its social reality; it works to hold open the openness of the modern world. In *Sick Girl*, death is shown as the approaching moment in time in which the girl will die. The painting renders visible a reality in which the moments before, of, or after death are equal events only separated sequentially in time. They are equally observable and thus equally representable. In other words, the work shows death as it can be represented *by certainty* from the subjective observer's perspective, and as such excludes any representations of otherworldly journeys in the afterlife.⁵⁸⁸ The way death "is" is as an occurrence, the factual consequences of which "we" – as the represented perceivers of the work – know are primarily social: the girl, who once sat in the chair, will eventually not be there anymore.

⁵⁸⁷ Choron, *Death and Western Thought*, 133. Note, however, that Choron's interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy would be a typical example of what Heidegger calls a "Christian" interpretation of Greek thinking.

⁵⁸⁸ I contend that even an interpretation of the mullions of the window, reflected on the armrests, as a cross, does not alter this. (Ustvedt, "The Story of a Masterpiece," 123). The presence of the Christian symbol might rather be seen as a symbol of death, like the withering flower, than indicating hope of an afterlife. But even though interpreted as symbol of hope of an afterlife, this hope is here a question of the subject's faith, as the continuation of life after death is not something of which one can be *certain*. It can never be observed and guaranteed by the subject's observation and can therefore not be true (as certainty).

Summary and Transition

Through a discussion of an ancient Greek funerary plaque, an engraving from a medieval *Ars Moriendi*, and Krohg's oil painting *Sick Girl*, I have discussed the broad strokes of the history of the essential transformations of death in relation to the essential changes in the artworks' poietics and metaphysics. Although my approach omits any detailed and richer explorations into each epoch and each work, I have attempted to bring to light the larger historical transformations that will guide my discussion of *The Sick Child* in the final section. The main point I would like to emphasize is that *The Sick Child* is a work that belongs to a history of pictorial thinking of death. This history is not the result of the ideas, beliefs, or artistic productions of individuals or groups of subjects, but is sent by being and belongs to its history. Thus, these works are not mere representations of the ideas or beliefs different human beings have had concerning death. Rather, they are themselves happenings whereby the truth of being establishes itself in beings. This happens through a fixing in place of the rift (tracing a strife between world and earth, i.e. a constellation of intelligibility) in figure, which I have described as the works' poietics (its mode of pictorial intelligibility, or its style in the essential sense), and which as such lets understandings of death essence in alignment with the truth of being. The works' *showing* of the essential understandings of death, however, are ways of articulating – addressing and bringing to light in an explicit way – the essences of death themselves. This showing of what death “is” I suggest could be seen as a pictorial thinking of death, which indeed is a “thinking without science, without philosophy.”⁵⁸⁹ Hence, in the final section of this chapter, I will turn back to *The Sick Child* in order to think with *its* way of responding to the existential question “what is death?” along with the metaphysical significance of its reply.

⁵⁸⁹ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 61. [gedacht...ohne Wissenschaft, ohne Philosophie] (*GA 12*, 154).

Section Three |

On the Poietics and Metaphysics of The Sick Child

In the first section of this chapter, I raised the question of the being of the scratches and incisions of *The Sick Child*'s surface, focusing especially on the heavy, red line of the girl's head [image 22]. The question of how this line is to be *seen* – whether it “is” the girl's head or hair, if it is “above” or “outlines” the head, or if it is imposed on the surface and thus not “belonging” to the girl's head at all – led to the question of how the work is meaningful as such. As I have suggested, to question the being of the dark red line is to raise the questions both of *what* is brought forth by work, and the way in which the work is *bringing forth*, i.e. the question about the work's *poietics*. How, then, does the work mean? That is, how does the work provide intelligibility? What truth of beings as a whole establishes itself in, and is revealed by, the work? And how is death brought to essence in *The Sick Child*?

As I have argued, what I see as the most crucial point in Heidegger's unthought art history of being, is that it reveals that changes in pictorial idiom relate to essential changes in the poietics of works of art, and finally, that this “essential history of Western art” *corresponds* to the historical transformations of the truth of being. As I argued in the previous section, the way a work is intelligible relates essentially to an epochal constellation of intelligibility as such. And likewise, how death is rendered meaningful by the work of art relates to this very same metaphysics. The previous works, however, were chosen as exemplary works, which each in their own way opened up for seeing and experiencing the implication of Heidegger's unthought history of art – the recollected relatedness between the works and the being-historical epochs' metaphysics. As far as my analysis went, the works were argued to *found* their epochs' understanding of being in the sense of bestowal and grounding. That is to say that, once, the works were happenings that brought the epochal understandings of death to appear in the world of the works. This poetical showing, this bringing-into-view of death, thus strengthened and contributed in holding open the worlds of the pre-Socratic, medieval, and modern epochs.⁵⁹⁰ This very-same showing, which today no

⁵⁹⁰ This, however, I admit might simplify the works' contribution to the art history of being. The works, each in their own way, contribute to the shaping and revealing of the epochal understanding of being, but due to the scope and aim of the present thesis, I have chosen not to continue along that path of thinking. A more nuanced

longer holds open a world, but still articulates an openness, I have suggested to be the pictorial thinking of the works. However, in this final section, I will argue that *The Sick Child*, in contrast to the archaic, medieval, and modern works, enables us to think the founding of the work of art in another sense – in the sense of *beginning*. That is to say, that I will argue that the work challenges – and in this way can be seen as a contribution to a reconfiguring of – the modern truth of being.

In the following, I will begin by taking a historiological interpretation of *The Sick Child* as a clue; a clue for arguing how the work transgresses the limits of pictorial intelligibility exemplified by Krohg's Naturalist poetics. In line with Heidegger's unthought history of art, I will argue that this challenge towards the pictorial idiom of Naturalism is simultaneously a challenge towards the understanding of being that sustains the poetics of this idiom. *The Sick Child*'s challenge of the Krohgian poetics works to disclose reality of death as it appears affectively – or as I will say, in line with Heidegger, as it appears in a 'mood.' Finally, I will suggest that the work's extension of what is possible to represent in a pictorial work of art, also to include affect, brings along a "loosening" of affectivity from the subjective point of view, and hence that the work challenges the subject's privileged position as the guarantee of truth as certainty.

Transgressing the Limits of Pictorial Intelligibility

Historiologically conceived, *The Sick Child* has been understood as a result of a conflict between two different artistic impulses – what Reinhold Heller has called "the intended subjectivity of [Munch's] aims and the intended objectivity of his Naturalist approach."⁵⁹¹ Or rather, between the "subjective" Naturalism of Munch's friend Hans Jæger (one shall "paint one's own life"⁵⁹²) and the "objective" Naturalism of Krohg. In this interpretation, *The Sick*

and deeper recollection of the pictorial thinking of these works would see and think along the way these works stand in relation to other works of their epoch. Other depictions of the prothesis and the deathbed would provide a broader path of thinking which could allow us to see and appreciate in more depth the works' individual contribution to the art history of being.

⁵⁹¹ Reinhold Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 34.

⁵⁹² This subjective or autobiographical impulse is explicitly formulated in "The Commandments of the Bohème," ("Bohêmbud," in *Impressionisten*, ed. Christian Krohg and Oda Krohg (Kristiania: 1889)) usually attributed to Jæger, where commandment number one reads "You shall write your own life." The attribution is contested both by Fosli (Halvor Fosli, *Kristianiaboheemen* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1994), 293) and Bjørnstad (Kjetil Bjørnstad, *Jæger: En rekonstruksjon* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2001), 550), who both claim that it was written by the editors Christian and Oda Krohg as a sardonic pun (the last commandment is "You shall take your own life"). Nevertheless, it seems that the idea of the first commandment was in accordance with what Jæger said and preached to others in the bohemian circle, and that the idea was explicit enough for Munch to refer directly to Jæger when he in a note (from between 1927 and 1933), writes in remembrance of the 1880s, that he "had to seek expression for what moved [his] mind – to this contributed spending time with Hans Jæger – (paint one's own life)." [Jeg måtte søge uttrykk for hva bevæget mit sind – Dertil bidrog omgang med Hans Jæger – (male sit eget liv)] (Edvard Munch,

Child is both an autobiographical representation of Munch's subjective memory of his sister's death, and an objective representation of the models (Betzy Nilsen and Karen Bjølstad).⁵⁹³ However, regardless of the accuracy or correctness of this interpretation – historiologically considered – I contend that it does not reach the truth that is set into work, if seen in light of the art history of being, by and in the work.

What I would like to bring along from the historiological interpretation, however, is the claim that *The Sick Child* was painted on the basis of a certain pictorial idiom, namely a Krohgian Naturalism, with which Munch was well familiar.⁵⁹⁴ It was “born in the teachings of Naturalism,”⁵⁹⁵ as Heller puts it. During the execution of the painting, this pictorial idiom became unsatisfactory and needed to be transgressed in order to depict what was to be depicted. The work was painted with the aid of models, but that which was to be depicted was not possible to represent within the limits of the Krohgian poetics. However accurate the visual semblance to the models were, it was not enough.

If we look, yet again, at *The Sick Child* [image 1], we can see that the work was painted, scratched out, and painted again, several times. But despite the encrusted surface, with all its lines, scratches, and incisions – the work-material of the artwork – we see the sick girl resting against a large pillow, with her mother at the side, the shallow pictorial space, the dresser, the flask, the glass of medicine. Contrary to the crisp Naturalism of Krohg's *Sick Girl*, where the appearance of the material paint on the canvas – the earth of the work – almost seems to disappear in its task of supporting the world of the work, the earth of *The Sick Child* rises and holds itself present. It refuses to fall in line with the beings that are depicted by the work. Nevertheless, the tired eyes of the girl, and the bent neck of the grieving mother rests in the earth that the work sets forth. And the earth of the work is itself let appear due to the openness of the world of the work.

The painting opens up the world of the dying girl and her mother. Overtly and explicitly, however, the painting sets forth the earth, the self-bearing appearance of the work-material; the thick and pastuous paint of the blanket, pillow, and the wall; the soft and careful modulations of the girl's face; and the wall or curtain to the right is brought to appear through the rough and heavy vertical and horizontal strokes.

MM N 122 (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1927-1933). See also the preface of Hans Jæger, *Fra Kristiania-Bohømen* for Jæger's own definition of Naturalism as “deterministic poetry.”

⁵⁹³ For a discussion of this interpretation, see Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 60-5.

⁵⁹⁴ On Munch's artistic development before *The Sick Child*, see for instance *ibid.*, 34-54. See also Bjerke, “Edvard Munch, *The Sick Child*: form as content,”

⁵⁹⁵ Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 34.

Despite its almost brutal irruption into the world of visibility, the earth of the work-material bears the openness of the work's world. Through the scars and incisions, along with the shades of white and pink, the face of the girl is let appear; through the mucky, besmirching mixture of greens, blues and yellows, along with the occasional spots of reds, the arm of the girl is displayed; her right hand is showed through a few strokes of pale pink along with some red lines, indicating blood; her left hand is entirely merged with her mother's, both of which only almost emerge from a nebulous, flesh-toned field of color. But also, in the openness of the work's world the earth is let appear. Through the tired face of the girl, the scratches and incisions, as well as the shades of white, red, and pale pink are let appear; the arm of the girl provides a place for the juxtaposition and mixture of the greens, blues, and yellows; the bloody hand gives room for the appearance of red and pale skin-tones; the merged hands are an occasion for the nuances of flesh-tones to come to light. The world of the painting provides an openness in which the rough and coarse appearance of the work-material – the earth – is *let* appear; at the same time, the earth bears this openness and lets the world of the girl and her mother be shown.

In *The Sick Child*, the striving between earth and world seems agitated and intense; the world of the girl and her mother, and their communal being in the imminence of death, demands of the perceiver to recognize the mother's hopeless despair and the girl's empty-eyed fatigue. At the same time, the earth of the painting, the uneven distribution of colors and textures, the flatness of the pictorial space, the rigidity of the composition, the impure and dull colors, and the *scratches* all over the canvas seems to strive forcefully to conceal the world of the work in a blunt materiality, a simple, unexplainable appearance of the assembly of paint on a canvas.

If we attempt to see *The Sick Child* in the same way as we see *Sick Girl*, the surface appears opaque, and it diffuses and distorts our access to the world of the work. Looking at the heavy, dark red line of the girl's head, it is an error, a falsity. It does not correspond to anything that the human eye can observe: it is false. It is not a strand of hair, it is not a drawn outline of the head, and it is not something hovering above the girl's head. Yet, we see the girl's head. We can see her hair. We can see the pillow. How can we make sense of this dark line?

In the previous section, Krohg's *Sick Girl* brought us in touch with the poietics of the modern epoch, a pictorial intelligibility that works in alignment with the epoch's fundamental understanding of beings as a whole. The real is no longer what rises and falls by itself in the openness of *aletheia*, nor what is created by God – it is the objective world as it is guaranteed

by the subject. The *essential* history of modern painting, I wrote above, becomes the “fighting of the battle” of what and how the reality of the real *is*, and how it can truthfully – and *certainly* so – be represented by the work of art. As such, also Krohg’s painting fights the battle of what and how the reality of the real *is* (also here, “there still is metaphysics”). It prescribes an understanding of what is possible to represent through painting, and how the work-material, oil paint on canvas, must *mean* in order to represent beings. As such, it lets the truth of being establish itself in a being, which I suggest means, most crucially, that it also establishes a *limit* of pictorial intelligibility. How the work *means* conditions what is meaningful and possible to depict. For the medieval engraving – the poietics of which works in alignment with the understanding of truth as *veritas* (the correspondence between the divine intellect and the work) – it is both possible and meaningful to render visible God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary, side by side with dancing and grimacing demons, as well as a dying man on his deathbed. The truthfulness of the work is not a question of its correspondence to the sensuously, empirically observed reality, but its correspondence to the divine realm. Contrary to this, we saw that the poietics of *Sick Girl* shows the reality of the real as what is sensuously, empirically observable. The reality represented by the work is not the bare visual appearance of beings, but the *observable* social relation between two subjects, as observed from the first-person, subjective point of view. The work’s poietics admits the perceiver’s subjective point of view within its boundary, and as such allows it to be represented in the work.

When Munch’s *The Sick Child*, then, transgresses the *pictorial idiom* of Krohg’s Naturalism, I contend that this is not a mere stylistic variation of the same, never-changing motif of the sick girl and the pillow – for the styles are indeed of “a different metaphysical essence.” As such, it is also a transgression of the limits of pictorial intelligibility that are established and prescribed by Krohg’s *Sick Girl*, which means in turn that their *poietics* – their way of bringing forth – are essentially different. Therefore, insofar as the poietics of the artwork *corresponds* to an understanding of beings as a whole, *The Sick Child’s transgression of the Krohgian Naturalist poietics is consequentially also a challenge towards the understanding of beings as a whole that sustains and guides this poietics*. The scratches and incisions on/in *The Sick Child* I suggest are the most visible way in which we can see that the work breaches the limits of how painting is intelligible according to *Sick Girl*. The painted surface of the canvas does not *work* in the same way in the two paintings. The way they *are* as works is essentially different. The strife between world and earth that is traced by the works are different. The work-material of the work does not provide intelligibility in the same way

in the two paintings. The worlds they open are different. Yet, I contend, their pictorial thinking concerns essentially the same, namely the essence of death.

If seen from the perspective of the epochal changes in the pictorial thinking of death, throughout what I have called Heidegger's unthought art history of being, what is significant about *The Sick Child* is neither its relation to Munch's biography, his sister, mother, and aunt; nor to the historical or epidemiological context of Kristiania in the 1880s. What is significant from the perspective of this thesis is that in order to bring the essencing of death to appear, the work challenges and transgresses an established limit of pictorial intelligibility and hence, by altering these limits, contributes to change the limits of intelligibility in general. In terms of the history of the pictorial thinking of death – the path of thinking to which *The Sick Child* belongs – the work shows death in an essentially different way than the ancient Greek pinax and the medieval *Ars Moriendi*-engraving. Like *Sick Girl*, however, it is confined to show death as it appears in reality (determined by the subject's representation), and as such as termination. However, as I will argue, *The Sick Child* shows the reality of death as termination in an essentially different way than *Sick Girl*, and this difference has implications for the history of being.

In order to arrive at the final discussion concerning *The Sick Child's* contribution to the history of being, I will first attempt to think along with the work's way of disclosing the essence of death. How is death's reality shown in *The Sick Child*?

The Affective Reality of Death

In repetition, according to Heidegger, what something "essentially" is, is *how* it is, or how it "holds sway" and is meaningful or intelligible for Dasein of an epoch. The question, "what is death," or "what is the essence of death," I have suggested to mean, "how is death disclosed?" *How* or the *way* in which something is "present" or disclosed as intelligible is what I mean by something *essencing*. In the works of art I have discussed in this chapter, death is disclosed in different ways. In the Archaic pinax, death essences as the concealment (lethe) belonging to any unconcealment (aletheia), life arises from death, and is only in relation to death. Death belongs to life as much as concealment belongs to unconcealment. The prothesis-work is a showing of death as the withdrawal into concealment. It lets the concealing come to appear. In the medieval work, death is not concealment, but is disclosed as the transitional journey into the afterlife. The work shows the impact of the prospect of immediate particular judgment (as well as the final, general judgment) on the way in which the dying behaves in the hour of

death. In Krogh and Munch's paintings, in contrast, there are no references to judgment, and contrary to the two other works, neither a dead person nor the hour of death is shown. Yet, I have suggested that death is disclosed also in these two works – as it is possible to represent within the limits of intelligibility considered as reality.

Thus, contrary to Leif Østby⁵⁹⁶ and Peter Nome,⁵⁹⁷ I do not see *The Sick Child* as representing a girl looking into a world *beyond*, symbolically represented through the light shining in through the window beyond the picture frame. In my view, these interpretations do not take into account the way in which the work means – its poetics – and rather impose an implicit (in Østby's case) or explicit (in Nome's case) Christian interpretation on the work.⁵⁹⁸

The worlds that are opened up both by *Sick Girl* and *The Sick Child* are worlds of death. The “wherein” that is brought to appear by the works are worlds focused by the prospect of approaching death, which thus brings death into view as the withdrawn horizon of the works' intelligibility. Although *Sick Girl* symbolizes death through the withering flower, and *The Sick Child* evokes death through the devastating grief of the mother, both let death come to presence primarily through the depiction of the vulnerable child against a large, white pillow. This, I have suggested, enable us to see the works as belonging to an over two and a half thousand years long history of pictorial thinking of death, where the dead or dying is brought to appear with their head resting on pillows.

In Krogh's painting, however, the dying of the child appears as a regrettable and disturbing event, situated sometime in the near future. Although the very happening of death is beyond our control, the painting shows the being – and by indication, the consequences – of death as it can be represented in correlation to visual appearance. That is, it shows the reality of approaching death as it is graspable and knowable for the subject, and in this limited sense, as it is controllable. Through the means of visual representation, *Sick Girl* stages a fictional meeting between the perceiver and a sick, dying child. In this way, it stages the possibility for the perceiver to be affected by the destiny of the child, which will sometime soon no longer

⁵⁹⁶ Leif Østby, *Fra Naturalisme til Nyromantikk* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1934), 126.

⁵⁹⁷ Nome, *Kunst som "Krystallisasjon,"* 75. Nor do I see the pillow in the painting as a “kind of profane nimbus.” (Ustvedt, “The Story of a Masterpiece,” 124).

⁵⁹⁸ Historic-biographically, however, I might add that that the belief in life after death appears to have been strong in Munch's family. As is attested in Karen Bjølstad's written account of the death of Sofie, Sofie received the absolution, took farewell with her family, promised to bring greetings from the family to her mother in heaven, and died “softly and quiet” after commending her soul to God the Father. MM N 3736. (See appendix XIII). Whether or not this was Munch's personal belief, however, is a question that falls outside of the scope of this thesis. See Nome, *Kunst som "Krystallisasjon,"*, 53-101, for a discussion of the religious life of Munch and Munch's family. And for a brief discussion of Bjølstad's account, see Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 102-3. For an alternative discussion of Munch's non-Christian religiosity, see Sophia Oftedal, *Monism and Synaesthesia: Two Metaphysical Concepts in the Art of Edvard Munch* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2007, Master thesis).

sit in the chair. The work shows the *social* reality of death, as it can be shown through the representation of objective, visual reality.

Contrary to Krohg's *Sick Girl*, Munch's *The Sick Child* – through its transgression of Krohg's Naturalist poetics – seems to refute that the modern essencing of death can be adequately represented in this way. The work shows the reality of death as something “more” than that which is visually present and representable. *The Sick Child* brings the complex and ambiguous affectivity of death to appear. Death is not concealment or transition, nor is it the social reality of the endpoint of a short, human life. The work addresses and shows the affective reality of death. What is represented by the work is the way death claims our being in a confused mixture of grief, fear, and despair, as well as the pain and anxiety evoked by the anticipation of loss.

In my view, *The Sick Child* renders visible death exactly *as* this affective reality. It does not only represent the visual, objective appearance of a grieving or mourning mother – as for instance seen in C. W. Peale's *Rachel Weeping* (1772-6) [image 40]. Rather, the work seems to attempt to “loosen” the affect both from its objective appearance and from the interiority of the subjects represented, in order to bring the affective presence of death as such to appear. In contrast, the Archaic pinax shows the women performing the traditional gestures of mourning – tearing their hair.⁵⁹⁹ But the Archaic work does not show death *as* this affective reality. The work does not address the subjective feeling of grief and despair in the mourners as such, but displays their shared recognition of death's concealed presencing. The men, raising their arms, do likewise show and let appear - by this gesture of recognition of someone departing – death as a withdrawing into concealment. The gesturing depicted provides an openness in which death as concealment can appear. Hence, my claim is not that human beings did not respond affectively to death in ancient Greece or in the Middle Ages,⁶⁰⁰ but that *The Sick Child*, in contrast to the other works discussed in this thesis, primarily addresses and shows the reality of death as it claims our affective life.

However, the most general aspect of this interpretation – that *The Sick Child* shifts the emphasis from the objective realm of visual appearance to the subjective realm of affectivity – is an interpretation that surfaces in different variations throughout the literature on Munch. As Ustvedt writes, in contrast to Krohg's *Sick Girl*, *The Sick Child* rigorously tones down

⁵⁹⁹ See Shapiro, "The Iconography of Mourning in Athenian Art," , 630 and 634.

⁶⁰⁰ However, I do not claim anything in regard to what extent, or in what manner and meaning grief took place in the age of the ancient Greeks, or in the Middle Ages.

“symbols, narrative and socially critical elements...in favor of more general and universal themes...The focus is on *the aspect of loss* and the relation between the mother and the dying child.”⁶⁰¹ And Eggum argues that with *The Sick Child*, Munch brought “himself closer to a more emotionally charged and individualistic art where *psychic realities* became the governing motif.”⁶⁰² Grøgaard has called it “stenographed affect,”⁶⁰³ but the term is here used synonymously with expressionism, and he argues that it is “early to talk about an “expressionist intent” in 1886.”⁶⁰⁴ Moreover, although not aimed at *The Sick Child* in particular, Przybyszewski – in the essay discussed in the opening pages of this thesis – describes Munch’s art as a “psychic naturalism.”⁶⁰⁵ In this sense, *The Sick Child*’s transgression of the Krohgian Naturalist poetics has been seen as resulting in an extension of the observable and representable reality, beyond visual appearance, also to include a “psychic reality.” The question remains, however, what this “psychic reality” is and to whom it belongs.

All of the above, with the exception of Przybyszewski, interpret (to a lesser or higher degree) the turn towards affectivity in light of Munch’s biography – and discuss, speculate, or claim that the work was Munch’s attempt at rendering visible *his* feelings concerning *his* sister’s death.⁶⁰⁶ In light of this interpretation, the viewer is invited to stand in the shoes of Munch himself, as it were, and as Heller puts it, to relive and “share the experience.”⁶⁰⁷ In my view, however, it is not clear that the work invites the viewer to assume this position, as if in a similar way to Krohg’s *Sick Girl*.⁶⁰⁸ Rather, I contend that a significant aspect of the work is that it works to reject the viewer’s identification with a stable point of view. The affectivity of the work does not “belong” only to the perspective of the viewer, standing in the place of the artist looking at his canvas. It belongs as much (or as little) to the girl and the mother. The inwardness of the gaze of the child might let the work appear as if its world is seen through her eyes; or, as Tøjner argues, through the mother figure’s devastating grief.⁶⁰⁹ The flatness of

⁶⁰¹ Ustvedt, "The Story of a Masterpiece," 124. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰² Eggum, "The Theme of Death," 148. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁰³ Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 62.

⁶⁰⁴ [det er tidlig å snakke om en «expressionist intent» i 1886]. Ibid., 62. “Expressionist intent” is a quote from Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 35, whose interpretation Grøgaard discusses in the text. The notion of ‘stenography’ is in turn a reference to Jæger, who worked as a stenographer in the parliament.

⁶⁰⁵ Przybyszewski, "Psychich Naturalism," 1044. (*Das Werk Des Edvard Munch*).

⁶⁰⁶ Grøgaard notes, however, that “*The Sick Child* became not only [Munch’s] portrait of Sofie, exactly not, it became *his* motif.” [*Det syke barn ble ikke bare hans portrett av Sofie, nettopp ikke, det ble hans motiv*] Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 66.

⁶⁰⁷ Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 35.

⁶⁰⁸ Despite claiming a “kinship in the way the...pictures activate the viewer,” Ustvedt makes a distinction between *Sick Girl* and *The Sick Child*, where the former has a “direct communication of the gaze, while Munch’s picture puts the viewer in the position of a witness.” Ustvedt, "The Story of a Masterpiece," 124.

⁶⁰⁹ “The perceiver’s point of identification is not the dying child, the picture is not about anxiety of death, but about being abandoned. It is the mother who senses death and hides her face in despair. It is the mother and us

the pictorial space does not appear to invite the perceiver to the fiction of standing in the same room as the girl and her mother. The encrusted surface, the disappearing pillow, the flask and the glass (which are merely indicated by a few lines of paint), and especially the myriad scratches and incisions, all works to keep the viewer at a distance.

What I suggest is rather something similar to what was recognized as early as in Jæger's review of the Autumn Exhibition of 1886, where *The Sick Child* first was exhibited. In the newspaper *Dagen* (20.10.1886), Jæger writes about his visit to the exhibition, and how he supposedly talked to a man – who discards the painting as a “scandal”⁶¹⁰ – about the meaning and creation of the work. According to Jæger, what is central for the artist is not that it accurately represents visual reality, but that the work brings forth a “mood” [stemning].⁶¹¹

Jæger, however, does not describe or explain what this mood is in any more detail, although he seems to suggest that the work's “sketch”-like appearance, which has “failed to find a form,”⁶¹² is the origin of the work's bringing forth of a mood. In line with the perspective of this thesis, however, I suggest that Jæger's claim might be seen in light of what Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls ‘disposedness’ [Befindlichkeit].⁶¹³ Disposedness names an existential structure of Dasein, which describes the phenomenon that one always “find oneself” [sich befinden] in an ‘attunement’ or ‘mood’ [Stimmung]. According to Heidegger, Dasein's being-in-the-world is never “neutral,” but is always disclosed affectively. Dasein is, for instance, bored, curious, or anxious (which are among Heidegger's own examples),⁶¹⁴ or

and the painter it is about, the child itself is already on her way into some light of explanation, which no one can say what is.” Poul Erik Tøjner, *Munch: Med egne ord* (Oslo: Press, 2000; repr., 2003), 14-5. Translation mine.

⁶¹⁰ Hans Jæger, quoted in Ustvedt, *The Sick Child: The Story of a Masterpiece* 156.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 86 and 156. Note that Jæger writes “fik frem” which literally means “got forth” or “brought forth” and not “capture” and “evoke” as it is translated. Note also, that while Jæger defended the work and claimed it attested to Munch's “genius,” he also lamented the work's inability to reach out to a broader audience. And finally, note that the very notion of ‘mood’ [stemning] and mood-painting [stemningsmaleri] has been a central notion in Norwegian art history, often in relation to what has also been called new-Romanticism [nyromantikk] and *recollective art* [erindringskunst]. A discussion of these terms and their application by artists, critics, and art historians is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss. Nevertheless, see for instance, Tore Kirkholt, *Inderlighet og moderne drømmer: Kritikk og resepsjon av malerkunsten i Norge: 1820-1914* (Trondheim: NTNU, 2010, PhD. Dissertation), 231-239 and 284-303; Øivind Storm Bjerke, “Edvard Munch and Harald Sohlberg. Two artists and their Relationship to the Local Norwegian Art World,” in *Edvard Munch, Harald Sohlberg. Landscapes of the Mind* (New York: National Academy of Design, 1995), 98-99; Østby, *Fra Naturalisme til Nyromantikk*, 52-83. And chapter four of this thesis, section one.

⁶¹² Ustvedt, *The Sick Child: The Story of a Masterpiece* 156.

⁶¹³ In Macquarrie and Robinson's translation, ‘Befindlichkeit’ is translated as ‘state-of-mind,’ but it has been argued that this translation makes the impression that moods are private properties of minds, which is exactly based upon the understanding of subjectivity which Heidegger seeks to overcome. The now more common translation as ‘disposedness’ is less subject-oriented, but still lacks the important root-meaning in *Befindlichkeit* that one always *find* oneself in a mood. Moods are hence not projected or invented by a mind which otherwise is neutral. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 172-179. (GA 2, 178-186).

⁶¹⁴ These attunements are each subject to philosophical scrutiny by Heidegger. On boredom, see *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 78-167 (GA 29-30, 117-249). On curiosity, see *Being and Time*, 214-17

joyous, irritated, frightened, eager, exited – or any combination or nuance between these and other attunements – I might add. Dasein is never *not* attuned; it always finds itself in some mood or attunement. What is significant for my argument is that Heidegger argues that a mood is not something private, interior to the subject. Rather, he claims it is a fundamental way in which *world* is disclosed for Dasein. As such, he writes that in “the primordial disclosure belonging to moods...Dasein is brought before its being as “there”.”⁶¹⁵ A mood is not reducible to the subject’s individual feelings, as if moods are mere supplements projected unto an otherwise brute, material reality. It is a fundamental way in which Dasein’s understanding of being occurs. Any clearing – any “there” – in which Dasein stands is disclosed affectively.

What Heidegger’s notions of disposedness and attunement/moods bring to the comprehension of *The Sick Child* is not the claim that Munch somehow foreshadows Heidegger’s philosophy, but the possibility of understanding how *The Sick Child*’s representation of affectivity somewhat paradoxically *loosens* the affect’s relation to a subject. In light of Heidegger’s notions, I suggest that we can see that *The Sick Child* does neither show affect as a being “in-it-self” nor as a property of a subject, but as a phenomenon that belongs to the disclosure of a *world*. Thus, I contend that *The Sick Child* can be seen as a representation of a complex and confused mood of grief and fear of loss, which itself discloses a world, a “there” or “wherein,” which is saturated by the presence of death. In this way, the work does not “express” affectivity, but represents the reality of death as it comes to presence affectively.

Before concluding this chapter, the final aspect of *The Sick Child* I would like to discuss is the question concerning the metaphysical significance of the work’s poietics. By representing the reality of death as a mood, *The Sick Child* alters the limits of pictorial intelligibility of the Krohgian Naturalist poietics. This poietics, I have argued, works in alignment with an understanding of being in which the reality of the real is ascertained by the subject’s observation of visual and objective reality. And insofar as the poietics of the work *corresponds* to an understanding of beings as a whole, *The Sick Child*’s challenge of the Krohgian limits of pictorial intelligibility is also a challenge towards the truth of being (the limits of intelligibility in general) that sustains these limits. What understanding of beings as a whole is revealed in *The Sick Child*?

(GA 2, 226-230). And anxiety, *Being and Time*, 228-35 (GA 2, 244-243). I will discuss the relation between anxiety and Heidegger’s analysis of being-towards-death in the next chapter of this thesis.

⁶¹⁵ *Being and Time*, 173. (GA 2, 179).

On the Metaphysical Significance of *The Sick Child's* Poietics

The Sick Child opens a world where death is brought forth as mood. Through the work, the reality of death appears affectively. However, in order to represent affect – to bring mood forth – the work challenges the way in which the Krohgian Naturalist poietics claims to guarantee the truthfulness of its representation; namely, the correlation between pictorial representation and subjective, visual observation.

While Krohg's *Sick Girl* lets the affective reality of death remain within the "interior," and thus invisible, *mineness* of the subjective sphere – both "in" the girl depicted and "in" the viewer – Munch's *The Sick Child* brings the mood of death to appear in the visual, "exterior" objectivity of the artwork. In my view, this should not be understood as an "expression" of the artist's subjective "feelings" through the work, as if the work is a neutral medium, conveying the subjective, invisible affectivity. Rather, I think the work should itself be seen as a representation of a mood, and in this way, explicitly as a making-*visible* of a mood, as belonging to the world that the work opens up. In comparison, we can see that this way of making "visible what is otherwise invisible" is *essentially* different from the one of the Archaic pinax and the medieval engraving. In the former, the work's making-visible is, like any being, a bringing forth (poiesis) out of concealment (lethe), into the openness of truth (aletheia). The work is a bringing forth of something in the openness of truth. In the latter, invisible, suprasensuous beings – God, Jesus, the Virgin, and the demons – are rendered visible in the work of art. In contrast, *The Sick Child*, as I argued above, extends the observable and representable reality also to include the otherwise invisible, affective sphere of moods.

Thus we can see that while Krohg's *Sick Girl* places the perceiver in a specific point within the painting's extended pictorial space (both by its explicit address to the perceiver through the girl's direct gaze, as well as the reflections on the armchair), *The Sick Child* appears to hold the viewer at a distance. Indeed, the encrusted, pastuous, and scratched surface emphasizes the self-rising work-material of the work and seems to reject the perceiver's sense of inclusion in the pictorial space of the work – so central to *Sick Girl*. But this "rejection" of the perceiver I suggest we might see not as a distortion or diffusion of the visually observable reality, but exactly as the work's way of loosening the representation of affectivity from the *subject*. The surface of the work and the tension between its earth-like sensuous appearance, and the world – the *there* – that it opens up, seems to be what brings the affectivity of the work to appear. Indeed, the work does not represent affectivity by faithfully representing the visually observable world, but by instigating an agitated and intense strife

between world and earth, where the appearance of the depicted beings are continuously threatened by being submerged in the materiality of the work. The bringing forth of a mood of death is a result of the continuous battling between that which strives to hold the world of the work open and that which strives to keep it closed. *Somehow*, this continuous oscillation between emergence and withdrawal (or rather, between the emergence of world and the emergence of earth), discloses the affective reality of death. But what or where in the work “is” this “affective reality”?

As I see it, it is not possible to point at some particular part or aspect of the painting in order to show “where” the work’s affectivity resides. It is impossible to provide certain evidence that will prove the accuracy of the work’s representation of the mood.⁶¹⁶ In contrast, the accuracy of *Sick Girl*’s pictorial representation of visual reality can be attested by pointing out the visual resemblance or dissemblance, i.e. the correspondence, between the work and visual reality.⁶¹⁷ But to what within the limits of intelligibility of the visually observed reality does *The Sick Child* correspond? *The Sick Child* does not correspond to an objective reality that can be ascertained by the same certainty as *Sick Girl*. Yet, the work somehow represents the reality of death as it appears in a mood.

My suggestion for making sense of this is that by extending the Naturalist poetics to the observation and representation (i.e. the control) of the affective sphere of moods, *The Sick Child*, paradoxically, weakens the *subject*’s control over the truthfulness of the representation. It extends the domain of the pictorial representation of *observable reality* beyond what is possible to ascertain. Note that I do not claim that *The Sick Child* is a complete rejection of the subject’s privilege as the guarantee of the certainty of representation, but that by loosening its relation to the subjective point of view, the work also loosens its claim to truthfully – correctly and certainly so – representing reality. In order to represent the reality of death as it essentially is as mood, the work simultaneously weakens its claim of the certainty of its representation. As such, the work challenges the understanding of beings as a whole as what is representable from the subjective point of view.

A way of understanding this extension of the observable reality is to see it as a challenge towards the sense of ownership or *mineness* of the observation to which the

⁶¹⁶ Although it is possible to measure the viewers’ affective response to the work from a neuro-psychological point of view, this does nevertheless not explain what it is about the work that provokes these affective responses.

⁶¹⁷ The point is not that *Sick Girl* is or is not an accurate representation of visual reality – whatever that would be – but that it works in alignment with a concept of truth (as certainty) where it is meaningful to discuss its success or failure in terms of its correspondence with visual reality. This, I would argue, is not the case with *The Sick Child*.

representation correlates.⁶¹⁸ While Krohg's *Sick Girl* works to strengthen the understanding of beings as a whole as the reality which is graspable through the *subject's* representation of objective reality, *The Sick Child* can be seen as working towards loosening the relation between the subjective, first-person perspective and the work. Through loosening the relation to the subjective point of view, the work is simultaneously loosening the subject's position as guarantee of the certainty of representation of reality. For what is crucial, is that what the work brings forth (a mood of death) demands that the viewer adapt to the *work's* mode of bringing forth – to adapt to *its* poietics and *its* limits of pictorial intelligibility. In order for the mood of death to be seen, the viewer must adapt its perception to the work. The perceiver cannot demand of the work that the mood that is brought forth by the work can be ascertained by its correlation to the subject's representation of visual reality. It is only available – it is only really *there* – if the perceiver accepts the poietics of the work, i.e. *the work's* way of being intelligible.

As a *preserver* of the work, the perceiver must stand within “the truth that is happening in the work.”⁶¹⁹ However, in order to think along with the work – to recollect the pictorial thinking that goes on in the work – one need to see and acknowledge the way the work demands of the perceiver to adapt to its poietics, its truth of being. *The Sick Child's* representation of the affective reality of death can in this way be seen as the paradox that the extension of what is representable (the extension of the limits of pictorial intelligibility) is also an alteration – however slight – of the subject's dominating position as the ultimate guarantee of the reality of the real within the metaphysics of the modern epoch.

⁶¹⁸ On the *mineness*, or *ipseity*, of subjective consciousness, see for instance Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge and London: MIT, 2006), 115-116.

⁶¹⁹ Heidegger, "The Origin," 65. [der im Werk geschehenden Wahrheit] (*GA* 5, 55).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed *The Sick Child* as a contribution to opening up Heidegger's unthought history of art, and thus the attempt at understanding what it means that thinking also goes on in works of art. My Heideggerian approach has in this way placed Munch's painting far from its usual historical-biographical and socio-historical contexts, and rather seen it as belonging to a history of pictorial thinking of death, a history stretching back to the art of ancient Greece. I have argued that the work discloses an understanding of death that is enabled by its transgression of a certain Naturalist poietics. At the same time, this transgression was understood as a challenge towards the metaphysical understanding of being that sustains the poietics of Naturalism. Therefore, we can see *The Sick Child* in light of what I wrote above: what the work discloses is contingent upon the work's poietics. In order to disclose the reality of death as mood, the poietics of the work had to be altered.

In this way, the perspective of Heidegger's unthought art history of being led my discussion concerning *The Sick Child* to the question concerning the essence of death. Throughout this chapter, we have encountered various understandings of what death "is," but the determination of death as an *existential phenomenon*, which was merely indicated in the beginning of this chapter, has yet to be clarified. For each of the essential understandings of death that are disclosed by the works throughout this chapter are, in Heidegger's terms, *inessential*, metaphysical *essentia* of death. Indeed, the various understandings of death that I have discussed in this chapter have in common not *what* or *how* death is understood, but *how* the understanding of death is revealed. *The Sick Child* does not disclose death as a point in time or as a biological process, but as something that is present affectively, despite "being" withdrawn – death "is" nowhere to be seen in the painting. It is shown as the horizon that saturates the "there" – the world – of the sick girl and her mother. However, one might ask, is this not merely to put the name "death" on an affective comportment towards a point in time or biological process? For what is meant by "death" so that it can be an issue for pictorial thinking? Are the changing understandings of death a mere sidetrack to the history of being, or do these changes relate even more closely to the essential transformations of truth? What is "death" and its relation to being, according to Heidegger? In order to attempt to find some answers to these questions, I will in the next chapter turn to Munch's painting *Metabolism: Life and Death*, and with it, to Heidegger's interpretation of death in *Being and Time* as "being-towards-death," and his post-WWII writings concerning "the mortals."

CHAPTER FOUR | METABOLISM

THE FALL OF MAN AND THE BIRTH OF DEATH

In this chapter, I will turn to Munch's painting *Metabolism* (1898-1899), and ask how it can be understood from the perspective of Heidegger's unthought history of art. As I will show, *Metabolism's* relation to the theme of death is explicit, both in terms of its various titles (*Metabolism, Life and Death*), but also as it belongs to a pictorial history of the depiction of the fall of man (indeed, when exhibited the first time in 1900, the painting was called *Adam and Eve*). As I will return to in the final section of this chapter, in *Genesis*, the fall of man is also the birth of death; due to the original sin, the human being became mortal and will "certainly die."⁶²⁰ As Nome writes, the "fundamental thought" of the Christian "doctrine of the work of Salvation by God... [is] that God gave his life through his earthly Son for us to gain eternal life."⁶²¹ The fall of man – the mortality of the human being – is the condition for both Judgment and Salvation, which are central to Christian faith as such. The main aim of

⁶²⁰ *Genesis*, 2:17

⁶²¹ [grunntanken i læren om Guds frelsesverk... at Gud ga sitt liv gjennom sin jordiske sønn for at vi skal få evig liv] Nome, *Kunst som "Krystallisasjon,"* 241.

this chapter, however, is to attempt to unfold the work's contribution to the pictorial thinking of death. Based in Heidegger's thinking on death, I will discuss the work's relation to the historical provenance of its pictorial thinking, and finally, the work's contribution to this history.

The chapter is structured in three sections. In the first, I will introduce and describe *Metabolism*. According to Munch, *Metabolism* is as necessary to *The Frieze of Life* as the "buckle is to the belt."⁶²² Hence, I will briefly discuss the Symbolist poetics of *The Frieze*, its relation to Symbolism more broadly conceived and to the poetics of *The Sick Child*. The section concludes by unfolding the question concerning *Metabolism*'s pictorial thinking of death.

In section two, I will prepare for my attempt at thinking along with the pictorial thinking of *Metabolism*, by questioning how Heidegger understands death as an existential phenomenon in *Being and Time*, and how this understanding is altered in two post-WWII lectures. My basic argument is that while Heidegger in *Being and Time* seems to claim that Dasein's understanding of death is based upon its understanding of being, his writings on "the mortals" seems to suggest that the human being's understanding of being is granted through the essence of death, and hence that the history of being is not only a history of the "oblivion of being"⁶²³ but also a history of the oblivion of death.

In the final section, I will return to *Metabolism*. First, I will discuss the work's relation to the theme of the fall of man by exploring the outlines of its pictorial history – traced back to a 2nd century fresco from the catacomb of St. Januarius (San Gennaro, Naples), through Medieval illuminations, and a print by Albrecht Dürer (to mention only a few of my examples). Finally, I will suggest that *Metabolism* takes a decisive step – a primordial leap [Ur-sprung] – from out of the pictorial history to which it belongs in order to let the late-modern epoch's essential understanding of death arrive and be shown by the work of art. *Metabolism* transgresses both the poetics of *The Frieze* (which works within the limits of pictorial intelligibility established by *The Sick Child*), and inverses and overturns the essential Neo-Platonism of its contemporary Symbolism. In this way, it thinks death's reality in its unity with life, within the metaphysical totality of beings as a whole thought as "Eternity." From Heidegger's perspective, however, this appears paradoxically as a preparation for the final oblivion of death as death.

⁶²² Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

⁶²³ Heidegger, "Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture "Time and Being"," 29. [Seinsvergessenheit] (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens*, 37).

Section One | Metabolism

Metabolism stands in a peculiar place within Munch's oeuvre, bridging different works and different themes. On the one hand, it relates to drawings [image 47], graphic works [image 48 and 49], and watercolors [image 50] dealing with the metabolism theme from the 1890s – works that emerged when Munch was commissioned to illustrate a new edition of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1896. Although the project was never completed, Munch created a series of works intended for the publication.⁶²⁴ On the other hand, it can be seen in relation to Munch's more or less explicit Adam and Eve-related paintings, such as *Jealousy*, [image 18], *Eye in Eye* (Woll 461), *Fertility* (Woll 462 and 528), and the later *Adam and Eve* (Woll 840 and 841).⁶²⁵ Most crucial for this thesis, however, is Munch's claim from 1918 that the work bridges the theme of *The Frieze of Life* ("the individual human being's sorrows and joys seen closely") and the later *Aula-decorations* ("the grand, eternal forces") (Woll 917-977).⁶²⁶ Moreover, he writes:

The frieze is thought as a poem about life, about love and death. The motif in the largest picture with the two, the man and the woman in the forest, lies perhaps somewhat to the side of the idea in the other pictures, but it is nevertheless as necessary for the whole frieze as the buckle is to the belt. It is the picture of life as death, the forest which draws sustenance from the dead and the city, which grows up behind the tree crowns.⁶²⁷

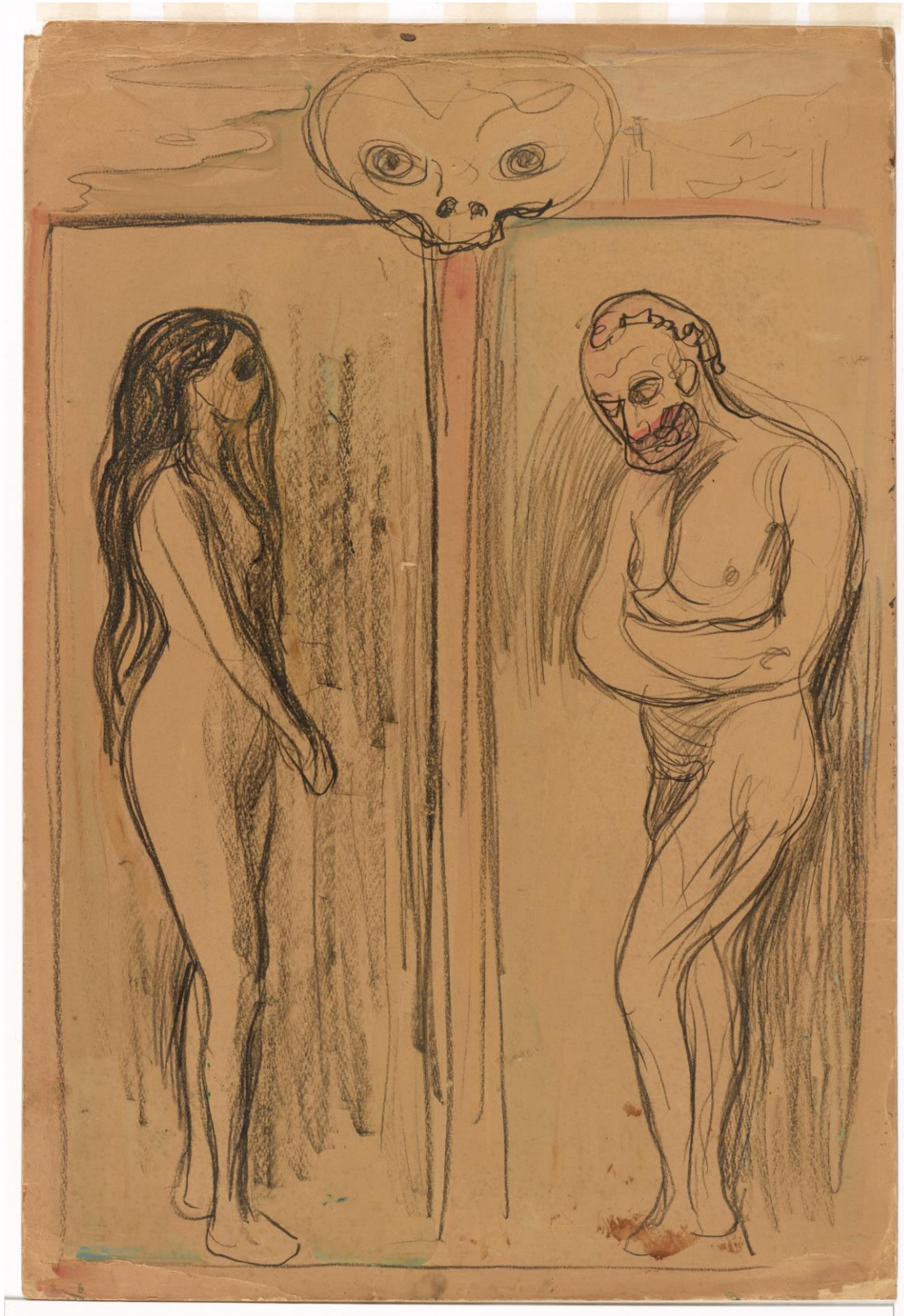
As mentioned in the previous chapter, many of Munch's most well-known works belongs to *The Frieze*. However, not only as a restriction of the scope of this thesis, but also due to my choice of what I think are the most significant and illuminating works for intimating Munch's pictorial thinking of death, I have chosen not to go into depth in *The Frieze* as such. Nevertheless, I must mention that I see *The Frieze*, not understood as a specific selection of works, but as an artistic project or impulse, as significant for the attempt at recollecting and understanding *Metabolism* – which according to Munch is the work that completes *The Frieze*

⁶²⁴ Eggum, *Edvard Munch: Malerier - Skisser og Studier*, 150. On this, and a discussion of other related drawings, see Høifødt, "Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens "Beltespenne", 129 and 132-133.

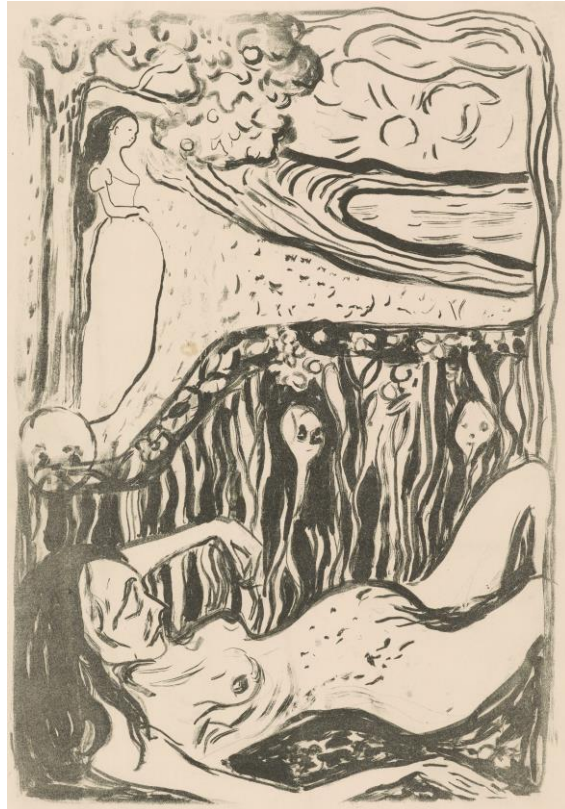
⁶²⁵ See "Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens "Beltespenne", 133-134.

⁶²⁶ [Livsfrisen er det enkelte menneskes sorger og glæder set paa nært hold – Universitetsdekorationerne er de store evige kræfter. Baade livsfrisen og Universitetsdekorationerne møtes i livsfrisens store billede Mand og kvinde i skogen med den gyldne by i baggrunden] Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

⁶²⁷ Ibid. [Appendix XIV].



47. **Edvard Munch, *Stoffveksling (Liv og død)*, Ca. 1898-1903.**
[Metabolism (Life and Death)] (MM T 413) Pencil and water color on cardboard, 810 x 555 mm. The Munch Museum, Oslo.



48. **Edvard Munch, *Stoffveksling*, 1897.**
[Metabolism] Woll 104. Lithography, 365 x 250 mm. The Munch Museum, Oslo.



49. **Edvard Munch, *Liv og Død*, 1902(?).**
[Life and Death], Woll 194. Etching, 189 x 149 mm. The Munch Museum, Oslo.



50. **Edvard Munch**, *Stoffveksling*, 1898.
[Metabolism] Ink and watercolor on paper. The Munch Museum, Oslo.

as its “buckle.” Moreover, if we are to follow Munch’s metaphoric description of the relation between *Metabolism* and *The Frieze*, it is crucial that a buckle needs to stand apart from a belt – it needs to be something different – in order to bring together its ends; or to complete the circle, if you will.

In this section, I will therefore, after first giving a provisional description of *Metabolism*, turn to a discussion of the Symbolist poetics of *The Frieze* and its relation to Symbolism more generally conceived. Finally, I will suggest that *Metabolism* transgresses the poetics of *The Frieze* in order to bring an essential understanding of death into view – that is, to *think* the essence of death. The section will end by posing the question concerning what death “is” so that it can be thought pictorially.

Metabolism: Life and Death

The monumental painting in vertical format (172.5 x 142 cm), with its heavy wooden frame, depicts a life-size nude couple, standing in the midst of a forest, separated by a centrally located tree.⁶²⁸ On the lower section of the frame, the roots of the tree are carved out, drawing nurture from a human and an animal skull. On the top section, there is a silhouette of a city, with blue sky above and green fields below. The woman and the man are slightly turned against each other. The red-haired woman is about to gently rise her right arm; the dark-haired man covers his stomach with his left, while holding the right behind his head. From the dark-green ground emerge the outlines of straight pines, in the background of which we can discern a few patches of red and coral which seem to run like a ribbon behind the trees. Still in the background, above the ribbon, there is a bright field of blues and turquoise. The reds and the corals separate the dense, dark green of the lower part of the canvas from the lighter blue tones above. The thin trees, which emerge out of the lower part, serves to counter the horizontal organization of background, becoming a middle-ground which rises up from the deep-greens, in-between the nude couple and the central tree, and the coral and turquoise.

⁶²⁸ The most comprehensive scholarly account of *Metabolism* is Høifødt, “Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens ”Beltespenne”,” which is an edited and slightly expanded edition of a chapter from *Kvinnen, Kunsten, Korset*, 84-103. However, *Metabolism* is regularly mentioned in texts concerning *The Frieze of Life*, most notably in, Eggum, “*Livsfrisen* som den var utstilt hos Blomqvist i 1918,” ; see also, for instance, Frank Høifødt, “Kvinnen - Kjærlighet og Død - Dommedag,” in *Edvard Munchs Livsfrise: En rekonstruksjon av utstillingen hos Blomqvist 1918*, ed. Karen Lerheim and Gunnar Sørensen, 97-111 (Oslo: Munch-Museet and Labyrinth Press, 2003), 102-106; and Guleng, “Livsfrisens fortellinger. Edvard Munchs bildeserier,” 136. Moreover, see also, Eggum, “The Theme of Death,” 179; *Edvard Munch: Malerier - Skisser og Studier*, 155-156; Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 144; Nome, *Kunst som ”Krystallisasjon,”* 244; Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism*, 97-106; and Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 132-133.

The uneven distribution of light, which selectively illuminates the bodies ever so slightly from the top left, does not fall on what appears to be the forest floor. The chalky white, highlighted reflection on the central tree – aligned at shoulder height of the man – is distinct from the warmer, but somehow still *dark*, glow of the couple. The brightness of the shine of the woman's back serves to balance the more fully illuminated massive body of the man.

Looking more closely, the woman's head and hair is a single massive field of dark dense reds, the silhouette and facial features of which are marked out with a few, heavy and dark lines drawn from the tip of the long red hair, above the head and downwards. Her eyes are not clearly visible, except as indicated by the dark eye sockets. She has no mouth. The silhouette of her entire body is outlined with burgundy and rusty reds, alternately merging with the reds of her hair and contrasting the moss greens and dirty yellows of her legs and feet. The man's body is likewise outlined in red, but he has, in contrast to the woman, a more discernable face. Most emphatically, the deep dark eye-sockets are highlighted with ultramarine on the eyelids (as well as along the hairline) and with two semi-transparent strokes of dark red beneath the eyes. A yet brighter red gives shape to his lips and the tip of the nose.

The central tree gradually rises up from the deep green below, with strange yellow, red and blue lines heavily applied on top. The bark is gradually emerging in light brown and coral, mixed with small patches of red and blue. In the exact center of the painting, we can see the vague, almost vanished outlines – indeed, the mere ghostly appearance – of a fetus.

Originally, or at least in 1903 when the painting was exhibited and photographed in Leipzig [image 51], the painting had a somewhat different appearance. From the photograph, we can discern the clear formation of a massive plant which grows up from the roots carved into the frame. In the midst of the plant, there lies a sickly fetus. In other words, *Metabolism*, like *The Sick Child*, went through a massive re-painting some years after its original execution.⁶²⁹ It is difficult, however, to judge from the photograph how much of the painting was re-painted. The background is almost impossible to see due to the bright light. What is clear, nevertheless, is that the plant and the fetus sprung up from the roots, with two of the leaves covering the genitals of the man. In the current version, the leaves are gone, and we can see the strange reproductive organ of the man, covered and outlined with a rusty red wash, merging the organ and the pubic hairs. The red of the groin both serves to draw attention to the reproductive organ and to cover it. In contrast to the highly articulated

⁶²⁹ For a discussion of the repainting and the first state of the work, see Høifødt, "Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens "Beltespenne"," 124; and *Kvinnen, Kunsten, Korset*, 84-89.



51. Photograph and detail from the exhibition at Beyer and Sohn, Leipzig, 1903. (B 1102) The Munch Museum, Oslo.

face, along with the rest of the body, the legs, knees and even the feet of the man, the genitals are vague and indistinct while, paradoxically, at the same time highly emphasized.

Including the carved frame, the three-partite horizontal organization of the work presents three different viewpoints: above, a distant view of the city walls and skyline, placed above us on a hill; in the middle, the man and woman are aligned with our view so that when we look down at the man's left foot, it is seen slightly from above; below, the skulls and the roots of the tree is seen directly frontally – as if a clean sectional cut has been made into the earth. The three fields provide decreasing pictorial spaciousness: from the distant sky and skyline of the city; the closer bodies, the forest in the middle ground, and the turquoise and corals in the back; to the close-up skulls and roots, surrounded by nothing but massive nothingness. As a result of the work's spatial organization, the city in the top-field clearly breaks with the middle-field by depicting a city where the tree-crown otherwise would have been; while the lower-field seems to continue from the middle-field, as if continuing from the central tree, showing its roots. But the roots do not fit with the size of the trunk above, nor are they aligned so as to smoothly continue the flow of the tree from the canvas into the frame – as seems to have been the case before the re-painting.

The work presents the juxtaposition of three separate picture fields which through this very juxtaposition are set in relation to each other, so as to provide three simultaneous views, including a point of view set underground. Each field is executed quite differently: in contrast to the simple – yet richer – middle-field, the top-field shows merely the simplest outlines and shallow relief of a grand city (the city walls, some towers, and a dome); the lower field is carved in a deeper and coarser relief, but shows even the little teeth of the skull and some, tiny slender roots. On the canvas, the forest floor is shown as a massive, dark field, which sucks up and conceals the lower part of the trees. There are no stones, flowers, grass or animals there, just dense dark-green darkness. The bodies of the two are occasionally softly modulated, but otherwise more coarsely treated, with strange lines and color patches – such as the thin, black line running from the man's hip, above the navel, across his stomach – or the little black, vertical line on the woman's hip – or the two red lines cutting across the toes of the man. The brushstrokes are clearly visible, and are applied in a mixture of slightly heavier and looser strokes. The illumination, which seems to come from a different light-source than the rest of the place, works to emphasize the nude bodies of the couple, and lets their faces (and especially the woman's) rest in shadows.

What and how does the work *show*? From the Heideggerian perspective of thesis - what configuration of world and earth is traced by the rift and set in place in the figure that the work “is” – i.e. in what way is meaning brought forth and what is *essentially* brought into view and let appear in the work as such? What truth is happening in the work – or rather, what happening of truth *is* the work? Contrary to *The Sick Child*, *Metabolism* appears far removed from the Naturalistic poetics and the understanding of the beings as a whole as what is representable from the perspective of subjective observation. While *The Sick Child* can almost – yet in the end, as I have argued, insufficiently – be described as a diffused depiction of an observed reality, *Metabolism* is clearly not a Naturalist study of a man and woman standing in the forest. The couple is emphatically nude, not naked, as Grøgaard notes.⁶³⁰ The strict symmetry of the composition, the variable light, and the outlines around the bodies, along with the three-partite organization of the work emphasizes other concerns than accurate correspondence with a visually observable reality. Yet, the work sets up a world and sets forth the earth. But what world is held up by the earth of the work-material?

As we saw Heidegger claim in the previous chapters, ‘world’ is not the beings depicted by the work, nor its “content,” but “the ever non-objective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into being.”⁶³¹ It is a “there” or “wherein” of Dasein, which in turn is sustained and guided by the history of being. But in order to see and grasp what and how the work shows, I will have to go through a series of preparatory steps. Let it suffice for now, however, to note that I will suggest that the work’s world is not the world of an individual man and woman, but a “wherein” of a grander scale.

In its early years, the work was alternately exhibited under the titles of *Adam and Eve*, *Life and Death*, and *Metabolism*. As I will return to in the third section, each of the titles emphasizes different aspects of the work. First, as a depiction of Adam [*ha adamah*; earth] and Eve [*chavah*; to breathe] – the first human beings, created by God – the thinking of the work concerns the nature of the human being. Indeed, as I will suggest, *Metabolism* belongs to the pictorial history of Adam and Eve, and the fall of man in particular, which stretches back to the first centuries A.D.

⁶³⁰Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 133. [nakne, ikke avkledte] An inversion of Nochlin’s description of Courbet’s *Bathers* as “naked rather than nude.” Nochlin, *Realism*, 38.

⁶³¹Heidegger, “The Origin,” 43. [Welt ist das immer Ungegenständliche, dem wir unterstehen, solange die Bahnen von Geburt und Tod, Segen und Fluch uns in das Sein entrückt halten] (*GA* 5, 30-31).

Second, the picture does not simply juxtapose *Life and Death*, but as Munch himself claims, the work is a “picture of life *as* death.”⁶³² Again, in the third section, I will discuss how the painting thinks the unity within the opposition between life and death – a unity, the circularity of which is emphasized in the third title *Metabolism*, which according to Cordulack “refers to the chemical and physical processes by which nourishment is made into protoplasm, which is broken down to release energy for all vital processes. Living organisms take energy from their environment and use it to move, grow, and reproduce. In short, metabolism sustains life.”⁶³³ The metabolic process is the circle whereby decay sustains life, and life sustains decay; life belongs to death, death belongs to life.

But what does this mean? How does the work as a work bring forth “life as death”? How are *Adam and Eve* and *Metabolism* shown by the work, and what is thought in this showing? What is the poetical bringing forth of the work and its *corresponding* understanding of beings as a whole? How is the essence of death disclosed by *Metabolism*? In order to place us on the path whereby we can think along with these questions, I will first turn to the Symbolist poetics of *The Frieze of Life* and its relation to Symbolism in general.

Symbolism and The Frieze of Life

As I mentioned above, Munch claimed that *Metabolism* is as central to *The Frieze of Life* as the buckle is to the belt. According to Eggum, the first “Frieze of Life” was exhibited in the Berlin Secession in 1902 and was comprised of a selection of works from the 1890s, presented under the main title *Rendering of a Series of Life-Pictures* [Fremstilling av en rekke livs-bilder; Lebensbilder].⁶³⁴ Notably, among the works exhibited was *Metabolism*. However, already in 1896 Munch exhibited a series of works under the name *Love*, and in 1892, a series called *A human life* [Et menneskeliv], both of which are considered prequels to *The Frieze*.⁶³⁵ The name *The Frieze of Life* [Livsfrisen] itself was first coined in 1918.⁶³⁶ Thematically, *The Frieze* is often seen in relation to the so-called *St. Cloud Manifesto* – a text from 1889 where Munch formulates his explicit opposition to the genre paintings of Naturalism. The most

⁶³²[billedet av livet som døden] Munch, “Livsfrisen,” [Appendix XIV] Heller’s translation of “som” as “as well as” is literarily correct, but runs in my view counter to the spirit of the quote as a whole. See Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 143.

⁶³³ Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism*, 97.

⁶³⁴ Arne Eggum, *Edvard Munch: Livsfrisen fra maleri til grafikk* (Oslo: Stenersen, 1990), 9. See also Høifødt, “Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens “Beltespenn,”” 125.

⁶³⁵ Eggum, *Edvard Munch: Livsfrisen fra maleri til grafikk*, 10.

⁶³⁶ Gunnar Sørensen, “Introduksjon,” in *Edvard Munchs Livsfrise: En rekonstruksjon av utstillingen hos Blomqvist i 1918*, ed. Karen Lerheim and Gunnar Sørensen, 9-12 (Oslo: Munch-Museet and Labyrinth Press, 2003), 11.

significant statement reads: “One shall no longer paint interiors, people reading and women knitting. They will be people who are alive, who breathe and feel, suffer and love.”⁶³⁷ Indeed, as Munch later described *The Frieze*, it was supposed to be paintings “from the modern life of the soul.”⁶³⁸ And in this sense, it is often seen as an artistic and aesthetic consequence of *The Sick Child*, which “seems to burst open the limits for what could be expressed in a naturalist pictorial idiom.”⁶³⁹

Significantly, Munch’s works from *The Frieze* earned him his place among the Symbolist painters of the *fin de siècle*, and his art figures in most major scholarly accounts of the theme.⁶⁴⁰ But pictorial Symbolism – from Puvis de Chavannes [image 52] to Klinger [image 53] to Gauguin [image 54] and Van Gogh [image 55] – is far from a uniform artistic movement, and as Bjerke argues, “it cannot be identified with a style but with an attitude.”⁶⁴¹ According to Bjerke, “this attitude is characterized by the interpretation of reality as something different from and more than what rationalism wishes, without reservation, to explain through reason.”⁶⁴² This seems related to what Marlais argues is characteristic of both the conservative (idealism, idéism) and avant-garde (symbolism, synthetism) currents of *fin de siècle* art, namely its “anti-Naturalism,” which he understands as “a blanket concept referring to an intellectual mood that saw naturalism’s fondness for the quotidian, the factual, the real, and the ordinary as wrongheaded.”⁶⁴³ What Bjerke highlights, but which is somewhat diffused by Marlais, is that Symbolist artists did not see the Naturalist (‘rationalist,’ in Bjerke’s words, but maybe

⁶³⁷ This quote is from Munch, *Livsfrisens tilblivelse*, 7. The original draft is MM N 289, trans. Francesca M. Nichols (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1989-90), where the exact formulation is missing. On this, see Volle, *Munchs Rom*, 222-223. See also Lasse Jacobsen, “Edvard Munchs egne publikasjoner,” in *eMunch - tekst og bilde*, ed. Mai Britt Guleng, 109-22 (Oslo: Munch-museet, 2011), 110 and 116-119. The *St. Cloud Manifesto* is often quoted in discussions relating to Munch’s art in the 1890s. See for instance, Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 63-64; “Edvard Munch’s “Night,” the Aesthetics of Decadence and the Content of Biography,” in *The Arts Digest*, 80-105 (1978), 101; Kirkholt, *Inderlighet og moderne drømmer: Kritikk og resepsjon av malerkunsten i Norge: 1820-1914*, 241; and Grøgaard, *Edvard Munch: Et utsatt liv*, 122-123.

⁶³⁸ [fra det modern Sjøeleliv] Munch, MM N 31, 1.

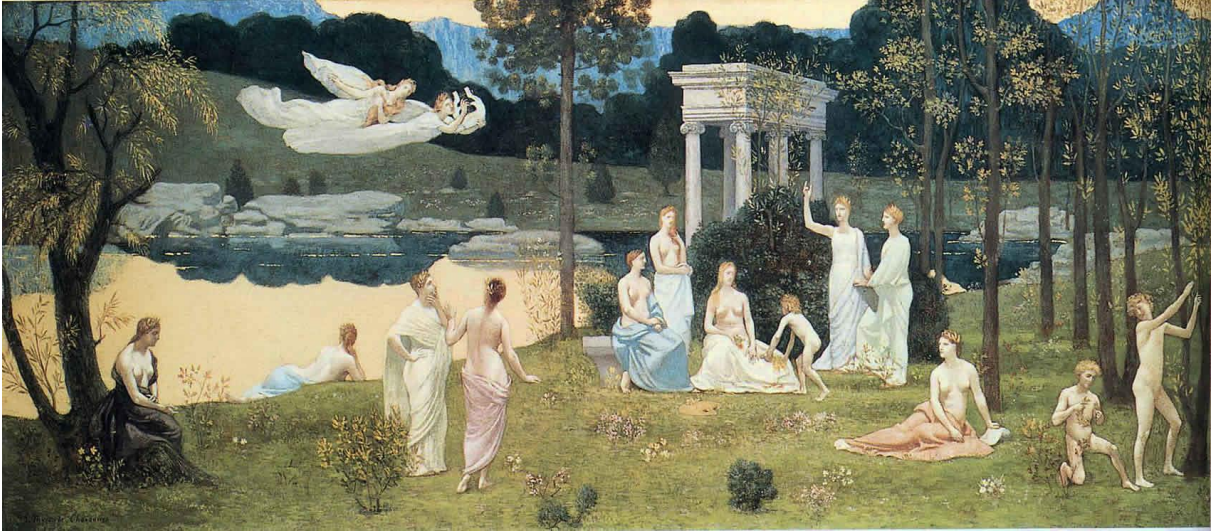
⁶³⁹ [I *Det syke barn* synes Munch å sprengre grensene for hva som kunne uttrykkes i et naturalistisk formspråk] Eggum, *Edvard Munch: Malerier - Skisser og Studier*, 45.

⁶⁴⁰ A few important works are Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), esp. 216-232; *Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe*, (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995); Sharon L. Hirsh, *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004); Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), Richard Thomson et al., *Van Gogh to Kandinsky: Symbolist landscape in Europe 1880-1910* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012). See also Reinhold Heller, “Concerning Symbolism and the Structure of Surface,” in *Art Journal*, 146-53 (New York: College Art Association, 1985).

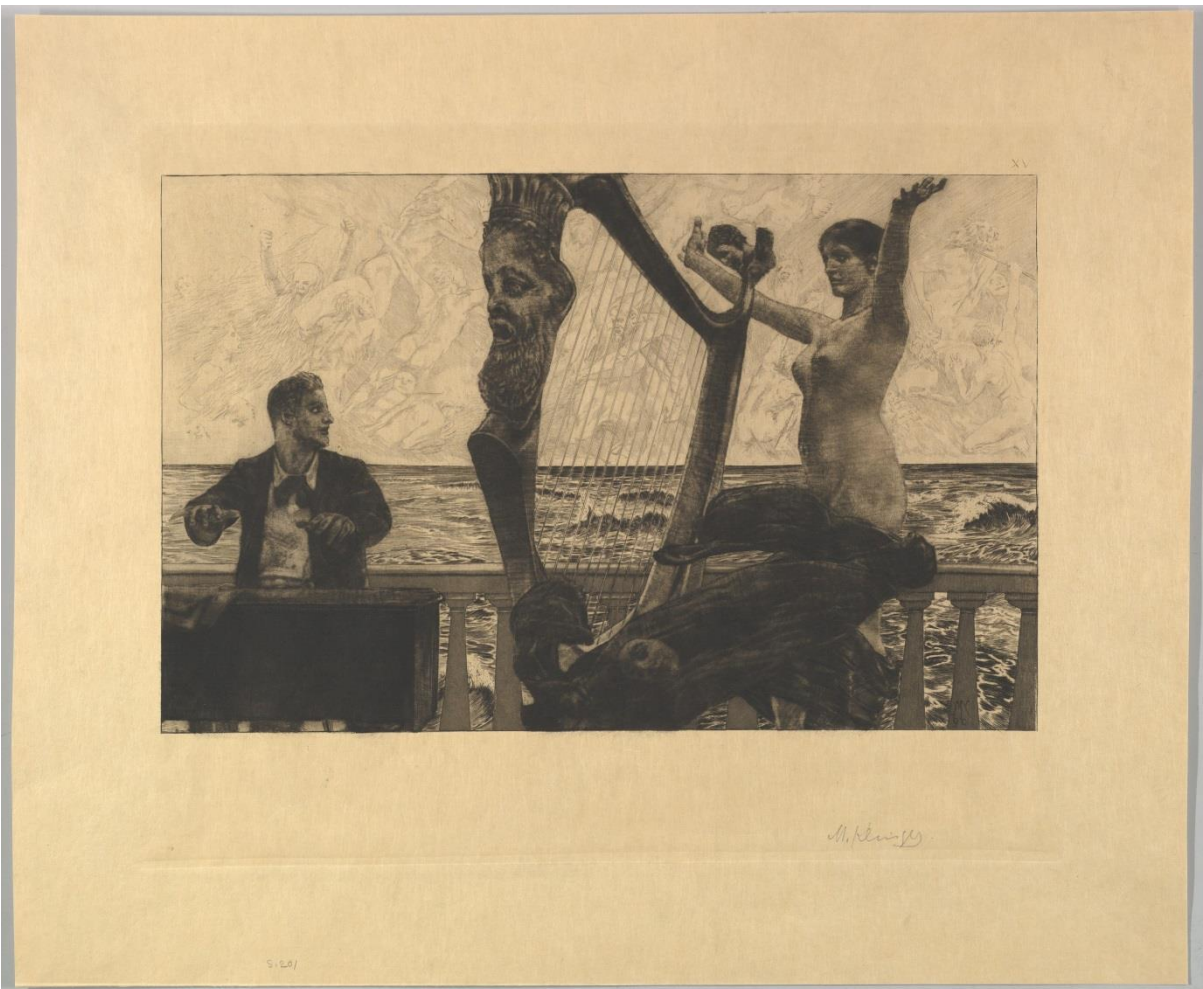
⁶⁴¹ Bjerke, “Edvard Munch and Harald Sohlberg,” 90.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*

⁶⁴³ Marlais, *Conservative Echoes*, 6.



52. Puvis de Chavannes, *The Sacred Grove, Beloved of the Arts and the Muses*, 1884/89. Oil on canvas, 93 x 231 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.



53. Max Klinger, *Evocation (from the series Brahms Fantasies)*, 1894. Etching, engraving, aquatint, and mezzotint, 22 x 33.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



54. **Paul Gauguin, *Vision After the Sermon*, 1888.**
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm. Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh.



55. **Vincent van Gogh, *The Sower*, 1888.**
Oil on canvas, 64 x 80.5 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

also ‘positivist’ or ‘scientist’⁶⁴⁴) fondness for the *real* as wrongheaded, but that its *interpretation* of reality was either too limited or wrongheaded. Indeed, if seen from the Heideggerian perspective of this thesis, it seems to me that underlying the various social, political, religious, and regional aspects of Symbolist art,⁶⁴⁵ as well as the artistic concerns *per se*, is the metaphysical issue concerning the understanding of the reality of the real. Thus, also Symbolist works of art can be seen as the “fighting of the battle in which the unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won.”⁶⁴⁶ That is, a battle belonging to the essential history of Western art and its *corresponding* truth of being which takes place in pictorial thinking, and can be approached from the perspective of Heidegger’s unthought history of art.

However, at the present, only a few observations will have to suffice. For example, the art critic Albert Aurier coined the term *idéiste* to distinguish the new art (for example Puvis) from the conservative *idealism* (for example Bouguereau [image 56]). Yet, I think it is instructive that when Aurier attempts to define the ideal towards which the *idéiste* art should strive, he “returned to the familiar Platonic thought that the ideal represents the world behind appearances, unknowable in the sense that we know the physical world,”⁶⁴⁷ according to Marlais. And another contemporary art critic, Maurice Denis, writes straightforwardly that “Symbolism was...neo-platonic.”⁶⁴⁸ In the art of Alphonse Osbert [image 57] and Jean Delville [image 58] for instance, there is little concern for the constraints of the Naturalist limits of pictorial intelligibility. However, as Goldwater claims, it was not unusual that many of these “so-called symbolists” returned to “allegory in its traditional forms.”⁶⁴⁹

On the other hand, we find the “progressive” or “avant-garde” Symbolists who “sought for an expressive unit of form and meaning,”⁶⁵⁰ exemplified by Munch and Gauguin. And a third phenomenon is the German *Gedankenmalerei* [thought-painting] (for instance Klinger), which shared its ambition with the avant-garde Symbolists to “give pictorial form to the ‘invisible world of the psyche’,”⁶⁵¹ while not seeking “the unity of Symbolism in form and content. Form and content remain parallels,”⁶⁵² in Bjerke’s words.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 9-10 and 58-72.

⁶⁴⁵ On this, see Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*. See also Marlais, *Conservative Echoes* for a discussion focusing on the conservative aspects of French art criticism of Symbolism and Idealism, in relation to contemporary political and especially Catholic contexts.

⁶⁴⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin,” 54. [Aufstellend eine Welt und herstellend die Erde ist das Werk die Bestreitung jenes Streites, in dem die Unverborgenheit des Seienden im Ganzen, die Wahrheit, erstritten wird] (*GA* 5, 42).

⁶⁴⁷ Marlais, *Conservative Echoes*, 43.

⁶⁴⁸ Maurice Denis quoted in Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 23.

⁶⁴⁹ Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 5.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 9. See also Bjerke, “Edvard Munch and Harald Sohlberg,” 89-90.

⁶⁵¹ Goldwater, *Symbolism*, 9.

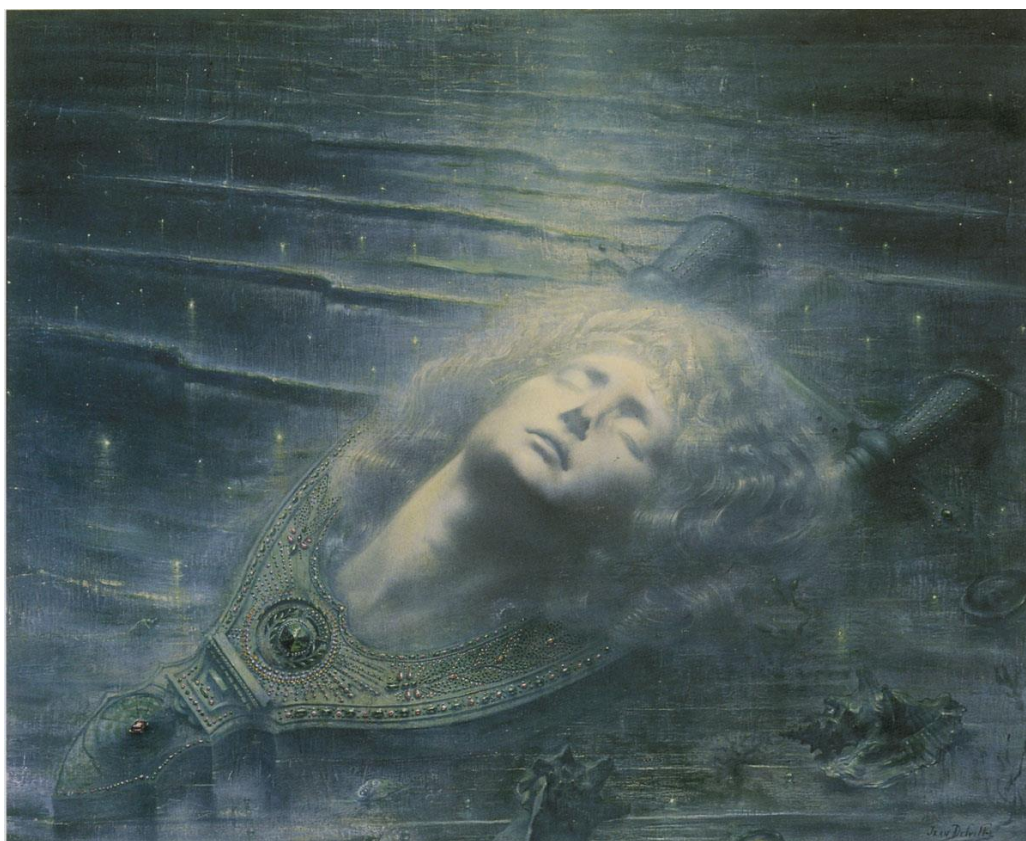
⁶⁵² Bjerke, “Edvard Munch and Harald Sohlberg,” 90.



56. William-Adolphe Bouguereau, **Birth of Venus, 1879.** Oil on canvas, 300 x 215 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris



57. Alphonse Osbert, **Hymn to the Sea, 1893.** Oil on canvas, 278 x 176 cm. Musée Départemental de l'Oise, Beauvais



58. **Jean Delville, *Orpheus*, 1893.**
Oil on canvas, 79 x 99 cm. Private collection.

Thus, despite the apparent differences in styles and pictorial idioms, the outspoken and widespread “desire for a less materialistic art”⁶⁵³ and an “art of ideas”⁶⁵⁴ was shared by “conservative” and “avant-garde” Symbolists, as well as “thought-painters,” alike. Indeed, as it was first formulated within the field of Symbolist literature, Kahn wrote – in clear polemic to Zola’s Naturalism – that the aim of the Symbolist artist is “to objectify the subjective (the externalization of the Idea) instead of subjectifying the objective (nature seen through the eyes of a temperament).”⁶⁵⁵ What is at stake, in other words, is not the *aim* of the artists – which in my view seems to be to paint “the idea,” or “the subjective” – but rather their various understandings of what “the idea” and “the subjective” *is*, and thus the various understandings of the reality of the real – and with it, the understanding of beings as a whole – that sustain and guide these understandings.

In my view, however, the usual claim that the distinction between thought-painting, “conservative” and “avant-garde” Symbolism rests mainly on a difference concerning the treatment of the relation between form and content/meaning might be correct, but yet not true, in Heidegger’s sense. For the different ways in which the “idea” or the “subjective” is understood, shown, or thought by the work *is* nothing else than how it is brought forth in a concrete work of art – and thus it *is* the very way the work means, i.e. its poietics; the way it lets the truth of the work happen. As I wrote in the previous chapter concerning Krohg’s Naturalism, *Sick Girl* is not a mere representation of a visually observed reality, but a work the (pictorial) intelligibility of which is sustained by an understanding of being which sees the reality of the real as what is representable for the subject. The poietics of the work – the way it is intelligible – *brings forth* in alignment with this understanding of being and thus works to strengthen it (founding, in the sense of grounding, in Heidegger’s terms). The Symbolists’ anti-Naturalism, on the other hand, seems in various ways to implicitly carry along a challenge towards the metaphysical presuppositions that sustain and guide the Naturalist poietics. But it remains a question – not to be answered here – of how, in what way, and to what end, this is conducted by the pictorial thinking of Symbolist art, broadly conceived.

As I recounted in chapter two, Heidegger seems to claim that all art since the Classical (Platonic) age is metaphysical and can be understood essentially as *symbolic image*. This, means that all metaphysical Western art is essentially characterized by the bringing together

⁶⁵³ Marlais, *Conservative Echoes*, 42.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁵⁵ Kahn, “Response of the Symbolists (1886),” 1017.

[sumballein] of the sensuous and the suprasensuous realms. Essentially, then, this is the same whether conceived of in the Platonic sense that the work of art is a reflection of an idea (albeit twice removed), in the Medieval sense that the work is a reflection of the divine realm, or the Modern sense that the work is a reflection of reality; and consequentially, whether the truth of the work is determined by its correspondence to the idea, its correspondence to the divine intellect, or its correspondence to objective reality. In alignment with Heidegger's argument, I suggested in the previous chapter that also the art of Realism and Naturalism can be conceived as *symbolic image* because also here the metaphysical determination of the *being* of beings – i.e. the *reality* of the real, which itself is not a real, sensuous being – is brought together with a sensuous being. Thus, the history of art *corresponds* to the transformation of truth not through its changing styles and pictorial idioms as such, but through the changes in the fundamental way works provide intelligibility (let truth happen and establish itself in beings), the way they *are* meaningful, that is, as I have suggested, through their *poietical* transformations.

Hence, from a Heideggerian perspective, it appears to me that it is not the exclusive characteristic of Symbolist art to “direct viewers toward immaterial entities and metaphysical truths,”⁶⁵⁶ as Facos seems to suggest. For instance, also Naturalist art might be seen as directing – although inconspicuously – the viewers towards the immaterial entity of the subject and the metaphysical understanding of truth as certain correspondence. However, the aim seems to be more explicitly on the agenda of many Symbolist artists, and, moreover, the determination of *which* “immaterial entities” and “metaphysical truths” that can be depicted along with *what* they are, does not remain identical. Thus, Symbolist art in general (both “conservative,” “avant-garde,” and “thought-painting”) can be understood as aiming, in various ways, for an extension of the limits of what is representable and depictable in painting; that is, an extension of what “immaterial entities” can be depicted. And as a rough and general characteristic, this expansion can be seen as aiming to include dreams, visions, fantasies, and reveries, as well as the mythical, fantastic, spiritual, and mysterious, in short, phenomena that were considered as *the* meta-physical (in the traditional sense of that which is over and beyond the physical) – or the *supernatural* – if seen from within the modern epoch's understanding of being. That is, from for instance Courbet's point of view, the “*abstract*, not visible, non-existent” – which for him is “not within the realm of painting.”⁶⁵⁷ As Debora Silverman argues, this could also include the quest for discovering “a new and modern form

⁶⁵⁶ Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 13.

⁶⁵⁷ Gustave Courbet quoted in Nochlin, *Realism*, 23.

of sacred art”⁶⁵⁸ as was the case of the collaboration of Van Gogh and Gauguin. Interestingly, however, Silverman argues that this collaboration ultimately broke down due to incompatibly understandings of the sacred, based in their different religious backgrounds (Dutch reformed Protestantism and French Catholicism, respectively) and consequently, their different conceptions of “the meaning of the visible world,”⁶⁵⁹ as she puts it.

Along with the Symbolists’ expansion of the limits of pictorial intelligibility follows a quite explicit rejection of the understanding of truth as certainty: as it is generally conceived, the Symbolist work should be evocative or *suggestive*, not explanatory and determinative,⁶⁶⁰ i.e. certain. As it for instance is formulated by Odilon Redon in his text “Suggestive Art,” it is “necessary *not* to define anything, understand anything, limit anything or point at anything specific.”⁶⁶¹ Thus, the aim of depicting “the ideal” or “the subjective” was followed by a gradual abandonment of the understanding of truth as certainty, and thus the claim to *bring forth* in alignment with a correspondence to an observed reality.

Turning back to *The Frieze of Life*, it is worth noting that in the Norwegian context, ‘Symbolism’ as a term has been less used. Instead one has used terms (to designate only partially overlapping artistic phenomena) such as ‘mood painting’ [stemningsmaleri], ‘decorative art’ [dekorativ kunst], ‘art of recollection’ [erindringens kunst], and especially ‘neo-romanticism’ [nyromantikk].⁶⁶² However, I think it is uncontroversial to claim that the artistic impulse of *The Frieze* can initially be seen as emerging from the same anti-Naturalist attitude described by Bjerke above as characteristic of Symbolism. Indeed, *The Frieze* shows and brings forth in alignment with an understanding of reality that is broader than what could be represented in a Naturalist pictorial idiom, namely the “psychological” or “affective” reality of the subject – thus giving rise to Munch’s status as a forerunner of Expressionism. But seen from the Heideggerian perspective of this thesis, it is crucial that the Symbolist

⁶⁵⁸ Debora Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 3.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 51. See esp. 122-127 and 132-134 on Gauguin’s Catholic anti-Naturalism. See also “At the Threshold of Symbolism, 1888: Van Gogh’s *Sower* and Gauguin’s *Vision After the Sermon*,” in *Lost Paradise: Symbolism in Europe* 104-15 (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1995).

⁶⁶⁰ Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 12-13.

⁶⁶¹ Odilon Redon, “Suggestive Art,” in *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, trans. Akane Kawakami, 1064-66 (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 1065.

⁶⁶² For a discussion of the notion of ‘Symbolism’ in Norwegian art historical research, see Øivind Storm Bjerke, “Symbol og fantasi møtes i maleriet,” in *Tradisjon og fornyelse*, ed. Glenn Alfsen, Ellen Lerberg, and Nils Messel, 93-112 (Oslo: Nasjonalgalleriet, 1995), 98-100. See also Magne Malmanger, *Norsk kunstdebatt ved modernismens terskel: Fra "erindringens kunst" til "det dekorative*, vol. 1, Kunst og Kulturs Serie (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985); Kirkholt, *Inderlighet og moderne drømmer: Kritikk og resepsjon av malerkunsten i Norge: 1820-1914*, 231-239 and 284-303; and Østby, *Fra Naturalisme til Nyromantikk*, 114-124.

poetics of *The Frieze* does not radically challenge the limits of pictorial intelligibility established by *The Sick Child*. For although the execution and artistic style of the works of *The Frieze* differs from *The Sick Child*, its poetics seems still to work within the limits of pictorial intelligibility opened by *The Sick Child*. That is, through the very non-correspondence to visually observed reality which nevertheless remain within the parameters of recognizable and identifiable representations that brings forth the depiction of reality, and which through this very non-correspondence shows something *else* or *more* than the merely visually observable. However, it is not within the scope of the present thesis to explore this issue in any more detail. In any case, it seem to me that it is the very non-specificity and indeterminacy of the works that paradoxically makes them both more “subjective” (by depicting *the* subjective) and more “objective” (by loosening the representation’s claim of corresponding to a subjective point of view).

Thus, I would suggest that neither *The Sick Child* nor works of *The Frieze* show or “suggests” a “higher” reality – neither in the sense of a Platonic “ideal” nor in the “merely subjective” sense of the reveries and fantasies of the subject. To me, they rather appear to show a more intense and affectionate reality – a “lower” reality, maybe. This is so, insofar as the limits of pictorial intelligibility established by *The Sick Child* are conceived as an *expansion* of what is considered to be truly real, but not an entirely different understanding of what the reality of the real is as such. Hence, as Krohg wrote as late as 1920, “Symbolism,” (or at least one form of Symbolism), “has *expanded* the realm of “truth”⁶⁶³ – that is, expanded the realm of truth, rather than contested the understanding of truth as such.

In this sense, *The Frieze* might be seen as exploring the potential within the limits of pictorial intelligibility established by *The Sick Child*, and hence might rather be considered less *anti-Naturalistic* than *post-Naturalistic*. Albeit only in the sense that the poetics of *The Frieze* does not alter the basic understanding of the reality of the real as what is subjectively observable (the understanding of truth as certainty), but that it is a result of an extension of the *field* of what is observable. That is, an extension of what is admitted within the limits of (pictorial) intelligibility, and thus considered to be in being – which is captured in Przybyszewski’s claim that Munch’s art is a “psychic naturalism.”⁶⁶⁴ Although, as I argued in the previous chapter, this paradoxically weakens the claim to certainty of the truthful correspondence, it does not alter the basic understanding of truth that is established by the

⁶⁶³ [Men Symbolismen har erklæret, at der maa herske den fuldeste Frihed. Den har udvidet ”Sandhedens” Rige] Christian Krohg, “Symbolisme i Nordisk bildende kunst,” in *Kampen for tilværelsen*, 26-30 (København: Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag, 1920; or. published, 1894), 30. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁶⁴ Przybyszewski, “Psychich Naturalism,” 1044. (*Das Werk Des Edvard Munch*).

work *as such*. And maybe in this sense, Leif Østby's verdict on *The Sick Child* from 1934 might seem somewhat less mysterious. He writes. "For this art only wants to be soul-painting... Here is already the goal of Symbolism achieved."⁶⁶⁵ Historiologically, it might seem preposterous to claim that Symbolism was completed already in 1886 – the same year as the Symbolist "movement" was initiated.⁶⁶⁶ Yet historically, *The Sick Child*, like any true origin, brings along its own end,⁶⁶⁷ and in this sense achieves the goal of at least one path of Symbolism simply by making it possible; i.e. by being a happening of truth whereby the limits of pictorial intelligibility are altered, which hence alters the limits of intelligibility in general.

Thus, the limits of pictorial intelligibility established by *The Sick Child* contributed in extending the observable realm and thus accounting not only for visual appearance but also the "psychological realities" of "the modern life of the soul." Although, as I claimed in the previous chapter, *The Sick Child* can be seen as a showing of the affective reality of death, its poietics remains within the purview of the "the individual human being's sorrows and joys."⁶⁶⁸ And although several of the works exhibited under the title of *The Frieze* deals with the issue of death (*Death in the Sickroom* [image 59] and *By the Deathbed* [image 60], most notably),⁶⁶⁹ I do not see that they challenge the limits that are established by *The Sick Child*. Such a challenge, however, occurs through *Metabolism*, which Munch describes as "the picture of life as death."⁶⁷⁰ But how can we see *Metabolism* as such a challenge? How does it relate to the understanding of death that is shown by the painting? And what pictorial thinking of death goes on in the work?

Summary and Transition

In this section, I have described and provisionally interpreted Munch's painting *Metabolism*, and attempted to think along with Munch's own claim that the work is "as necessary for the whole frieze as the buckle is to the belt."⁶⁷¹ After a discussion of Symbolism and the poietics of *The Frieze of Life*, I finally returned to *Metabolism* and suggested that it challenges the limits of pictorial intelligibility established by *The Sick Child*. In the third and final section

⁶⁶⁵ [For denne kunst vil bare være sjelemaleri... Her er alt symbolismens mål nådd]. Østby, *Fra Naturalisme til Nyromantikk*, 126-127.

⁶⁶⁶ Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 9.

⁶⁶⁷ "The beginning already contains the end latent within itself." Heidegger, "The Origin," 74. [Der Anfang enthält schon verborgen das Ende] (GA 5, 64).

⁶⁶⁸ Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

⁶⁶⁹ See Eggum, "The Theme of Death," 172-179.

⁶⁷⁰ Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

⁶⁷¹ Ibid. [Appendix XIV].



59. Edvard Munch, *Døden i sykeværelset*, 1893.

[Death in the Sickroom] Woll 329. Tempera and crayon on canvas, 152.5 x 169.5 cm. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.



60. Edvard Munch, *Ved dødssengen*, 1895.

[At the Deathbed] Woll 376. Oil and tempera on canvas, 90 x 120.5 cm. KODE Art Museums, Bergen.

of this chapter, I will see this challenge as a response to the changing understanding of death belonging to the emergence of the late-modern epoch; which is to say that *Metabolism* concerns the essential understanding of what death *is*. But what does this mean, more exactly? Both in this and the previous chapter I have suggested that some works of art concern essential understandings of what death “is” – and hence that a pictorial thinking of death goes on through these works. Yet, the determination of death as an *existential phenomenon*, which was merely indicated in the previous chapter, has yet to be clarified; as is the relation between death and the (art) history of being.

Indeed, the various understandings of death that I have discussed so far in this thesis have in common not *what* or *how* death is understood, but *how* the understanding of death is revealed. As was argued in the previous chapter, *The Sick Child* does not disclose death as a point in time or as a biological process, but as something that is present affectively, despite “being” withdrawn – death “is” nowhere to be seen in the painting. It is shown as the horizon that conditions the “there” – the world – of the sick girl and her mother. And if *Metabolism* not only concerns the essential understanding of death, but that it challenges the limits of pictorial intelligibility established by *The Sick Child* – and hence goes beyond the pictorial thinking of death in *The Sick Child* – it must be made clear what is meant by “death” so that it can be an issue for pictorial thinking.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that *being-towards-death* is an existential structure of Dasein. The issue of death, however, surfaces also in Heidegger’s later writings, and most significantly in the essays “The Thing” and “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” where he describes the essential determination of the human being as ‘the mortals.’ In the next section, I will turn to these two different understandings of death in Heidegger’s thinking in order to see and grasp what death “is” according to Heidegger, as well as its relation to the history of being – a discussion which will prepare for my final discussion of *Metabolism* in the third section.

Section Two | Heidegger on Death

The second part of this thesis aims to see and think along the pictorial thinking of death in Munch's paintings *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism* from the perspective of Heidegger's unthought art history of being. But what is Heidegger's understanding of death and how does it relate to the history of being? In *Being and Time* the question of death is central, but the issue reappears in the late 40s and early 50s in his thinking on the notion of 'the mortals.' Insofar as this thesis concerns the notion of death and Heidegger's philosophy (although mediated by the questions concerning art, (pictorial) thinking, and the history of being), it seems to me that it would have been a crucial oversight not to discuss Heidegger's thinking of death in some depth. In this section, I will therefore describe and discuss Heidegger's two different takes on the question of death, first the analysis of *being-towards-death* from *Being and Time*, and then the notion of 'the mortals' in the essays "The Thing" and "Building, Dwelling, Thinking."

As I wrote in the introduction, in *Being and Time* Heidegger aims to prepare the ground for answering the question concerning the meaning of being in general.⁶⁷² According to Heidegger, the entire history of Western philosophy has overlooked this question in favor of the question concerning the meaning of the being of *beings*. However, I wrote that in order to answer the question of the meaning of being in general, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger holds that it is first necessary to clarify the horizon from out of which this question is intelligible in the first place – Dasein. Clarifying the fundamental ontological structure of Dasein is the main theme of *Being and Time*, and the analysis of death occurs as a part of the analysis of Dasein. But due to the scope and length of this section, the following overview of Heidegger's analysis of death in *Being and Time* will only mention, but not discuss at any

⁶⁷² See George Pattison, *Heidegger on Death: A Critical Theological Essay* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) for an introduction of the main lines of *Being and Time* in relation to the theme of death (13-19), and an introduction to the analysis of death in *Being and Time* (19-35). See also Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 224-227; R. Raj Singh, *Heidegger, World and Death* (Plymouth: Lexington, 2013) 107-125; and Stephen Mulhall, "Human Mortality: Heidegger on How to Portray the Impossible Possibility of Dasein," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, 297-310 (Malden: Blackwell, 2006). There are numerous introductory and commentary works on *Being and Time*, see for instance Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, and Guttorm Fløistad, *Heidegger: En innføring i hans filosofi* (Oslo: Pax, 1993).

length, the most relevant aspects of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein in relation to the analysis of death.

Being-towards-death

The investigation of death appears in the beginning of division two, after “the preliminary fundamental analysis of Dasein,” which showed that Dasein could be formally indicated as “an understanding potentiality-for-being, which, in its being, makes an issue of that being itself.”⁶⁷³ Dasein is ontologically described as being-in-the-world, the total structure of which “revealed itself as care.”⁶⁷⁴ At this point, Heidegger again reminds the reader that the aim of *Being and Time* is ultimately to “answer the question about the meaning of being in general” which in turn necessitates to clarify the horizon in which this question is meaningful, namely, the understanding of being that Dasein *is*. However, in order for the analysis of Dasein to be *primordial*, he claims that it must take into account and clarify the totality of the fundamental understanding which makes possible the hermeneutical situation of interpretation (“its fore-having, its fore-sight, and its fore-conception”⁶⁷⁵).⁶⁷⁶ Hence, in order to fully clarify the being that is the horizon of any inquiry of the question of the meaning of being in general – that is, Dasein – Dasein’s “being-a-whole” must be apprehended. The necessity of clarifying Dasein’s being-a-whole is what motivates the investigation of death, insofar as death marks the “end” of Dasein.⁶⁷⁷

“End” is put in quotation marks, as Heidegger explicitly contests that death is adequately interpreted if it is represented as the mere biological or temporal end-point of a life

⁶⁷³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 274. [das Dasein *ist* als verstehendes Seinkönnen, dem es in solchem Sein um dieses als das eigene geht] (GA 2, 307).

⁶⁷⁴ *Being and Time*, 274. [enthüllte sich als Sorge] (GA 2, 306). I will not discuss the analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world, the structure of which is care [Sorge], except in a very provisional sense further on. Let it suffice at this point to say that the naming of the human mode of being as Dasein is an attempt to radically re-interpret the dominant understanding of the human mode of being as *subject* and *consciousness*. As was discussed in chapter two, Heidegger later comes to think that the modern epoch’s understanding of subject posits the subject as the guarantee of objectivity, standing over-against and mastering objects. Dasein is not thought of as a subject within or surrounded by an objective ‘world,’ but is ontologically interpreted *as* being-in-the-world. As mentioned previously, in a lecture course from 1925, published as *The History of the Concept of Time*, Heidegger suggests that we could imperfectly imagine Dasein as that which is *between* subject and world. Although, he immediately renounce this image as insufficient. *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, 251-252. (GA 20, 346-347).

⁶⁷⁵ *Being and Time*, 275. [ihre Vorhabe, ihre Vorsicht und ihren Vorgriff] (GA 2, 308).

⁶⁷⁶ See *Being and Time*, 188-195 (GA 2, 197-204) for the distinction between understanding [Verstehen] and interpretation [Auslegung]. As Dasein’s being-there *is* understanding, interpretation is grounded upon understanding, and hence derivative of it.

⁶⁷⁷ Heidegger designates everydayness (the ontic state of Dasein’s being which is the main phenomenon of the analysis) as “precisely that being which is ‘between’ birth and death.” *Being and Time*, 276. [Die Alltäglichkeit ist doch gerade das Sein “zwischen” Geburt und Tod] (GA 2, 310). Birth is given less attention than the phenomenon of death, but see *Being and Time*, 425 on birth as “being-towards-the-beginning.” [Sein zum Anfang] (GA 2, 493).

process. This end-point is only available through our investigation of the death of the other, which in turn makes death an objectively representable event. Death understood as life's end-point, Heidegger calls "perishing," while the factual occurrence of our being temporally nearing death is called "demise."⁶⁷⁸ "Dying," on the other hand, "is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially."⁶⁷⁹ The phenomenon of investigation is hence not the scientific, social or cultural determination of death (perishing) and dying (demise), but "the ontological meaning of the dying of the person who dies, as a possibility-of-being which belongs to *his* being."⁶⁸⁰ What then, does Heidegger claim that the ontological meaning is of the dying of the person who dies, as a possibility-of-being which belongs to his being?

Heidegger's answer is that "*death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility – non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein's end, in the being of this entity towards its end.*"⁶⁸¹ In the determination of Dasein as being-in-the-world, the structure of which is *care*, Heidegger argues that Dasein's being is characterized by the threefold of *existence*, *factuality* and *falling*. Significantly, this threefold is re-encountered in the ontological interpretation of death.

First, Dasein's *existence* is characterized as its possibility-of-being. That is to say, that Dasein is characterized by being ahead of itself, always caught up in its projects and dealings.⁶⁸² Death, however, is what is ahead *as such*, and *is* only by being ahead. Death is something which is *as such* "not-yet" – it is something impending. It is always already still outstanding, a description which in the literature often is related to Epicurus statement that "when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist."⁶⁸³ But contrary to Epicurus, Heidegger claims that death is not graspable in terms of mere presence and absence. Death, grasped ontologically, is only "present" to Dasein as always

⁶⁷⁸ To me, this seems similar to Kellehear's definition of "dying," quoted in the introduction. According to Kellehear, dying is "a self-conscious anticipation of impending death and the social alterations in one's lifestyle prompted by ourselves and others that are based upon that awareness." Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*, 2.

⁶⁷⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 284. [Sterben ist keine Begebenheit, sondern ein existenzial zu verstehendes Phänomen] (GA 2, 320).

⁶⁸⁰ *Being and Time*, 283. [Die Frage steht nach dem ontologischen Sinn des Sterbens des Sterbenden als einer Seinsmöglichkeit seines Seins] (GA 2, 318).

⁶⁸¹ *Being and Time*, 303. [Der Tod als Ende des Daseins ist die eigenste, unbezügliche, gewisse und als solche unbestimmte, unüberholbare Möglichkeit des Daseins. Der Tod ist als Ende des Daseins im Sein dieses Seienden zu seinem Ende]. (GA 2, 343).

⁶⁸² Contrary to Pattison's explanation that being-ahead indicates our understanding of ourselves "in light of [our] future possibilities," (Pattison, *Heidegger on Death*, 19), I take Dasein's being-ahead to indicate that our present is determined by being entangled in anticipation (what Heidegger calls 'projection'[Entwurf]). That is, we are always already caught up in projects ahead of the present, and not simply aiming to actualize our future possibilities or representable goals (although we might do so in a derivative sense). See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 236. (GA 2, 254-255).

⁶⁸³ Epicurus, quoted in Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 224.

not-yet. Hence, it is the possibility of the end of Dasein's possibilities. Or, in Heidegger's formulation, "death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein."⁶⁸⁴

Second, Dasein's *factuality* is characterized by being "thrown." That is to say, that Dasein finds itself always already in the possibility of death. As an elucidation, Heidegger quotes the medieval saying that "as soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die."⁶⁸⁵ Dasein's existence is defined by the possibility of it to no-longer be Dasein.

Third, Dasein's *falling* is characterized as its tendency to avoid, or cover up, its own being in its everydayness. Concerning the phenomenon of death, this is encountered as Dasein's tendency to "theoretically" accept that *one* dies, but that in the present it has nothing to do with one's life.

The description of death as the possibility of the end of Dasein's possibilities is further defined as not merely a possibility among other possibilities, but the one possibility which is Dasein's ownmost [eigenste]. It is a possibility which is non-relational, a characterization which does not disavow the social and cultural aspects of dying, but which signifies that no-one can die one's death for us. Empirically, one can observe that a person might die in the place of another – in the sense that the baker can be executed in place of the smith. But each person's death is one's own to die. Furthermore, the possibility of death is described as a certain and indefinite possibility. This certainty does not take shape of a certainty which is ascertained by empirical observation and deduction, but is attested in Heidegger's description of the everyday acceptance that "death certainly comes." This acceptance, however, which is followed by "but not right away," consequently covers up the determinative character of death's certainty, namely "*that it is possible at any moment*,"⁶⁸⁶ and hence indefinite. Being the *possibility* of the absolute impossibility of Dasein, death is, as we have seen "something *distinctively* impending,"⁶⁸⁷ and hence, as such, not to be outstripped, surpassed or surmounted. The possibility of the end of Dasein is *the* unavoidable possibility in our possibility-of-being and hence the possibility which is our ownmost, which is always possible as long as Dasein is.

⁶⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294. [Der Tod ist die Möglichkeit der schlechthinnigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit] (GA 2, 333).

⁶⁸⁵ *Being and Time*, 289. [„Sobald ein Mensch zum Leben kommt, sogleich ist er alt genug zu sterben“] (GA 2, 326).

⁶⁸⁶ *Being and Time*, 302. [daß er jeden Augenblick möglich ist] (GA 2, 343).

⁶⁸⁷ *Being and Time*, 294. [ausgezeichneter Bevorstand] (GA 2, 333).

The ontological meaning of the death of Dasein, in other words, is neither an event nor a state, but that ownmost possibility Dasein is *towards*. Existentially understood, death is being-towards-death. Dasein is always already dying.⁶⁸⁸

Authenticity, Inauthenticity, and Anxiety

For the sake of clarity, I have so far chosen to employ the term everydayness and covered-up when describing Dasein's *inauthentic* being-towards-death. Inauthenticity [Uneigentlichkeit] is a technical term which designates Dasein's mode of being in its everydayness as "the one" [Das Man]; that is, in its *fallen* mode. Exemplified by the statement "'One is' what one does,"⁶⁸⁹ inauthentic Dasein (as the one), is caught up and absorbed in its projects and everyday concerns. Its counterpart is authenticity [Eigentlichkeit], which designates the non-covered-up being of Dasein, that is, Dasein's being-in-truth. Heidegger's discussion of authenticity and death is limited to provide the existential (ontological) *possibility* of an authentic being-towards-death, which subsequently could guarantee the existentiell (ontic) authentic being-towards-death.

The certainty of death was described above in the inauthentic sense ("one dies"), but the question still remains whether death can be understood as certain in an authentic sense. To repeat, the inauthentic being-towards-death covers up the peculiar character of death's possibility, namely that it is certain and indefinite, by de-individualizing death as an event that will happen to everyone. Nevertheless, it is recognized that "one" certainly dies. Above, it was claimed, however, that my – or one's own – death does not happen to everyone. My death is mine to die. How is this certainty revealed to Dasein?

In order to answer this question, Heidegger turns back to a previously described characteristic of the care-structure of being-in-the-world, namely thrownness. Thrownness is described as Dasein's always already finding itself in a situation and in a world not of its own creation. But this situation is always also accompanied by a mood or attunement [Stimmung]. As I wrote in the previous chapter, Heidegger calls this phenomenon 'disposedness' [Befindlichkeit].⁶⁹⁰ As little as we create the world by a subjective projection, Heidegger claims that we do not create or project our moods. Rather, we always already find ourselves in one mood or another. In the present context, the mood *anxiety* is of special significance.

⁶⁸⁸ It is important at this point to recall the distinction between demise as a social phenomenon and dying as an existential phenomenon. Biologically, one might say that birth is the beginning of the life-process that eventually leads to death (perishing), hence, the human being is from the moment of its birth always dying (demising), but this is in my view not what Heidegger means. Rather, Dasein finds itself always already in the possibility of the impossibility of its existence. Hence, Dasein is always already dying, that is, towards-death.

⁶⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 283. ["Man ist" das, was man betreibt] (GA 2, 319).

⁶⁹⁰ See *Being and Time*, 172-179. (GA 2, 178-186).

Contrary to the mood *fear*, which is always directed towards something or someone (fearing for terrorists or God's wrath, for instance), anxiety is not directed towards any particular being. Anxiety, rather, is directed towards Dasein's being-in-the-world as such. In anxiety, Dasein's sheer being-*there* (*Da-sein*) is disclosed to Dasein. *That* I am being-in-the-world is what appears for me. This revealing of my being-there occurs as the withering of my familiarity with the world that I am (as being-in-the-world). The familiar intelligibility of the world dissolves, and the sheer *there* is what is left. That is, my being-*in-the-world* is suspended, and I find myself in a state which therefore reveals the possibility of me not-being-in-the-world. In anxiety, we experience the implication of our thrownness: that we find ourselves in a universe which is not of our own creation; it was before us, and will outstrip us – an experience which hence reveals that we are finite beings, the end of which is not to be outstripped. In anxiety, in other words, the authentic certainty of our own finitude is disclosed. That is, we are not falling back to the inauthentic understanding of death as an event belonging to everyone, but we are facing the individualized, existential meaning of death as our ownmost possibility. Indeed, Heidegger writes, “being-towards-death is essentially anxiety.”⁶⁹¹

Anxiety is what enables the possibility of authentically being-towards-death. In anxiety, Dasein's finitude is revealed to Dasein, and hence the possibility of grasping the totality of Dasein's being-a-whole. This grasping, Heidegger emphasizes, is not one of representation or expectation of our own end-point, nor of our chronological life as a whole (as if looking into the future, somehow). Rather, Dasein's being-a-whole is encountered in *anticipation* [Vorlaufen].⁶⁹² This anticipation of death must not be confused with the actualization of death in advance. Death, we must remember, is always not-yet as such, something distinctly impending, and *never* actual for Dasein. Death is present as an always already not-yet actualized possibility. Indeed, “*the closest closeness which one may have in being towards death as a possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual,*”⁶⁹³ Heidegger writes.

⁶⁹¹ *Being and Time*, 310. (GA 2, 352).

⁶⁹² Vorlaufen, although structured by the root –laufen, ‘to run,’ is somewhat awkwardly rendered as “running towards” by Pattison. (Pattison, *Heidegger on Death*, 13). I take it to mean something like “to undergo in advance.” The usual translation as ‘anticipation’ is etymologically structured similar to ‘vorgreifen’ (which is occasionally used by Heidegger in his discussion), as “to take into possession” or, more literarily, “to grasp” beforehand. But ‘Vorlaufen’ indicates exactly that our anticipation of death is not one of possession, but something through which we move (indeed, run) beforehand – hence my explication of my usage of the term ‘anticipation’ as “to undergo in advance.” See also translator’s note in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 306, n3.

⁶⁹³ *Being and Time*, 306-307. [*Die nächste Nähe des Seins zum Tode als Möglichkeit ist einem Wirklichen so fern als möglich*] (GA 2, 348).

The exact character of anticipation, however, is best explained by Heidegger as a negation of the inauthentic being-towards-death: “Anticipation, however, unlike inauthentic being-towards-death, does not evade the fact that death is not to be outstripped; instead, anticipation frees itself *for* accepting this.”⁶⁹⁴ Anticipation is a freeing *for* (and not *from*) Dasein’s finitude. Anticipation, indeed, is a way of behaving towards death, and could be understood as a certain *attitude* – or a way of comporting oneself – towards death. This attitude, to repeat once again, is not directed towards our biological demise and perishing, but towards our ownmost possibility of the impossibility of existence. Anticipation, as an attitude towards death, is way to relate *understandingly* to death.⁶⁹⁵ It is an accepting of Dasein’s finitude, revealed in anxiety, which leads to the appearance (freeing) of death as my ownmost possibility: “being-towards-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first *makes* this possibility *possible*, and sets it free as possibility.”⁶⁹⁶ Anticipation is what *makes* death a possibility *for me*, which I can relate to and take up in my being-in-the-world in an authentic way. Thus, by its being revealed through the mood of anxiety, Heidegger claims that death as an “existential possibility is *based on* the fact that Dasein is essentially disclosed to itself.”⁶⁹⁷ Only because Dasein is the being that understands being is death revealed to Dasein.

Summary and Transition

In summary, I have shown Heidegger’s description of death as Dasein’s possibility of authentic and inauthentic being-towards-death, understood as the ownmost possibility of the impossibility of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. Authentic being-towards-death is revealed in the mood of anxiety, which allows Dasein to anticipate death, making it available for us to see death as our ownmost, individualized possibility. Inauthentic being-towards-death covers up the individualized character of death by ascertaining that it is indeed certain that death will come to everyone, but for the time being, it has nothing to do with me. Inauthentic being-towards-death, thus, is to evade the individual certainty and indefiniteness of death. The motivation of the analysis of death in *Being and Time* was to make secure that the analysis of the human mode of being, Dasein, takes the totality of Dasein into view. This was necessary

⁶⁹⁴ *Being and Time*, 308. [Das Vorlaufen aber weicht der Unüberholbarkeit nicht aus wie das uneigentliche Sein zum Tode, sondern gibt sich *frei für* sie] (GA 2, 350).

⁶⁹⁵ Again, remember the difference between understanding and interpretation. (*Being and Time* 188-195.) Heidegger does not claim that we in anticipation obtain *knowledge* about our own death.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 307. [Das Sein zum Tode als Vorlaufen in die Möglichkeit *ermöglicht* allererst diese Möglichkeit und macht sie als solche frei] (GA 2, 348).

⁶⁹⁷ *Being and Time*, 294. Emphasis mine. [Dessen existenziale Möglichkeit gründet darin, daß das Dasein ihm selbst wesenhaft erschlossen ist] (GA 2, 333).

for Heidegger, insofar as the aim of *Being and Time* is to prepare for the possibility of adequately being able to answer the question of being in general.

In light of the previous chapter, what I think is significant about Heidegger's analysis of death is that he names it as an existential phenomenon, which – as a result of the analysis' pertaining to the existential analysis of Dasein – is only formally indicated. In *Being and Time*, nothing is said concerning the "content" of death. Indeed, Heidegger explicitly avoids "taking any existentiell stand towards death," i.e. to take stand as to "whether Dasein 'lives on' or even 'outlasts' itself and is 'immortal'."⁶⁹⁸ The only thing he seems to concede in this respect is that death is the possibility of the impossibility of Dasein's being-in-the-world – that is, the possibility of the discontinuation of *this* particular "there" for *Da*-sein. Whether or not there is another "there" after death, and whether Dasein remains identical after an alteration of its "there," remain unquestioned. However, if put in the perspective of *Being and Time*, I suggest that the different understandings of death that were discussed in the previous chapter – from the pre-Socratic understanding of death as concealment in the Archaic pinax, to the affective presencing of death in *The Sick Child* – can be seen as relating exactly to the ontic aspect of Dasein's being-toward-death. Death, as an existential phenomenon, is not a particular understanding of death, but the possibility of the *impossibility* towards which Dasein *is* in its understanding relation of death. Whether the "impossibility of Dasein's being-in-the-world" is understood as a returning to the concealment of lethe, a journey into the afterlife, or the sheer termination of social life, Dasein *is* still being-towards-death. However, in light of Heidegger's later writings on the history of being (as well as the history of pictorial thinking of death discussed in the previous chapter), it seems to me that the strict divide between death as an ontological and an ontic phenomenon becomes difficult to uphold. For as an existential phenomenon, is not death, like any other phenomenon, determined by the history of being? If that is the case, what is the relation between death and the human being? And what is the relation between death and *being* as such? In my view, these concerns appear to be at stake for Heidegger when he returns to the question of death in his post-war lectures.

The Mortals

As discussed above, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes Dasein as the being that first and foremost is caught up in an understanding relation with the world. In this context, what motivates the analysis of Dasein's *being-towards-death* is the need for the analysis to be

⁶⁹⁸ *Being and Time*, 292. [ob das Dasein „fortlebt“ oder gar, sich „überdauernd“, „unsterblich“ ist] (GA 2, 329).

comprehensive, and in this way fully clarify the being of Dasein, in order to prepare for the interpretation of the meaning of being in general.⁶⁹⁹ Significantly, Heidegger's return to the question of death in the post-war years is fueled by entirely different motivations.

The question of death is raised again in Heidegger's brief writings on "the mortals," a term which first appears in a series of lectures held under the title "Insight into that which is" in Bremen in 1949-50, while he was under a teaching ban imposed by the French authorities.⁷⁰⁰ It is a term which, despite its arguably deep and rich significance (and unthought implications, I will argue), is not given prolonged treatment in a single work, neither in books, articles or lectures, by Heidegger. This simple observation alone sets it apart from the thorough existential analysis of Dasein in *Being and Time*. The two most comprehensive – yet, brief – treatments of "the mortals" appear in the lecture "The Thing" from the abovementioned lecture series, and the slightly later lecture "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," each of which I will turn to eventually.

In chapter one, I discussed the "turning" in Heidegger's thought occurring in the 1930s. Among the things I emphasized was the change within the formulation of the question of being [Seinsfrage] from the question concerning the meaning of being in general, to the truth of being – the latter of which I discussed in chapter two, becomes identical with the question of the history of being: "The history of being is being itself."⁷⁰¹ Understanding what being "is" amounts to understanding the historical disclosure of *beings*. And I contend that one can say that in Heidegger's view, being "is" this historical disclosure as such. Thus, I wrote that through his engagement with Western metaphysics and the epochal changes in the understanding of the truth of beings as a whole, Heidegger arrives at the critique of the emerging late-modern epoch of technology and nihilism. Significantly, the question concerning the essence of technology, Gestell, and resources [Bestand] are raised in the same lecture series as the notion of the mortals is first presented. As described in chapter two, Heidegger contends that the late-modern epoch emerges as the subject of the modern epoch's will to control the objective world implodes. This in turn opens up to the possibility of the emergence of the understanding of being whereby human beings – like all beings – are understood as mere resources, available for immediate ordering in the service of the

⁶⁹⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, this interpretation was never conducted within the framework of *Being and Time* as the attempt "did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics." "Letter on Humanism," , 250. (GA 9, 328).

⁷⁰⁰ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 3. See also, Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 3-73. (GA 79, 3-77).

⁷⁰¹ *The End of Philosophy*, 82. [Die Seinsgeschichte ist das Sein selbst] (GA 6.2, 489).

efficiency, flexibility, and growth that is demanded by Gestell. Finally, in this, Heidegger sees the supreme “danger” of the complete forgetting of the truth of being.

Remarkably, however, Heidegger claims that it is exactly the technological understanding of being that enables the possibility of a transformation of the understanding of being, and thus the hope of a new beginning. As he quotes Hölderlin: “But where danger is, grows / the saving power also.”⁷⁰² This new, non-metaphysical epoch (which I find it helpful to think of as relating to the late-modern epoch like the inverse aspect of a gestalt drawing), Heidegger hopes will counter the entire history of Western metaphysics, from its Platonic origins and onwards. But as he famously stated in the *Der Spiegel*-interview, however, there is nothing an individual thinker can do to change the course of the history of being: “only a God can save us.”⁷⁰³ Yet, thinking after the “end of philosophy” (i.e. after the end of *metaphysics*) retains a *preparatory* role.⁷⁰⁴ The thinker’s attentive listening to the call of being might contribute in letting this new understanding of being arrive. And in my view, it is from the perspective of this preparatory role of thinking that we should understand Heidegger’s choice of now naming the human being ‘the mortals.’ In other words, what seems to motivate Heidegger’s return to the question of death is not a new clarification of the horizon or interpretation of the meaning of being in general, but the continued attempt at preparing for the overcoming of metaphysics.

The Word ‘The Mortals’

Before embarking on the question of the relation between the mortals and death, I will first briefly investigate the notion of ‘the mortals’ [die Sterblichen] and attempt to understand the motivation for the choice of words. Mitchell recognizes that ‘the mortals’ is a response to the understanding of the human being within Western philosophy as *zoon logon echon*, a “living being possessing the logos,”⁷⁰⁵ and its later translation into Latin as *animale rationale* – the rational animal. Adding to Mitchell’s discussion, I suggest to understand ‘the mortals’ in light of Heidegger’s sustained interest in early Greek thinking. Significantly, in Homer’s *Iliad* there

⁷⁰² “The Question Concerning Technology,” 28 and 34. [Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst/ Das Rettende auch] (*GA* 7, 29 and 35).

⁷⁰³ “Only a God Can Save us,” [Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten], in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan, trans. W. Richardson, 45-67 (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1981; or, published, *Der Spiegel* 30 (Mai, 1976), 193-219). Note that elsewhere, Heidegger explains that by “saving,” he means “to set something free into its own essencing.” “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 148. Translation modified. [retten bedeutet eigentlich: etwas in sein eigenes Wesen freilassen] (*GA* 7, 152). And as we soon will see, the God Heidegger has in mind is not the metaphysical, Christian God.

⁷⁰⁴ “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” 60. (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens*, 75).

⁷⁰⁵ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 211.

are two different words that are used for the human being. The first, ‘anthropos,’ is well known and it has been suggested to have a meaning reminiscent of the *animale rationale*, namely the overcoming of the animal or beastlike condition.⁷⁰⁶ The second, ‘brotoi,’ is less known. Its counterpart is ‘ambrotoi,’ close to the more familiar ‘ambrosia’ – the nectar of the gods in Greek mythology. The one’s who drink the ambrosia are the ambrotoi – the immortals. The brotoi, however, are the mortals.⁷⁰⁷

The choice of naming the human being as the mortals, in other words, might be seen as Heidegger’s attempt to re-think an understanding of the human being from *before* the inception of metaphysics which, as Mitchell argues, is characterized by the thinking of the human being as an animal endowed with rationality. Indeed, the notion of the human as the mortals in ancient Greek seems restricted to poetical usage, while anthropos is the more common prosaic term.⁷⁰⁸ But as discussed in chapter one, Heidegger deems poetic thinking as equally significant as – at times, more significant than – philosophical thinking, for understanding the history of being. It is thus no surprise, although still significant, that in attempting to counter the culmination of the history of Western philosophy, Heidegger turns to the poetic language of ancient Greece in order to prepare for a new beginning of the history of the West.

What I think is important to have clearly in view at this point is that the philosophical project in which the discussion of mortality appears in the post-war years is distinctly different from *Being and Time*. And although there are several resemblances between Dasein’s being-towards-death and the description of the mortals, I will in the following, in line with Mitchell, refute with Young’s claim that the term mortals “corresponds to the (essentially mortal) ‘Dasein’ of *Being and Time*.”⁷⁰⁹ As well as R. Raj Singh’s claim that when Heidegger “uses the term ‘mortal’ instead of ‘Dasein,’ he prefers the word because it emphasizes being-towards-death.”⁷¹⁰ Considering the degree of awareness towards

⁷⁰⁶ Fritz Graf, "Orpheus: A Poet Among Men," in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (London: Routledge, 1987; reprint, 1990), 84.

⁷⁰⁷ “Mortals (thnetoi, brotoi) were subject to extinction, while the gods (athanatoi, ambrotoi) could never die.” (Justina Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 20). See also LSJ Greek-English Lexicon, "βροτός," URL:

<http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=21648&context=lsj&action=from-search>. (Retrieved: 11.03.16).

⁷⁰⁸ See "βροτός". The LSJ Greek-English lexicon cites the word’s appearance in the Homeric works, as well as in the later tragedies of Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus, among others.

⁷⁰⁹ Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, 94. A similar position is expressed by Hubert Dreyfus in his lectures on Heidegger’s later philosophy. Hubert Dreyfus, "Heidegger's Later Philosophy: Lecture 18," University of California, Berkeley, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2g7TNPjoel>.

⁷¹⁰ Singh, *Heidegger, World and Death*, 128.

language⁷¹¹ and words⁷¹² in Heidegger's later thinking, I think what appears to be a renaming of 'Dasein' as 'the mortals' is not as a simple issue of style of writing or emphasis. Rather, in my view, it can be seen as being of the deepest significance for Heidegger's entire philosophical project, and as I will argue, for his earlier notion of the history of being in particular.

Thus, having clarified the term's place in Heidegger's oeuvre, its historical roots in ancient Greek thinking, and anticipated what is at stake for Heidegger's philosophical project in this renaming of the human mode of being, I shall now turn to Heidegger's descriptions of 'the mortals.'

The Mortals and the Fourfold

The term 'the mortals' appears most significantly within the context of what emerges as a key-term in Heidegger's later thinking, namely 'the fourfold' [Das Geviert].⁷¹³ The fourfold designates the unity of 'the earth' and 'the sky,' 'the divinities' and 'the mortals.' The mortals, in other words, is not conceptualized as a discreet entity, but is always already caught up in, and must be understood in conjunction with, the other three aspects of the fourfold. In the following, I will largely base my brief overview of the fourfold on Mitchell's analysis, although I will deviate from his analysis occasionally in my interpretation of the mortals.⁷¹⁴

According to Mitchell, the earth of the fourfold designates approximately the same as Heidegger's notion of earth in "The Origin." It is, as was discussed in chapter one, (sensuous) appearance, or "phenomenality as such."⁷¹⁵ Earth is self-bearing appearance; it is *that* which appears by itself; it is "the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and

⁷¹¹ See for instance, Heidegger, "Language," (GA 12, 7-30) which is one of numerous texts dealing with the nature of language.

⁷¹² See for instance, "Words," [Das Wort], in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, 137-56 (New York, 1971; or. published, 1958). (GA 12, 205-226).

⁷¹³ The fourfold is a particular dense and complex term in Heidegger's philosophy, which – despite its recurrence in many of Heidegger's later works – has not been among the most central issues within the Heidegger-research. However, for a book-length study of the term see, Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* from 2015.

⁷¹⁴ Although the "oneness" of the fourfold in the "thing's thinging" and the "world's worlding" – which is carried out by the "dif-ference" of being (see Heidegger, "Language," 200 (GA 12, 23)) – are of central importance for understanding Heidegger's later thinking, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage with these aspects. The thinking of worldhood in relation to things and the fourfold, as well as Mitchell's claim that Heidegger's later thinking should be seen as a "philosophy of things and relations," must be left for another occasion. See Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 259-306; and Singh, *Heidegger, World and Death*, 85-105.

⁷¹⁵ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 71.

water, rising up into plant and animal.”⁷¹⁶ There is nothing behind appearances which is more real or true. In simpler terms, this is to say that appearance is characterized by being *concealed*. As I wrote in chapter one, we can never, as it were, “fully” understand appearances – they are what they are exactly by being untranslatable and ungraspable.

The sky, on the other hand, is not the same as *world*. Rather, it designates the “space” or “openness” in which the earth appears, what Mitchell calls its “medium of appearance.”⁷¹⁷ This openness is no longer thought of exclusively belonging to the human being. In order for appearance to appear there must be some distance which allows for its appearance. The self-rising must rise into something which itself is not. But that into which the earth rises is never neutral or stable. Rather, it is inherently changing. In “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” Heidegger writes:

The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the year’s season and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and the blue depth of the ether.⁷¹⁸

What I suggest this to mean is that the earth always appears *in light of* the sky, and that this light conditions the mode of appearance of the earth. This does not merely signify a factual distinction between daylight and darkness, but the temporal, indeed historical, space in which the earth appears. Appearances appear in light of the “space” provided by the sky, but the sky does still not ground the earth. The sky is equally dependent on the earth as the earth is dependent on the sky. They are, to use a phrasing from *Being and Time*, equiprimordial – that is, equally primordial. Or as Heidegger describes it later, they are engaged in a “mirror-play.”⁷¹⁹ Like two mirrors facing each other, the mirror-image of which cannot be reduced to either mirror, but is dependent on both.

Turning to the divinities, Mitchell suggests that we should understand them as the messengers; or more accurately, as the messages – meaning. We are never faced with purely unintelligible appearance, but appearance is inherently meaningful to us. Contrary, again, to the metaphysical understanding of appearance as empty and inherently meaningless sensuous raw material, Heidegger claims that we primarily *are* in a world of meaning. Nevertheless,

⁷¹⁶ Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 147. [Die Erde ist die dienend Tragende, die blühend Fruchtende, hingebreitet in Gestein und Gewässer, aufgehend zu Gewächs und Getier. Sagen wir Erde, dann denken wir schon die anderen Drei mit, doch wir bedenken nicht die Einfalt der Vier] (GA 7, 151).

⁷¹⁷ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 116.

⁷¹⁸ Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 147. [Appendix XI] (GA 7, 151). For an in-depth analysis of each aspect of Heidegger’s description of the sky see Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 128-162.

⁷¹⁹ Heidegger, “The Thing,” 177. [Spiegel-Spiel] (GA 7, 181).

“the default of the God and the divinities is absence.”⁷²⁰ Meaning is nowhere purely present, but emerges from out of absence. It is not projected by the subject unto otherwise meaningless sensuous data, but is dis-covered or dis-closed, and hence is granted to us.⁷²¹ In simpler terms, we do not first encounter a piece of brute and meaningless substance or a pure configuration of colors and shapes in our field of vision, which subsequently is endowed with meaning as a property of our conscious mind. Rather, Heidegger claims that we encounter stones and trees, human beings and animals; that is, meaningful appearances. We do not sense “pure” color or “pure” weight, but we encounter the color *of* something and the weight *of* something. Colors and weight, in other words, are not qualities *added* to substance as little as meaning is *added* to appearance. Meaning emerges in appearance, and now Heidegger seems to suggest that meaning is the withdrawn appearance of the divinities.

Like the earth and the sky mirrors each other, the divinities and the mortals engage in a mirror-play. Meaning emerge in face of the mortals, the mortals emerge in face of meaning.⁷²²

The most important descriptions of the mortals appear in “The Thing,” and “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.” In the first, Heidegger writes:

The mortals are the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it. Death is the shrine of Nothing, that is, of that which in every respect is never something that merely exists, but which nevertheless presences, even as the mystery of being itself. As the shrine of Nothing, death harbors within itself the presencing of being. As the shrine of Nothing, death is the shelter of being. We now call mortals mortals – not because their earthly life comes to an end, but because they are capable of death as death. Mortals are who they are, as mortals, present in the shelter of being. They are the presencing relation to being as being.

Metaphysics, by contrast, thinks of man as *animal*, as a living being. Even when *ratio* pervades *animalitas*, man’s being remains defined by

⁷²⁰ “The Thing,” 182. [Der Fehl Gottes und des Göttlichen ist Abwesenheit] (GA 7, 185).

⁷²¹ The Norwegian word for ‘to discover’ (German ‘zu entdecken’), ‘å oppdage,’ is instructive. It means literally ‘up day-ing’ – that is, to bring (something) up from its hiddenness into the day (-light). Historically, it was a word designating the rising of the sun. Hence, the sun rose and granted the day. Thus, in clearer terms than the English or German word, it reveals the interplay between the earth and the sky.

⁷²² This is in my view not to say that meaning is somehow limited to the human sphere (hence correlationist and anthropocentric). Rather, it means simply that mortals are faced with meaning, without disqualifying any other being’s (e.g. an animal’s) possibility of meaningfully engage with its world. See Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 107-115, on Heidegger’s later views on animals. A response to (among others) Derrida’s critique of Heidegger’s earlier views on animals in the lecture series from 1929-30 published as Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. (GA 29-30).

life and life-experience. Rational living beings must first *become* mortals.⁷²³

The description is quite similar to the description in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” but has its emphasis on different aspects of the determination of the human being as the mortals. While the first provides the description of death as “the shrine of Nothing,” and compares the animal’s *perishing* to the mortals *dying*, the latter emphasizes the mortals’ relation to the fourfold and its initiation of its own essence:

The mortals are the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death *as* death. Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under the sky, before the divinities. When we speak of the mortals, we are already thinking of the other three along with them, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.

(...)

Mortals dwell in that they initiate their own essence [Wesen] – their being capable of death as death – into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there may be a good death. To initiate mortals into the essence of death in no way means to make death, as empty Nothing, the goal. Nor does it mean to darken dwelling by blindly staring toward the end.⁷²⁴

Despite the brevity of these descriptions of the mortals, compared to *Being and Time*’s analysis of Dasein’s *being-towards-death*, I suggest they together provide enough information to bring out the decisive differences between the two terms.

First, as Mitchell recognizes, ‘the mortals’ shifts the emphasis from being (*Da-sein*) to death. This shift I will claim to be highly significant, as it indicates that Heidegger goes counter to the entire metaphysical tradition of the West which designates man as *anthropos*, i.e. *zoon logon echon*, i.e. *animalitas rationale*. That is to say, Western philosophy has understood man as an animal, a being which first and foremost is defined as a *living being* [zoon] – a phenomenon of *life* [bios] – to which *logos*, or *rationality*, is added.

The second, quite obvious difference between Dasein and the mortals is that the latter is designated in the plural. In *Being and Time*, Dasein is indeed described with the existential characteristic of being-with-others [Mitsein].⁷²⁵ It is a fundamentally social entity – as Heidegger emphasizes in his aforementioned illustration of Dasein [image 6]. But what is in *Being and Time* described as a characteristic of an individual entity (Dasein), is in the mortals

⁷²³ "The Thing," 176. [Appendix XII] (*GA* 7, 180).

⁷²⁴ "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 148-149. Translation modified. [Appendix X] (*GA* 7, 152-153).

⁷²⁵ See *Being and Time*, 153-163. (*GA* 2, 157-168).

inscribed into the entity of such. ‘The mortals’ disavow the necessity of bridging the gap between the individual Dasein and the others as there is no such thing as *a* mortal.⁷²⁶ The mortals are not a collection of isolated subjects who happens to share the biological fact of finitude. Rather, “the mortals” is a community – a historical people – which is capable of death as death. What does this mean?

Heidegger writes that the mortals can die, and that to die means to be capable [vermögen] of death *as* death. In *Being and Time*, being-towards-death is interpreted as a ‘potentiality-for-being’ [Seinskönnen]. Although ‘Seinskönnen’ has also been translated as ‘ability-to-being,’⁷²⁷ to be capable of death as death – or, as Mitchell suggest, to *enable* death as death – is not one possibility, potentiality, or ability among others; not even the possibility which is certain and our ownmost. Being capable of death as death is to *initiate* our own nature.

‘Initiate’ is the translation of ‘geleiten.’ Literarily, ‘geleiten’ means to lead, in the sense of escorting, or guiding. It thus carries a different meaning than ‘initiate,’ which also designates origin and beginning. Keeping more in line with the German word, while avoiding the political connotations of ‘führen’ in ‘lead,’ I prefer ‘escort.’ Thus, a significant sentence of the German original of “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” reads: “Die Sterblichen wohnen, insofern sie ihr eigenes Wesen, daß sie nämlich den Tod als Tod vermögen, in den Brauch dieses Vermögens geleiten, damit ein guter Tod sei.”⁷²⁸ The quote I suggest could mean something like this: Mortals dwell insofar as they escort themselves into their own essence. Their essence is their being capable of death as death (the essence of death). The mortals escort their essence in the use and practice of the ability of this essence (i.e. in dwelling). When the mortals escort their essence, there may be a good death (and no-longer merely the animalistic coming to an end/perishing [Verenden]).

As has been repeated several times in this thesis, Heidegger does not understand essence [Wesen] as a stable or eternal being. Rather, the essence essences [das Wesen west]. Essences are subject to historical change, and hence designate the historical mode of being of a phenomenon, how something is *is-ing*. As I will return to soon, throughout the history of Western metaphysics, the essence of the human being has been the rational animal, but – as was emphasized above – Heidegger’s motivation in his post-war writings is nothing less than to prepare for an overcoming of metaphysic, and hence to prepare for a change in the essence

⁷²⁶According to Mitchell, this is so despite Heidegger’s occasional designation of the mortals in the singular. See Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 212, esp., n1.

⁷²⁷ See Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, xi.

⁷²⁸ Heidegger, *GA 7*, 152-153.

of the human being. That is, to change what and the way in which the human being *is*. This change is *initiated* by the mortals' escorting of their own essence (which qualifies Hofstadter's choice of word in the translation), i.e., their being capable of death as death.

According to Mitchell, this shift can be formulated as the shift from "being-towards-death" to "being-in-death."⁷²⁹ In his discussion of the mortals, Mitchell emphasizes Heidegger's rethinking of the word capability and ability [Vermögen] in his later writing, and links it to the "evaluation of the essence and ability [Vermögen] of the fish"⁷³⁰ to thrive in water. In the same way as the water is the element of the fish, death is the element of the mortals, Mitchell claims. I agree with this interpretation insofar as we keep in mind that this element is not itself a being (which Mitchell's designation of death as the *medium* of mortality comes close to suggest). The water is not simply the entity which surrounds the fish, but is what *enables* the fish to be (i.e. to essence). Hence, the human being can become the mortals insofar as it enables [Vermögen] death as death; that is, insofar as it escorts itself into its own essence; namely, its capability of the essence of death. How should we understand the notion of the essence of death? In the description of the mortals in "The Thing," Heidegger describes what "death as death" means, namely, that death is the shrine of the nothing.

The Nothing

The notions of presence and nothingness is a recurring theme in Heidegger's mid-period – especially in *Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1935⁷³¹ – and the description in "The Thing" echoes his discussion there. In his reading of the "first of all questions," namely "why are there beings at all instead of nothing?"⁷³² Heidegger claims that upon closer inspection this "first" question reveals the presupposition of an interpretation of being which provides the contradiction between present beings and nothingness.⁷³³ Contrary to this interpretation, Heidegger claims that "even the nothing "belongs" to "being."⁷³⁴ This might be more easily graspable in the minor example of the presencing of absence – that is, for instance in the phenomenal fact of our experience of the absence of something we expect to encounter (say, upon reaching for a pen which is not there; the very absence of the pen presences). The nothing is not the pure opposite of being; rather, it "belongs" to being. Hence, the nothing

⁷²⁹ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 227.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁷³¹ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. GA 40.

⁷³² *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 1. [Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?] (GA 40, 3).

⁷³³ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 35. (GA 40, 36).

⁷³⁴ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 89. Translation modified. [sogar das Nichts „gehört“ uns zum „Sein“] (GA 40, 90).

hence, is “that which in every respect is never something that merely exists, but which nevertheless presences [west], even as the mystery of being itself.”⁷³⁵ What is at stake is even clearer in Mitchell’s translation: “[the nothing] is that which in all respects is never some mere being, but nonetheless essences [west], namely as being itself.”⁷³⁶ The nothing – which like being is not itself a being – essences as being itself. What is the relation, then, between the nothing and death?

Heidegger does not claim that death *is* the nothing; he names death as the *shrine* [Schrein] of the nothing. A shrine, I would claim, is not only a reliquary, a container of relics; it is the holy place of worship of the divinities (the default of which, we remember, is absence). The shrine is that whereby the gods presences in their absence (like the relic is present in its being enshrined in the reliquary). The shrine is a concealment which lets something come to presence. Beyond Mitchell’s interpretation, I contend that death – as the shrine of the nothing – enjoys a distinct relation to the divinities, the messengers; to meaning. This seems to be anticipated in Heidegger’s somewhat earlier statement in a lecture on Nietzsche: “What stands against being is nothing and perhaps nothing is itself in essence for being and only its messenger.”⁷³⁷ As we saw Thomson claim in the second chapter, an epoch’s metaphysics does not merely designate an understanding of *what is*, but also of *what matters*.⁷³⁸ In line with my argument that Heidegger’s renaming of the human being as the mortals is a response to the nihilistic and technological, late-modern epoch, I suggest that Heidegger’s description of the essence of death provides a change of emphasis, which one might think of as a gestalt shift, from the nihilistic “nothing matters,” to “(the) nothing matters.”

In the mortals’ escorting themselves into their own essence, the nothing comes to matter. Or rather, it comes to provide *matter*. What is at stake is at this point is nothing less than Heidegger’s attempt to formulize a non-metaphysical understanding of being; an understanding which allows for being’s essencing, without thinking being as *a* being. Heidegger’s suggestion is to re-think the relation between being and the nothingness, in which neither are described as beings, but which nevertheless essences. He writes: “As the shrine of nothing, death harbors within itself the presencing of being. As the shrine of nothing, death is

⁷³⁵ "The Thing," 176. [Der Tod ist der Schrein des Nichts was in aller Hinsicht niemals etwas bloß Seiendes ist, was aber gleichwohl west, sogar als das Geheimnis des Seins selbst] (GA 7, 180).

⁷³⁶ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 212. “das Geheimnis” – the secret/the mystery – is added in the published edition, but Mitchell translates the lecture-edition, see Heidegger, GA 79, 18.

⁷³⁷ Gillespie, 151. [Was gegen das Sein steht, ist das Nichts, und vielleicht ist selbst dieses noch im Wesen dem Sein und nur ihm botmäßig] (GA 6.2, 251). Compare to *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 192.

⁷³⁸ Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, 43.

the shelter of being.”⁷³⁹ Or in Mitchell’s translation: “Death, as the shrine of the nothingness, harbors in itself what essences of being. As the shrine of nothingness, death is the refuge of being.”⁷⁴⁰

Above, we saw that the nothing essences *as* being itself, and it is exactly this that I contend is meant by the statement that the shrine of the nothing *harbors* the essencing of being (and hence is the refuge of being). That is to say, that being essences (holds sway, is at work: that there *is* an understanding of what is and what matters) by the withdrawn, hidden – indeed, concealed – character of the enshrined nothingness. Death “provides” being; being *is* (essences) by death. In the clearest terms I can put it, I suggest it means that the mortals’ understanding of what is and what matters is provided by their capability of death.

As Heidegger puts it:

We now call mortals mortals – not because their earthly life comes to an end, but because they are capable of death as death. Mortals are who they are, as mortals, present in the shelter of being. They are the presencing relation to being as being.⁷⁴¹

Or,

The mortals we now name the mortals – not because their earthly life ends, but rather because they are capable [vermögen] of death as death. The mortals are who they are as mortals by essencing in the refuge of being. They are the essencing relationship to being as being.⁷⁴²

The mortals are who they are because they are capable of *being* (essencing) *-in-death* (the refuge of being). The statement that “mortals are who they are” I suggest to be the very intersection between Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein and the mortals, the first of which is formally indicated as the being for which its own being is an issue. It is from out of this intersection I suggest that also the most decisive difference between Dasein and the mortals appear. As discussed above, in *Being and Time* Heidegger writes that Dasein’s “existential possibility [of being-towards-death] is *based on* the fact that Dasein is essentially disclosed to itself.”⁷⁴³ Furthermore, it is disclosed to itself as “ahead-of-itself,” which “in the structure of

⁷³⁹ Heidegger, "The Thing," 176. [Der Tod birgt als der Schrein des Nichts das Wesende des Seins in sich. Der Tod ist als der Schrein des Nichts das Gebirg des Seins] (GA 7, 180).

⁷⁴⁰ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 212. (Heidegger, GA 7, 180).

⁷⁴¹ "The Thing," 176. [Die Sterblichen nennen wir jetzt die Sterblichen - nicht, weil ihr irdisches Leben endet, sondern weil sie den Tod als Tod vermögen. Die Sterblichen sind, die sie sind, als die Sterblichen, wesend im Gebirg des Seins. Sie sind das wesende Verhältnis zum Sein als Sein] (GA 7, 180).

⁷⁴² Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 212.

⁷⁴³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294. Emphasis mine. (GA 2, 333).

care has its most primordial concretion in being-towards-death.”⁷⁴⁴ This is to say that the Heidegger’s description of Dasein as ahead-of-itself (the most primordial concretion of which is being-towards-death) is *based on* the basic, formal indication of Dasein as the being for which its own being is an issue. Dasein is towards death *second* to being an understanding relation to being. Inversely, the mortals’ understanding of being is *primarily* grounded in their belonging to death.

Keeping still in mind the suggestion that Heidegger’s motivation for renaming the human being as the mortals is the task of overcoming metaphysics, it is maybe surprising that he then claims that the mortals’ practicing of their capability of death will provide for there to be a *good* death. If this is seen from the perspective of *Being and Time*, the notion of a good death – contrary to everything else written on death, which seems to operate on the ontological level – might be understood ontically, that is, as concerning the factual death of a human being (and not the existential structure of this death). Mitchell suggests – with reference to Ariès – that Heidegger’s call for a good death refers to the dominant attitude towards death in the 14th century’s peasant life,⁷⁴⁵ what Ariès calls “the tame death.” But, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Ariès’ account of the attitudes towards death spans the history of Latin Christianity. And indeed, Ariès’ “tame death” is first observed within the medieval epoch’s understanding of being, which understands the human being as the creation of God – whose death is in the hands of God’s will. But regardless of the metaphysical implications of Ariès’ “tame death,” the description of the mortals, as I wrote above, is not a new attempt at a fundamental analysis of Dasein’s *being-towards-death*, but an attempt to prepare for the overcoming of metaphysics. Thus, I suggest that Heidegger’s notion of the good death is a response to what might be surmised to be a “bad” death according to him.

In “The Thing” Heidegger explicitly places the mortals’ capability of death in contrast to the animal’s perishing. “Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it.”⁷⁴⁶ The crucial point is that Heidegger does not claim that the human being by *default* is capable of death as death, for “metaphysics, by contrast, thinks of man as *animal*, as a living being. Even when *ratio* pervades *animalitas*, man’s being remains defined by life and life-experience.”⁷⁴⁷ In the metaphysical epochs of the history of being, the human being is understood as animal (albeit, rational), and in order to overcome metaphysics,

⁷⁴⁴ *Being and Time*, 294. [Dieses Strukturmoment der Sorge hat im Sein zum Tod seine ursprünglichste Konkretion] (GA 2, 333).

⁷⁴⁵ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 255.

⁷⁴⁶ Heidegger, “The Thing,” 176. [Nur der Mensch stirbt. Das Tier verendet] (GA 7, 180).

⁷⁴⁷ “The Thing,” 176. [Die Metaphysik dagegen stellt den Menschen als *animal*, als Lebewesen vor. Auch wenn die *ratio* die *animalitas* durchwaltet, bleibt das Menschsein vom Leben und Erleben her bestimmt] (GA 7, 180).

“rational living beings must first *become* mortals.”⁷⁴⁸ Thus, I understand the notion of good death not as a designation of a specific attitude towards dying (in Ariès’ sense), but as Heidegger’s attempt at naming the mortals’ death in contrast to the mere *animal* perishing, the mere coming to an end [verenden].⁷⁴⁹

In this, I see some of the implications of Heidegger’s change of emphasis from being (Da-*sein*) to death in his description of the human being’s non-metaphysical essence. We, the human beings, are not yet mortals but, according to my reading, Heidegger seems to suggest that when (or, insofar) we come to escort our essence into the capability of death as the shrine of nothing (i.e. when we become the mortals, in Heidegger’s understanding of the term), the metaphysical understanding of being will be overcome. Thus, the human being’s understanding of death as the shrine of nothing – which harbors that which essences of being – is revealed as that which grants a (non-metaphysical) understanding of being. Contrary to the analysis of being-towards-death in *Being and Time*, Heidegger now comes to suggest that rather than seeing the understanding of death as *derivate* from an understanding of being, the understanding of death is what *opens* for a non-metaphysical understanding of being.

However, what seems to me to remain unthought in Heidegger’s post-war account of the mortals are the implications of this shift – from being to death – for the history of being. For, does not this claim (that the determinative characteristic of the non-metaphysical essence of the human being is its capability of death as death (the shrine of nothing)), also reveal that the history of the human being’s understanding of *death* lies at the heart of the history of being? That is to say, that the metaphysical epochs of the history of being are not only characterized by the “oblivion of being”⁷⁵⁰ [Seinsvergessenheit], but also what could be called an oblivion of death?

Oblivion of Being, Oblivion of Death

Despite the fact that Heidegger’s own writings on the history of being do not have the changing essence of death as a central focus, Heidegger seems to recognize the relation in an anecdote recounted by Petzet. In a public conversation with Egon Vietta, Heidegger was told about an American university president who asked Vietta to “tell [him] all about Mr.

⁷⁴⁸ "The Thing," 176. [Lebewesen müssen erst zu Sterblichen werden] (GA 7, 180).

⁷⁴⁹ See also the discussion of the animal in Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 107-115.

⁷⁵⁰ Heidegger, "Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture "Time and Being"," 29. [Seinsvergessenheit] (*Gesamtausgabe 14: Zur Sache des Denkens*, 37).

Heidegger – in five minutes!”⁷⁵¹ The audience laughed, and Heidegger was amused by the story. But after listening to Vietta’s account of American society, he posed a single question, namely “how do Americans comport themselves towards death?”⁷⁵² Vietta’s answer concerning the “rituals with corpses that are painted, embalmed, and arranged in desired positions...revealed to Heidegger,” according to Petzet, “the American attitude toward death, which was to him at the same time a revelation of American life.”⁷⁵³ It must be mentioned that Heidegger, after WWI and his involvement with the Nazis, came to see Nazism, Marxism and “Americanism” as belonging to the same essential understanding of being of the Late-Modern epoch.⁷⁵⁴ In this respect, it is significant that Heidegger sees the American comportment towards death as the phenomenon that par excellence reveals the American life-style – which again points to the late-modern understanding of being.

As I discussed in chapter two, Heidegger claims that the inception of metaphysics in the history of being occurs in the essential oversight of the question of being in favor of the question of the being of beings. Thus, Heidegger claims that the history of being is characterized by an oblivion of being, or more accurately, an oblivion of the *truth* of being.⁷⁵⁵ Rather than attempting to understand being as the epochal changes of beings’ *disclosure* – and thus attempting to understand *that* there is disclosure as such – metaphysics has attempted to provide final and eternal answers to what beings are as beings. Hence, belonging to the fundamental transformations of truth and of beings as a whole, there is a history of the essential transformations of the being of the *human* being – a history which can only be roughly indicated here. Metaphysics, from the ancient Greek *zoon logon echon* and the Roman *animalitas rationale*, metaphysics has understood man as a living being [zoon] or animal, to which the word [logos], or *rationality*, is added.⁷⁵⁶ Thus, the Platonic doctrine of

⁷⁵¹ Herman Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters & Dialogues with Martin Heidegger: 1929-1976* [Begegnungen und Gespräche mit Martin Heidegger, 1929-1976], trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993; or. published, 1983), 101.

⁷⁵² Ibid., 102.

⁷⁵³ Ibid. See also Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011; or. published, 1998) for an account of the American funeral industry from the 1960s until the 90s. And Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, 596-601.

⁷⁵⁴ See Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History*, 131-134. Implied in Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, 103-109 (GA 7, 90-96). See also Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art*, 3-133, for an in-depth study of the socio-historical and political contexts of Heidegger’s critique of modernity.

⁷⁵⁵ This oblivion, however, is not a lack or errancy on the human beings’ part, but is according to Heidegger (as I argued in chapter two), destined by being itself. The essential oversight is due to being’s withdrawal.

⁷⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 142. (GA 6.2, 195).

the suprasensuous, immortal soul [psyche]⁷⁵⁷ was taken up in the metaphysics of the Medieval epoch. Now the human being is fundamentally understood as a *created* being consisting of a sensuous body endowed with a suprasensuous *soul*. In the Modern epoch's metaphysics, the human being (here in Descartes' formulation) is the combination of the *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, or of the *objective* body and the suprasensuous, but now *self-grounding* subjective consciousness. Furthermore, Heidegger claims the same essential dualistic determination of the human being as *animalitas rationale* is at work even in Nietzsche's metaphysics, although here "*animalitas* is taken as the guide."⁷⁵⁸

But if the human being after the overcoming of metaphysics is to be characterized not as the being that is "defined by life and life-experience [Leben und Erleben]"⁷⁵⁹ (and hence only subsequently *is* towards death), but rather as the being that is defined by *death* and *death-experience*,⁷⁶⁰ how does this impact the history of the metaphysical transformations of the human essence as *animalitas rationale*? In my view, by claiming that its mortality is the determinative characteristic of the human being's essence (as the mortals), it seems that Heidegger suggests that any understanding of the human being which denies, or rather overlooks, death (as the shelter of nothing) forgets – is *oblivious* to – the human being's essence. Thus, by naming the human beings the mortals Heidegger implies that *metaphysics* does not only forget the truth of being, but that it is oblivious to the essence of death. For what I discussed in the previous chapter was exactly that the essential transformation between the understanding of death in pre-Socratic, Archaic pinax, and the medieval engraving was that while the latter thinks the human being as essentially immortal, the former shows death as concealment. The mediaeval death is merely the end-point of life in this transitory, sensuous world. The *truly real* part of the human being, its suprasensuous soul, is – like in Plato's metaphysics – immortal. This essential determination of the human being remains unquestioned in the medieval engraving. What is at stake is the understanding of the nature of the transition, i.e. of judgment, and how the human being can prepare for this transition.

⁷⁵⁷ See, for instance, Choron, *Death and Western Thought*, 47-57. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Heidegger contests the usual interpretation of Plato's metaphysics, and with it, the usual translation of 'psyche' as 'soul.' It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss this. See Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 99. (GA 54, 147).

⁷⁵⁸ Nietzsche: *Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 147. [in Nietzsches Metaphysik wird die animalitas (Tierheit) zum Leitfaden] (GA 6.2, 200).

⁷⁵⁹ "The Thing," 176. (GA 7, 180).

⁷⁶⁰ Note that this wordplay, however, is only permissible in English due to the customary translation of *Erleben* as life-experience, which emphasizes the word's belonging to life [Leben] and sets it apart from the German 'Erfahrung' – an experience one undergoes, suffers, or endures. Life-experience, *Erlebnis*, is for Heidegger always related to the Modern understanding of the subject. See for instance "The Age of the World Picture," 116, esp. translator's note n4. (GA 5, 75).

As I argued above, a way to interpret Heidegger's choice of naming the human beings as 'the mortals' is to see it as a rethinking of the ancient Greek word 'brotoi.' At first sight this might look like an attempt at romanticizing a return to pre-Socratic thinking. Indeed, Heidegger's claim that death is the shrine of the nothing (which, as its refuge, harbors the essencing of being) appears to me to be similar to, or at least related to the pre-Socratic understanding of death discussed in the previous chapter. There we saw that death is thought of as the concealment (lethe) that belongs to the unconcealed (aletheia); and the *prothesis*, the lettering-appear and recognition of this concealment. The shrine of the nothing is the concealment in which being takes refuge, so that it can belong to the essence of the human being (through its mortality), and the human being belong to the essence of being. The concealment that death is (as the shrine of the nothing) belongs to the unconcealment in which the mortals stand; or rather, this concealment is what enables the unconcealment in which the mortals stand – its world, its understanding of being.

However, rather than a return to Greek thinking, I think this might be seen as an example of Heidegger's claim that "only the way back will lead us forward."⁷⁶¹ Indeed, what is at stake for Heidegger is not the attempt at taking refuge in the past, but the explicit task of overcoming metaphysics. And more specifically, the task of overcoming the *culmination* of metaphysics in the late-modern epoch's essential understanding of being as Gestell and resources, which brings along the ultimate danger of the complete forgetting of the truth of being – and I add, the danger of the complete forgetting of the essence of death.

Thus – although this can only be indicated in a far from satisfying and sketch-like manner in the present thesis – from the perspective of the mortal essence of the human being, metaphysics is revealed as an oblivion of death. From Plato and onwards, the essence of the human being is understood in its relation to eternal, immortal life.⁷⁶² In the medieval epoch, the immortality of the soul is determined by God. In the modern epoch, the immortality of the soul becomes an issue for the suprasensuous subject, and has to be grounded *rationally* (which for instance was ascertained by the evidence of natural reason, for Descartes, or by the moral argument, for Kant⁷⁶³). But when the reality of the real is determined by what is

⁷⁶¹ *On the Way to Language*, 12. [sogar der Weg zurück uns erst vorwärts führt] (GA 12, 94).

⁷⁶² Choron, *Death and Western Thought*, 47-52. See also Hendrik Lorenz, "Ancient Theories of Soul," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2009 Edition), for a discussion of Plato's accounts of the soul.

⁷⁶³ See Choron, *Death and Western Thought*, 111-115 and 139-150. Although both Plato and the Scholastic philosophers (among others) provide *proofs* of the soul's immortality before the modern epoch, my suggestion of a Heideggerian reply would be that the understanding of truth to which these "proofs" are aimed are different according to their essence, and that it is first in the modern epoch that rationally grounded *certainty* is demanded for ascertaining the immortality of the soul.

certainly representable by the subject, and what is represented in such representing is always the objective – that which stands against [Gegen-stand] the subject – the immortal soul, which itself is not an object, becomes impossible to ascertain rationally. And as I claimed, in the previous chapter, was the case in Krohg and Munch’s paintings – due to the emerging transformation of the poietics of post-medieval art that pictorial representation must correspond to the observable reality (because the reality of the real is itself determined by its observability) – the immortal soul disappears from view.⁷⁶⁴ And hence, the representation of the reality of death becomes confined to its social (in Krohg’s painting) and affective (in Munch’s painting) reality.

Despite the fact that the disappearance of the soul and its expulsion from the limits of pictorial intelligibility in the art of Krohg and Munch does not imply that the human being is considered soulless, these works seem to belong to the emergence of the overturning of the dualistic understanding of the human being. As mentioned in chapter two, Heidegger claims the subject’s capacity for representation is the ultimate tribunal for ascertaining the reality of the real in the modern epoch. Thus, that which is unrepresentable is pushed to the margins, becomes insignificant, and eventually unreal.

But if Heidegger’s naming of the human being as the mortals is to be understood as a contribution to his attempt at preparing for the overcoming of the late-modern epoch, what does this imply concerning the understanding of death in the late-modern epoch? What is the essence of death in the late-modern epoch?

Summary and Transition

The point of departure for this section was the need of clarifying what and how death “is” so that it can be thought in works of art, and revealed to the human being, according to Heidegger; and hence also the relation between death and the history of being. In summary, I have discussed Heidegger’s conception of Dasein’s being-towards-death in relation to his later renaming of the human being as the mortals. It was argued that while Dasein is towards death based on its understanding relation to being, the mortals’ understanding of being is based in its belonging to death. And I suggested that Heidegger’s inversion of the relation between death and being is motivated by his attempt at overcoming metaphysics, by preparing for a new non-metaphysical understanding of being. Finally, I suggested that the naming of the human beings as the mortals might be understood to imply that the metaphysical epochs of

⁷⁶⁴ Note, I do not claim that this essential transformation begins in Krohg or Munch’s art, but that both grounds it by letting the modern essence of death arrive, appear, and thus establish itself in the work.

the history of being are not only characterized by oblivion of being, but also oblivion of death, and hence, that the ultimate *danger* of the late-modern epoch is not only the complete forgetting of the truth of being, but also the complete forgetting of the essence of death. However, it is not clear what this forgetting of death would mean, and what and how it “is.” Indeed, above, I only briefly indicated the outlines of what might be seen as the essential changes in the mortal essence of the human being, and suggested that metaphysics, since Plato, sees the essence of the human being in relation to eternal life. But how and what is the human being’s mortality – its belonging to death – in an age where *the* metaphysical and suprasensuous realm of the Divine is closed to man? As I will argue in the final chapter, Munch’s painting *Metabolism: Life and Death* can be seen as a response to this question.

Section Three | Metabolism, the Fall of Man and the Birth of Death

If the human being is to be characterized not only as the being that is towards death, but the being that is mortal – and hence, that it is the mortality of the human being which enables its understanding of being as such – the history of the pictorial thinking of death takes a central place in the art history of being. What death “is” changes, and with it the openness of being that grants our shared sense of what it means for anything to be and matter. Thus the changes in the history of the pictorial thinking of death can be seen as a mode of the essential response to being’s historical disclosure. In the previous chapter, I described the outlines of the pictorial thinking of death concerning the theme of death and the pillow; from an Archaic pinax, through an engraving from a late-medieval *Ars Moriendi*, to Krohg’s *Sick Girl* and Munch’s *The Sick Child*. In the first section of this chapter, I described Munch’s painting *Metabolism* and discussed the relation between Symbolism and *The Frieze of Life* – for which Munch claims *Metabolism* is as necessary “as the buckle is to the belt.”⁷⁶⁵ In the final section of this chapter, I will turn again to Munch’s painting *Metabolism (Life and Death) (Adam and Eve)* and attempt to think along with the pictorial thinking of death that goes on in the work.

Not only the title, but also the basic depiction of a man and woman separated by a tree, indicates *Metabolism*’s belonging to the history of the depiction of Adam and Eve – the first human beings created by God, according to *Genesis*. As this chapter will show, more specific, it belongs to the pictorial history of *the fall of man*. By default, this history belongs to Christian metaphysics, but it is not clear whether or in what way *Metabolism* relates to this understanding of being. Hence, this section will first explore and outline a pictorial history of the fall of man, and discuss its relation to *Metabolism*. Based upon this discussion, but also what has been said in the previous sections and chapters of this thesis, I will then turn to the pictorial thinking of *Metabolism*, how it thinks life *as* death, and death *as* life, as well as its poietics and metaphysics.

⁷⁶⁵ Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

An Outline of the Pictorial History of the Fall of Man: Sin, Death, and Beauty

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Genesis, 2:16-17

In Høifødt's article, *Metabolism* is discussed (with reference to Gösta Svenæus) in relation to two other paintings that concerns the fall of man, Jan van Eyck's *Adam and Eve* (altarpiece in Ghent, 1432) [image 61] and Hans Thoma's *Adam, Eva und Tod* from 1897 [image 62]. In both cases, however, what seems to be primarily at stake is the correct dating of the work. The fact that van Eyck's work was reproduced in a monograph about the artist in 1898, while there are "correspondences"⁷⁶⁶ between Thoma and Munch's works, are suggested to provide indications for when Munch' painted the work. In any case, Høifødt states, Munch "was not unaffected by the time's fascination with the Middle Ages and the Renaissance."⁷⁶⁷ In line with the aim of this thesis, however, I will not discuss the historiological questions concerning Munch's sources of inspiration, fascination, or influence. Rather, what is presently at stake is to see the pictorial history to which *Metabolism* belongs, and from out of which it *shows*.

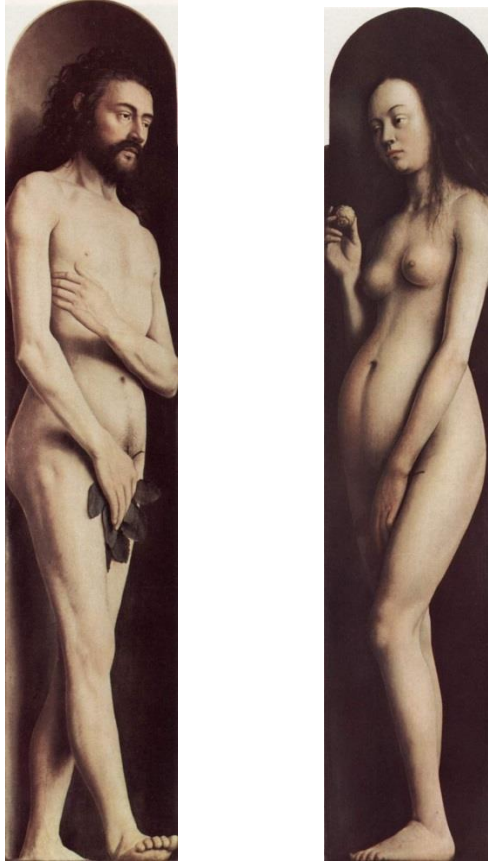
In Christianity, man's mortality was first decided and determined by the event of the fall of man. Eve was tempted by the serpent, and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Then she gave it to Adam, who also ate of the fruit. God, in his fury upon discovering their disobedience, condemned man to mortality: "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."⁷⁶⁸ Man now knew good from evil, and was certain to die. However, in the center of Eden, there were placed two trees: the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. God saw that "man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil," and decides: "He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."⁷⁶⁹ Hence, in order to prevent man from gaining immortality, God

⁷⁶⁶ [overensstemmelser] Høifødt, "Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens "Beltespenne", " 127.

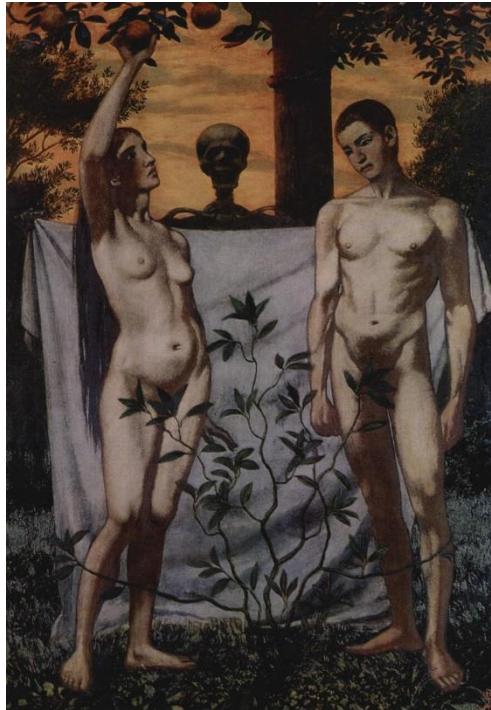
⁷⁶⁷ [Han var ikke upåvirket av tidens fascinasjonen [sic] for middelalder og renessanse] *ibid.*, 126.

⁷⁶⁸ *Genesis*, 3:19.

⁷⁶⁹ *Genesis*, 3:22.



61. Jan van Eyck, *Adam and Eve* (from *The Ghent Altarpiece*), 1430-32.
Oil on oak panel, dimensions unknown.
Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent.



62. Hans Thoma, *Adam and Eve*, 1897.
Oil on canvas, 110 x 79 cm. The State
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

banished man from the Garden of Eden and placed at the gates “cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”⁷⁷⁰

At the heart of Christian faith lies the mystery of mortality and immortality. In the Old Testament, the human being’s mortality is explained by the will of God, provoked by man’s original sin. As told by the New Testament, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, promised the eternal life of the soul, and thus the final overcoming of death: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”⁷⁷¹ The belief in Jesus Christ as the Savior – and thus as the guarantee for the overcoming of death and the securing of the Christian’s eternal life – is the core of Christian faith. And in this way, the human being’s determination as mortal in *Genesis* is, in other words, a condition for Christian faith as such.

Hence, the fall of man has been a central theme in the history of Western art, stretching back to the first centuries A.D. and the rise of non-iconoclastic, early Christianity. Like most Christian art, works which depicts the fall of man have their literary basis in the Bible – a basis which gives the motif its stability throughout the ages. But what is crucial in the perspective of this thesis is how these few lines of texts prompt dramatically different pictorial articulations throughout the centuries. The fall of man is a central part of the Christian creation myth insofar as it is the first characterization of any length of the human being in the Bible. Hence, as seen from this perspective, I suggest that we can see Munch’s *Metabolism* as belonging to a roughly eighteen century long history, whereby pictorial artworks not merely illustrates a biblical story, but through which the changing essential understandings of what the human being *is* are shown and rendered visible.

Consider the fresco from the catacomb of St. Januarius (San Gennaro, Naples) [image 63], which is suggested to be the earliest depiction of the fall of man in Christian art, dating from some time in the first half of the 2nd century.⁷⁷² Here, Adam and Eve are turned away from each other. Adam, with his right arm outstretched in an elegant gesture, faces the viewer and displays the silhouette of his classical, muscular body. Eve turns away while covering herself with a few leaves. The slender tree is barely visible between them. Despite the worn state of the fresco, we can see that Adam and Eve are shown in alignment with the pictorial idioms

⁷⁷⁰ *Genesis*, 3:24.

⁷⁷¹ *John*, 3:16.

⁷⁷² Tom Deconshire Jones, Linda Murray, and Peter Murray, *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2013), 4. Also mentioned in Robert Milburn, *Early Christian Art and Architecture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 55.

and ideals of classical Greek and Roman antiquity through the contrapposto of their poses. This classical idiom is far less prominent, however, in a 3rd century fresco from the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter (Santi Marcellino e Pietro, Rome) [image 64].⁷⁷³ Indeed, I suggest that we might see this not as a mere stylistic change, but as yet an example of how the very way works of art are intelligible – their poietics – change.⁷⁷⁴ The emerging Christian understanding of being establishes itself in works of art, which means that an entirely different understanding of truth – namely the medieval sense of *veritas* as correspondence to the *intellectus divinus* – emerges. The ancient modes of rendering reality in visual terms become obsolete as the very understanding of being that sustains and guides these renderings change. Now, in the 3rd century fresco, executed in loose strokes of paint, Adam and Eve are turned against each other, but their eyes are cast down, and they seem to even more strongly cover themselves; not only with the leaves but with their arms, both of which hold the leaves firmly in place. In a later, 4th century fresco, also from the catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter [image 65],⁷⁷⁵ the serpent is clearly present, coiling around the tree of knowledge. The abundantly green and brown tree is joined by another tree to the left. The couple seems to look at each other, while Eve is raising her right hand, with an open palm, towards Adam.

All three paintings are painted directly on the catacomb walls. Not exactly a background, the walls are simply there as the bright contrast, the material support which retains and conveys the frescoes. Adam and Eve do not occupy a designated pictorial *place* – although their shadows are clearly visible in the 4th century fresco, and the bodies themselves modulate their own space. The whiteness of the wall provides a certain spaciousness, without providing any further reference to a place; the tree of knowledge suffice for placing them in the Garden of Eden. The catacomb frescoes, which might originally have been seen in the dim light of candles and lamps, are today brightly lit up by LEDs in honor of the tourist industry. Hence, we can only imagine how the frescoes, which were both painted and viewed in flickering half-darkness, previously proscribed a certain intimacy of vision. Neither pure decoration nor mere illustration, the paintings tell the already familiar story through each individual picture.

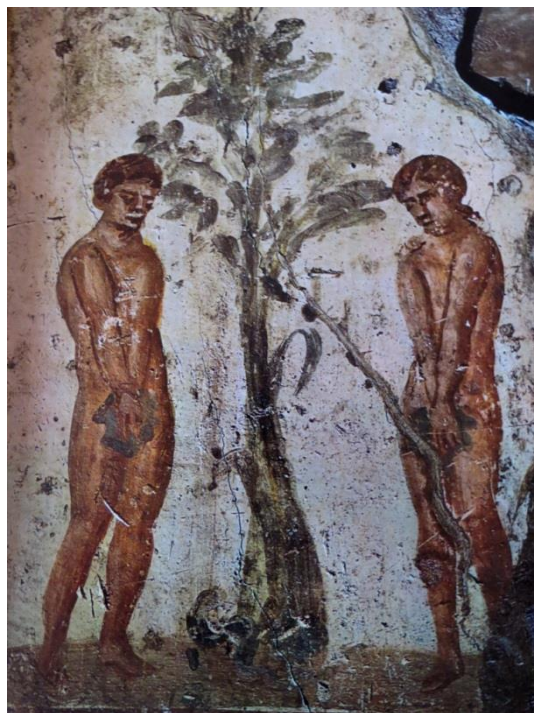
⁷⁷³ Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 26.

⁷⁷⁴ This notable stylistic change has for instance been called “impressionist,” “symbolist,” and “primitive.” See, Milburn, *Early Christian Art and Architecture*, 44.

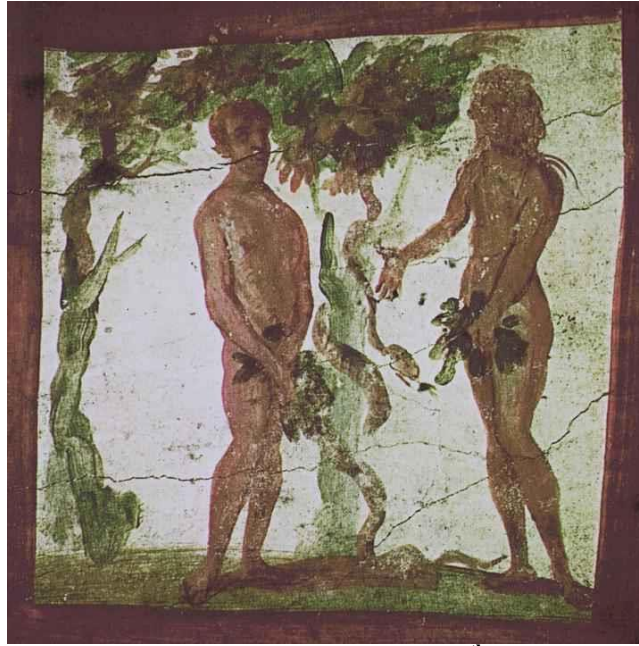
⁷⁷⁵ “The presence of Adam and Eve in the catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus...underlines the necessity for the redemption of Man by Christ from the consequences of the Fall.” John Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 24.



63. Unknown artist, *Adam and Eve*, 2nd century A.D.
Fresco, dimensions unknown. Catacomb of St. Januarius, Naples.



64. Unknown artist, *Adam and Eve*, 3rd century A.D. Fresco, dimensions unknown. Catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter, Rome.



65. Unknown artist, *Adam and Eve*, 4th century A.D. Fresco, dimensions unknown. Catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter, Rome.



66. Unknown artist, *God, Adam and Eve (from the Bernward Doors)*, ca 1015. Bronze, dimensions unknown. St. Michaels Cathedral, Hildesheim.



67. Unknown artist, *Adam and Eve (Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus)*, 359. Marble, dimensions unknown. Museum of Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City.

The three frescoes display remarkable differences in variation of the same theme. While all three take their motif from the moment right after Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit, in neither painting is the fruit itself portrayed; but as Jensen points out, such “visual images are not merely illustrations of narrative texts, nor are they simply aids for non-readers.”⁷⁷⁶ Indeed, in my view, what is crucial is not the mere iconological identification of the “motif” but how these depictions of Adam and Eve – the first man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God – concern the essential determination of the human being as such.

In the 4th century fresco, Adam seems to look somewhat bewildered at Eve, who opens her palm towards him. The hand simultaneously points towards the tree and the serpent, as if in explanation. The 3rd century fresco depicts the two in their shared shame and embarrassment for each other. They are, however, turned against each other, as if just having observed the other’s naked body, and immediately realize their own nakedness. Finally, in the 2nd century fresco, we see the widest separation between the two. Eve seems to recoil from Adam, who stretches his arm out – against her. The gesture places the blame; in reply of God’s question of whether he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Adam answers: “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”⁷⁷⁷ Indeed, some nine centuries later, the pointing is given full attention in the bas-relief of *The Bernward Doors* of the Cathedral of Hildesheim (ca 1015) [image 66]: God points at Adam, Adam points at Eve, and Eve points at the serpent – “the serpent beguiled me, and I ate.”⁷⁷⁸

Indeed, the three early Christian frescoes do not primarily address the fall of man in relation to its mortal consequence. Rather, they show how the couple cover themselves with leaves, suddenly ashamed of their nakedness. This brings forth the essential characteristic of the human being, which was neither death, disobedience, nor temptation, but sin.⁷⁷⁹ Indeed, not only in the earliest Christian art – that is, from the time before the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in 306-337 – but also after Christianity was tolerated in the Roman empire (and from 380, the state religion), depictions of Adam and Eve focused less on the issue of death than on sin (see for instance the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus from 359

⁷⁷⁶ Robin M. Jensen, "The Fall and Rise of Adam and Eve in Early Christian Art and Literature," in *Interpreting Christian Art: Reflections on Christian Art*, ed. Heidi J. Hornik and Mikael Carl Parsons, 25-52 (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 36.

⁷⁷⁷ *Genesis*, 3:12.

⁷⁷⁸ *Genesis*, 3:13.

⁷⁷⁹ For a discussion of the complexity of this issue, the relation of sin to baptism, Jesus Christ, and the “divine Logos,” see Jensen, "The Fall and Rise of Adam and Eve in Early Christian Art and Literature,"

[image 67]). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, “early Christians appear to have approached death joyfully, with confidence in their eternal salvation.”⁷⁸⁰ This rather sweeping statement by Reinis appears as a means to contrast the early Christian certainty of salvation to the rise of the fundamental *uncertainty* of salvation in medieval Christianity, which again serves as the background for a discussion of the change in the understanding of death in the German reformation in the 16th century.⁷⁸¹ Yet, it does provide a perspective unto these early depictions of the fall of man which highlights that what these works concern is not primarily the mortality of the human being and its destiny in the afterlife (as salvation is certain), but the fundamental sinful nature of the human being in this life – in fundamental contrast to the dominate Roman religion.

Contrary to the early Christian renderings of the fall of man on the catacomb walls, later medieval depictions instigated the tradition of portraying the eating of the fruit (conventionally depicted as an apple) as the central aspect of the biblical tale. This underlines the argument in the previous chapter, with reference to Ariès, that the question of death gained a more pressing attention from the 11th and 12th century; for while the early Christians focused on sin and shame, the medieval Christians eventually came to emphasize the fall of man as the birth of death. In numerous illuminated manuscripts we can find depictions of the same scheme: Adam and Eve placed on each side of an apple tree with a serpent coiled around it. Sometimes the apple is still hanging in the tree, sometimes in the hand of Eve [image 68] or Adam, or as we will see, both.

A particularly telling example is found in an illumination by the French monk Remiet, for the poetical work *Lay de la fragilite humaine* by Eustache Deschamps, from 1393.⁷⁸² In the little picture we can see, as usual, Adam and Eve placed on each side of the tree of knowledge, with the serpent twisted around it [image 70]. Eve eats the fruit, while handing it to Adam, who simultaneously is eating the fruit. As Camille argues, the three apples are the same, and Remiet portrays the temporal succession of the narrative by painting the apple three times. But more significantly, behind the two, we can see a third human, a body lying on the ground with the eyes closed and the mouth open. The third human figure in the illumination is neither merely a continuation of the biblical narrative (as if including a portrayal of Adam’s

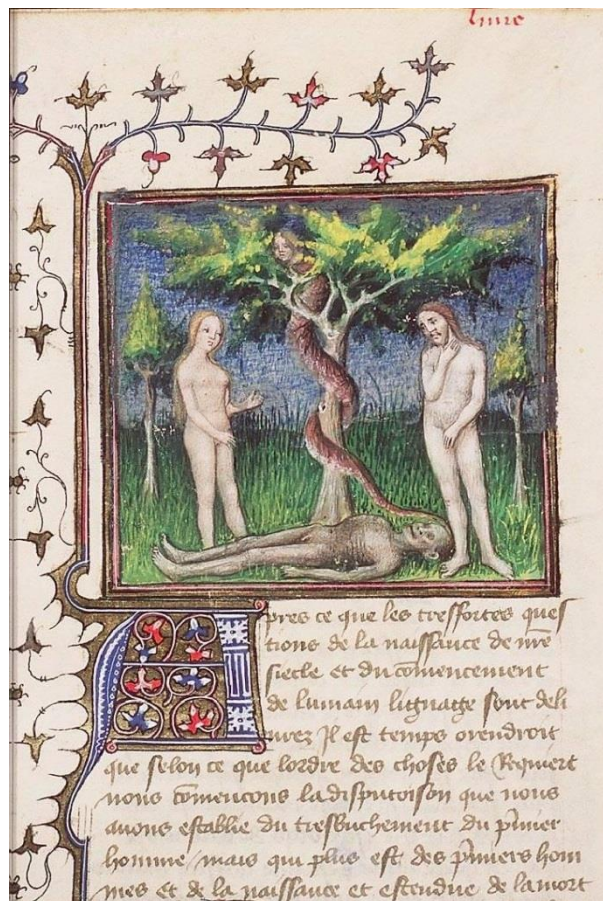
⁷⁸⁰ Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)*, 2.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

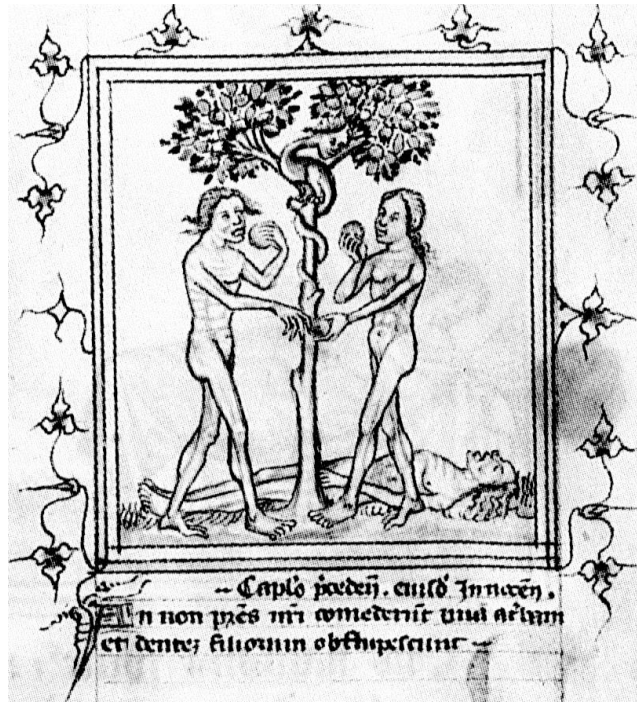
⁷⁸² Camille, *Master of Death*, 58-60.



68. Rabanus Maurus, *Adam and Eve* (from *De Rerum Naturis*), 1425.
Pal. Lat. 291. Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican.



69. Virgil Master, *Adam and Eve* (from *Augustine, La Cité de Dieu (Vol. II)*, ca. 1410-1412.
The Hague, MMW, 10 A 12 (Fol. 32r), book 13.
National Library of the Netherlands, Amsterdam.



70. Remiet, *Adam and Eve*. 1383. From Estache Deschamps, *Lay de la fragilité humaine*. Illuminated manuscript. Fr. 20029, fol. 8. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



71. Remiet, *The Fall From the Tree of Life*, ca 1400. From Augustine, *La Cité de Dieu*. Illuminated manuscript. Fr. 171, fol. 45. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

death at the age of 930 years)⁷⁸³ nor should it be seen as an otherwise unmentioned character inserted into the biblical tale by Remiet. It is “neither a personification nor a person, not even a symbol,” as Camille puts it, “just a fact of what has been born at this moment.”⁷⁸⁴ The tiny illumination depicts the fall of man as the inaugural event of man’s mortality, the birth of death. Indeed, the illumination is accompanied by a text: “How sin entered into this world by one man [par un homme] and how death [la mort] through sin came among all men.”⁷⁸⁵

Another, unknown master or workshop included a somewhat similar, but even more elaborated version of the fall of man in an illumination in a volume of Augustine’s *Le Cité de Dieu* from 1410-12 [image 69]. Even without depicting the eating of the apple, the connection between the fall of man and death is clear: separating Eve and Adam, and now placed in front of the tree of knowledge, lies a dark corpse. The massive serpent – with the now customary female head – lightly touches the corpse’s head with the tip of its tail, connecting the serpent’s temptation of Eve with the mortal fate.

Indeed, the horizontally placed body reoccurs in several of Remiet’s illuminations, and can for instance be seen in a particularly strange take on the motif of the fall of man. In yet another volume of Augustine’s *Le Cité de Dieu* from around 1400, we can see God as a bearded man watching man as he literally falls from the tree of knowledge [image 71]. On the ground lie two bodies, resembling the one from *Lay de la fragilite humaine*, except now they are clothed. Like the two bodies, the falling man is clothed in the style of Remiet’s time, hence no longer depicting Adam in particular, but man as such – essentially determined by the fall of man, in the presence of God.

In these medieval works of art, the fall of man reveals an answer to the question of death and the necessity of redemption; that is, the questions of *how* and *why* the human being became mortal. Indeed, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the Middle Ages saw the emergence of a fundamental uncertainty of salvation, and with it the myriad depictions of the general Judgment and eventually the rise of the doctrine of Purgatory and the particular Judgment. The fall of man, for instance in Remiet’s depiction above [image 70], shows how the human being, through the fall, became mortal and hence became in need of redemption and salvation through Jesus Christ.

⁷⁸³ *Genesis*, 5:5.

⁷⁸⁴ Camille, *Master of Death*, 58.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 62. Although it seems not to be recognized by Camille, the quote is a slightly altered version of *Romans* 5:12, to which there is merely added the two words “how,” revealing the unity between text and illumination in the medieval manuscript.

The fall of man served as a central motif, not only in the devotional pictures in catacombs and manuscripts of the middle ages, but later also in prints and paintings intended for individual patrons and buyers. Albrecht Dürer's engraving *The Fall of Man (Adam and Eve)* [image 72] from 1505 displays another transformation of the biblical tale. Contrary to the previous examples, the engraving explicitly situates Adam and Eve in the midst of a northern European forest. The explicit placement of the couple in a familiar forest location – and not in the elusive and mythical Garden of Eden, as merely indicated by the tree of knowledge – seems to naturalize the biblical tale, bringing it closer to a carnal reality. Both furthering and contesting this naturalizing impulse, however, the rendering of Adam and Eve attests to Dürer's idealizing poetics. Contrary to Remiet's simple but suggestive line, with his sparse use of colors, Dürer's prints (despite their colorlessness) modulate the bodies of the couple, giving them a carnal fullness. As Panofsky writes, the engraving was the culmination of Dürer's attempt at depicting the “perfect” male and female.⁷⁸⁶ Inspired by Vitruvius' *Canon of Proportions*, as well as drawings of the newly discovered *Apollo Belvedere*, Dürer first attempted to depict the perfect male in various renderings of Apollo, but “in the end, he gave up all these ideas and placed the classical figure in the service of a Biblical theme.”⁷⁸⁷ Panofsky's interpretation is significant because it highlights that the engraving is not first and foremost created as a devotional image – like those discussed above – but a site for realizing a specific artistic ambition; namely, to realize Dürer's interpretation of the ideal human body.⁷⁸⁸

Engraving as a medium afforded distribution of an unprecedented scale compared to the slowly copied and circulated manuscripts of the late medieval Christians, let alone the entirely static frescoes of the catacombs. And simultaneously as the medium made wider distribution possible, the engraving exemplifies how the fall of man became for Dürer a motif among other motifs, a pre-text which could be taken up and utilized as the literary framework for his explorations of human proportions. Hence, the engraving attests to a newly emerging fluidity, both in terms of the medium and the motif as such.

Like the medieval illuminations, the engraving depicts the event just before the fall: the serpent hands the apple to Eve, who will soon give it to Adam. But the reference to death – which is still obvious for instance in Dürer's student Barthel Beham's engraving (here, in a

⁷⁸⁶ Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*, 249-251.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

⁷⁸⁸ See also *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Fourth ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1955; or. published, 1943), 84-87, for Panofsky's thorough discussion of the engraving, and his interpretation of the animals as representing “the four humors.”



72. Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1504.
Engraving, 25.1 x 20 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



73. Sebald Bheam after Barthel Beham, Adam and Eve, 1543.
Engraving, 82 x 57 mm.
Art Institute of Chicaco, Chicago.

copy by Sebald Beham) [image 73], where the tree of knowledge takes the shape of a skeleton – is completely gone. Later (around 1519, according to Panofsky), Dürer became involved with Martin Luther and the theology of the German reformation.⁷⁸⁹ Contrary to the then traditional understanding of death and salvation, Luther argued that the human beings can never “earn” their salvation – as this is already decided through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As it is put by Reinis, Luther preached that “through faith Christians could be certain of their salvation.”⁷⁹⁰ Although this did not obliterate the need for guidance and consolation in the face of death,⁷⁹¹ it radically altered the understanding of the nature of death and the afterlife, and hence the meaning of the fall of man.

Dürer’s print brings into view, and shows, the human being not in the sense of the medieval *ens creatum*, but as subject. For contrary to the early medieval depictions which articulated the aspect of sin and shame by showing the moments after the eating of the fruit, and contrary to the late medieval schematic renderings of the eating of the fruit (and most significantly, in the few cases discussed above, the connection between the fall of man and the birth of death), Dürer’s *The Fall of Man* seems to downplay any moral or theological claim upon the perceiver in its attempt of presenting two models of the perfect, idealized male and female “placed...in the service of a Biblical theme.” Or could it be said that the inverse is true? That the Biblical theme merely serves as a location for the perfect male and female? Nevertheless, the engraving shows how the motif of the fall of man seemingly paradoxically becomes less tightly connected with its strictly religious meaning and devotional function. It becomes a site for the artistic experimentation of the beauty of the human body; hence exalting and showing man as a self-standing, self-certain, and self-grounding *subject*, and no longer a created being.⁷⁹² In my view, Dürer’s print seems to articulate and help to establish a decisively different understanding of being through its pictorial thinking of the human being. While the medieval depictions’ pictorial intelligibility is characterized by being both fateful and faithful, the modern depictions are rendered *rationality*, that is, according to *ratio*. Although this can be understood as a calculative, objective – scientific even – approach to the

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., 198-199.

⁷⁹⁰ Reinis, *Reforming the Art of Dying: The ars moriendi in the German Reformation (1519-1528)*, 247.

⁷⁹¹ Which is the theme of *ibid.*

⁷⁹² Indeed, the pictorial thinking of man as subject seems to predate its philosophical formulation. Further discussion of this shift could include a parallel discussion of the re-thinking of the contrapposto and classical human ideal proportions in Renaissance art, in contrast to the classical pose of the Adam of the second century fresco, as well as the *Apollo Belvedere* itself; and on the other hand, Heidegger’s discussion of the different fundamental metaphysical positions of Protagoras and Descartes in Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, Vol IV, 91-122. (*GA* 6.2, 135-173).

work of art, it simultaneously attests to “art’s moving into the purview of aesthetics”⁷⁹³ whereby the work is understood in relation to the subject’s aesthetic experience of sensuous beauty, rather than the beauty of its divine revelation.

Briefly glancing over a few works from the centuries following Dürer’s engraving, it seems that a characteristic of the modern epoch’s depictions of the fall of man is its concern with the pictorial meditation on visual beauty – the apotheosis of which is the human body. This change is not only a change in the social and material conditions of art creation and circulation, but can in my view be seen as revealing a significant shift in the most basic, implicit understanding of what a human being is, as well as what a work of art is. That is to say, to the vast differences in style and technique belong an essential transformation in the poetics of art, *corresponding* to the essential transformation of truth in the emergence of the modern epoch. That is, as was mentioned above, a change in the limits of pictorial intelligibility – a grounding of a new measure in the strife between world and earth.

The fall of man remains a central motif in Western art. Just to compile a few examples, we can recall Michelangelo’s *Sistine Chapel* (1508-12) [image 74], Tizian’s *The Fall of Man* (ca 1550) [image 75], and Rubens’ copy (1628-9) [image 76]. Moreover, looking at one of Lucas Cranach the Elder and his workshop’s many depictions of Adam and Eve [image 77] (1526), we can still recognize the medieval formula. But the lavish rendering of animals, as well as the reflections in the little pond in the foreground, makes the painterly virtuosity somewhat overshadow the solemnity of the scene. In Frans Floris’ *The Fall of Man* (ca 1560) [image 78], all attention is brought to the muscular torso of Adam, and the communication between the two seems to be almost purely bodily, as their gaze seems strangely inward or absent-minded. Hendrik Goltzius’ *The Fall of Man* (1616) [image 79] presents an overtly eroticized depiction of the fall, with Eve lying over Adam, seducingly gazing into his eyes. Carlo Cignani’s *The Fall of Man* (1700) [image 80] places the scene in the bright moonlight; Adam stands as if transfixed by Eve’s temptation.

Closer to Munch’s time, throughout the 19th century the fall of man remains a theme for many artists. Among William Blake’s illustrations for Milton’s *Paradise Lost* we can for instance find a rendering of *The Temptation and Fall of Eve* [image 81] (1807) which emphasizes Eve’s responsibility for the fall of man, a standpoint already present in the Middle

⁷⁹³ "The Age of the World Picture," 116. [daß die Kunst in den Gesichtskreis der Ästhetik rückt] (GA 5, 65).



74. **Michelangelo, *The Fall of Man*, 1508-1512.**
Fresco, dimensions unknown. The Sistine Chapel, The Vatican.



75. **Titian, *The Fall of Man*, Ca. 1550.**
Oil on canvas, 240 x 186 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



76. **Pieter Paul Rubens, *The Fall of Man*, 1628-9.** Copy after Titian.
Oil on canvas, 238 x 184.5 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



77. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Adam and Eve*, 1526.

Oil on panel, 117 x 80.5 cm. The Samuel Cortauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London



78. Frans Floris, *The Fall of Man*, Ca.1560.

Oil on wood 112 x 143 cm. Malmö Art Museum, Malmö.



79. **Hendrick Goltzius, *The Fall of Man*, 1616.**
Oil on canvas, 104.5 x 138.4.
National Gallery of Art, Washington.



80. **Carlo Cignani, *The Fall of Man*, Ca. 1700.**
Oil on canvas, 312 x 197 cm. Museum of Fine Arts,
Budapest.



81. **William Blake, *The Temptation and Fall of Eve* (Illustration to Milton's *Paradise Lost*), 1808.**
Watercolor, 497 x 387 mm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



82. **John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, *Eve Tempted*, 1877.**
Tempera on panel, 61.2 x 75.5 cm. Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

Ages.⁷⁹⁴ Indeed – although not without predecessors – several single portraits of the temptation of Eve emerges in the latter half of the 19th century.⁷⁹⁵ Three significant examples are John Roddam Spencer Stanhope's *Eve Tempted* (1877) [image 82], Gustave Moreau's *Eve* (1885) [image 83], and Franz von Stuck's *The Sin* (1893) [image 84]. The latter also painted the canvas *Adam and Eve* (ca 1920-26) [image 85], which further equals the serpent and Eve by showing how they together give the apple to Adam in a unified gesture.

However, the advent of pictorial Modernism saw a temporary decline in artistic renderings of the fall of man. Biblical motifs were not regarded as suitable subjects for the painters of modern life. As Courbet famously is quoted to have said, "I have never seen an angel. Show me an angel, and I'll paint one."⁷⁹⁶ Nevertheless, as was discussed in the first section of this chapter, among the many reactions against Naturalism was the emergence of *Idéism*, *Gedankenmalerei*, and *Symbolism* – all unified by the opposition towards the Realist and Naturalists' circumscription of the limits of pictorial intelligibility to the visually observable realm. Significantly, artists such as Hans Thoma (1897) [image 62], Paul Gauguin (1901) [image 86]; and later Max Beckman (1907) [image 87], Othon Friesz (ca 1910) [image 88] and Gustav Klimt (unfinished, 1917-18) [image 89], painted their respective versions of *Adam and Eve*. In the Scandinavian context, we find for instance Hans Heyerdahl's *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (1877) [image 90],⁷⁹⁷ Harald Slott-Møller's *Adam and Eve* (1891) [image 91] and Emanuel Vigeland's *Adam and Eve* (1897) [image 92]. And the same year as Munch finished his *Adam and Eve*, Gustave Courtois painted his erotic *Adam and Eve* (1899) [image 93], while the pre-Raphaelite William Strang painted *The Temptation* (1899) [image 94].

⁷⁹⁴ See Karl S. Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 38-81, on the question of gender in the representation of death in the middle ages. Guthke argues that the dominant tradition in the Middle Ages represented death as male, related to an interpretation of *Adam* as responsible for the fall of man. Female representations of death, however, are linked to the "notorious misogyny of medieval, particularly Augustinian Christianity" (ibid., 42). Indeed, we can for instance see how Remiet chose to depict the serpent with a female head in his aforementioned illumination [image 70], despite the accompanying text emphasizing that sin came into the world "by one man." (See Camille, *Master of Death*, 62.)

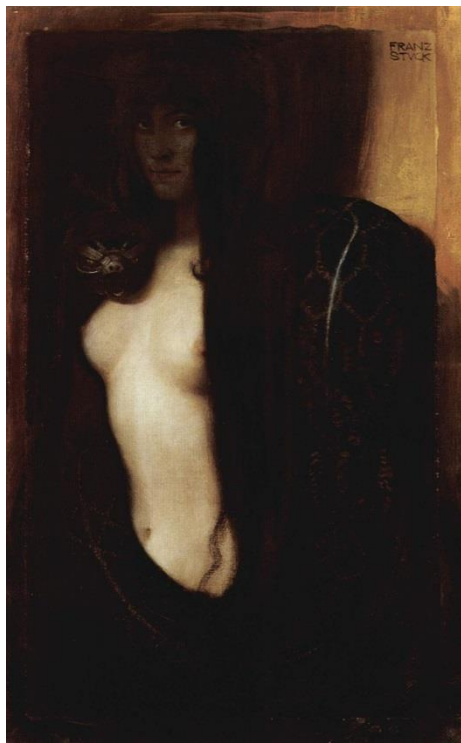
⁷⁹⁵ The emergence is suggested to be related to the changing gender roles as well as the growing misogyny of many artists in the last decades of the 19th century. See Guthke, *The Gender of Death*, 173-228. And Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 115-144.

⁷⁹⁶ Quoted by Vincent van Gogh, in a letter to his brother Theo (July, 1885), in Ronal de Leeuw, ed. *The letters of Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 302.

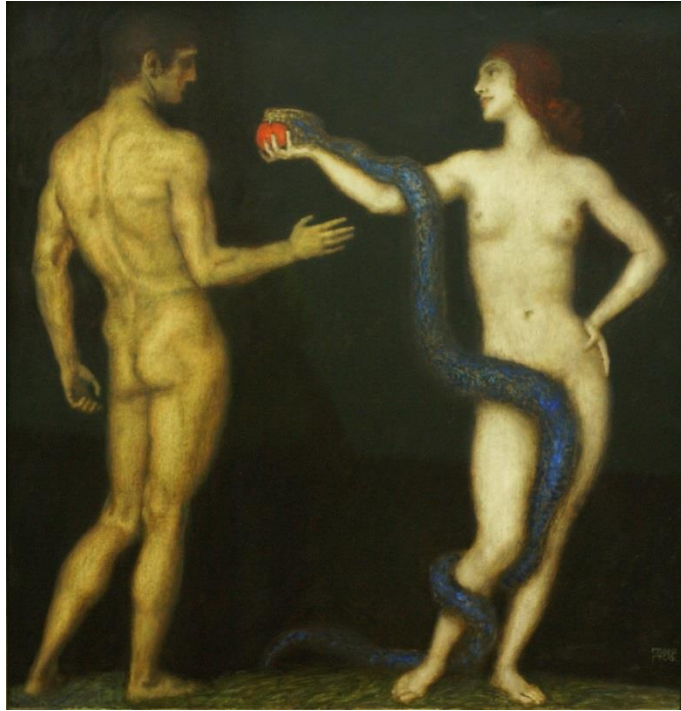
⁷⁹⁷ I have not emphasized other works taking the expulsion as their theme (a motif which has a related but distinct history from the fall of man), but Heyerdahl's painting is mentioned since it attests to the presence of the Biblical tale in Norway at the time. Heyerdahl was among the most well-known and established painters in the late 1870s and 80s, and *The Expulsion* was exhibited at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1878 and was awarded the third price medal.



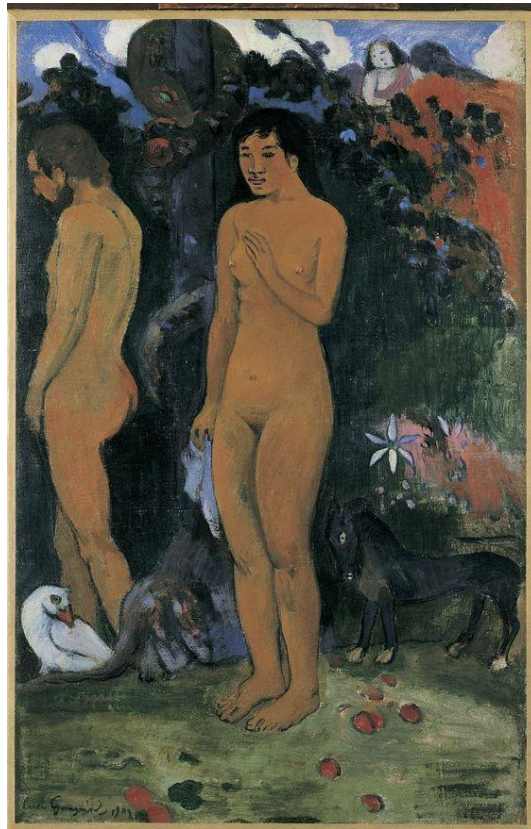
83. **Gustave Moreau, *Eve*, 1885.**
Watercolor and gouache on paper, 33 x 19.5 cm. Leicester Galleries, London.



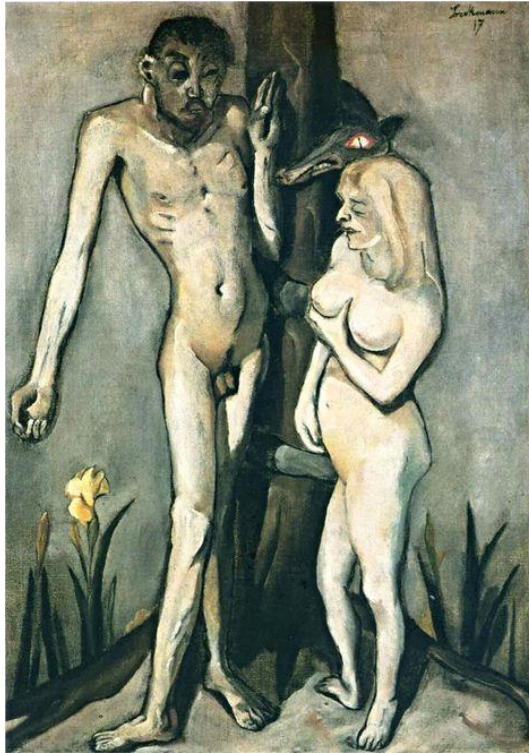
84. **Franz von Stuck, *The Sin*, 1893.**
Oil on canvas, 94.5 x 59.6 cm. Neue Pinakothek, Munich



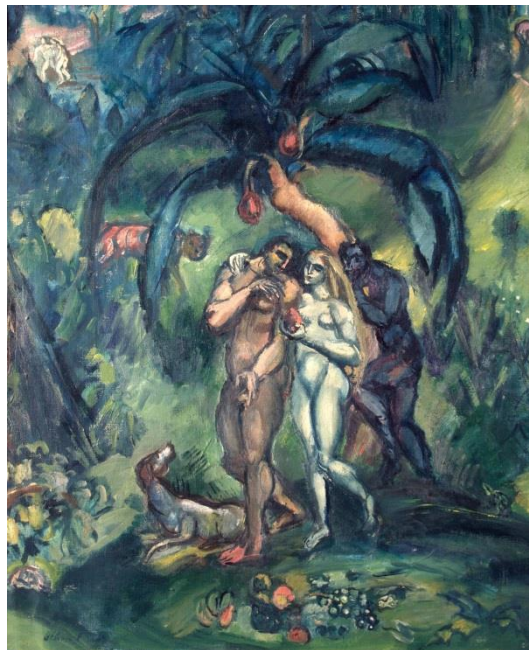
85. **Franz von Stuck, Adam and Eve, ca 1920-26.** Oil on canvas, 98 x 93.5 cm. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.



86. **Gauguin, Adam and Eve, 1902.** Oil on canvas, 59 x 38 cm. Ordrupgaard, Charlottenlund.



87. Max Beckman, *Adam and Eve*, 1917.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 57 cm. Private collection.



88. Othon Friesz, *Temptation (Adam and Eve)*, ca 1910.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.



89. **Gustav Klimt, Adam and Eve, unfinished, 1917.** Oil on canvas, 173 x 60 cm. Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.



90. **Hans Heyerdahl, Adam og Eva Drives ut av Paradiset, 1877.** [The Expulsion of Adam and Eve] Oil on canvas, 257 x 187 cm. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo.



91. **Harald Slott-Møller, Adam and Eve, 1891.** Oil on panel, 77 x 79 cm. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.



92. **Emanuel Vigeland, Adam and Eve, 1897.** Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Emanuel Vigeland Museum, Oslo.



93. **Gustave Courtois, Adam and Eve, 1899.**
Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Le musée des beaux-arts et d'archéologie, Besançon.



94. **William Strang, *The Temptation*, 1899.**
Oil on canvas, 137 x 151 cm. Tate, London.

Through this brief historical overview and compilation of some works of art concerning the fall of man, I suggest we can begin to glimpse the contours of the fundamental transformations in the pictorial history of the fall of man: From the early Christian's emphasis on the sinful nature of the human being, through the medieval emphasis on the relation between the fall and death, to the modern emphasis on the physical beauty of the human figure. Likewise, it enables us to vaguely see the fundamental poetical changes, from the early emergence and unfolding of the medieval epoch's understanding of being and truth, to the gradually emerging understanding of being of the modern epoch – here, first exemplified by Dürer's *Adam and Eve*.

Turning to Munch's *Metabolism* again, I suggest that the work both relates to and departs from each of these various fundamental transformations. Like the early Christian depictions of the fall of man, *Metabolism* depicts the man and the woman on each side of the tree, and like the 2nd and 3rd century frescoes it does neither portray the apple nor the serpent. But while the early Christian renderings of the fall of man emphasize the shame and sin that befall the human beings after the fall, the Adam and Eve of *Metabolism* seems hardly to be concerned with their own nudity. The symmetrical composition of the early Christian frescoes becomes formulaic in the medieval illuminations – and in this way, *Metabolism* might appear initially to resemble these depictions most closely. Indeed, *Metabolism* shares the medieval emphasis on death, but while the medieval illuminations show the relation between the fall of man and the birth of death so as to provide reason for the necessity of redemption in the face of judgment, *Metabolism*, I will soon suggest, *shows* an entirely different understanding of what death *is*. Moreover, its poetics works in alignment with a fundamentally different understanding of being. And finally, contrary to the medieval illuminations, there is no apple or serpent in *Metabolism*.

Dürer's *Adam and Eve* relates to the most basic aspects of the medieval formula by portraying Adam and Eve on each side of a tree, along with the apple and the serpent. Yet, it omits the explicit relation to death – so present in the medieval illuminations – and rather emphasizes the visual beauty of the *rationaly* represented human being. Despite the many differences between *Metabolism* and Dürer's *Adam and Eve*, they both belong to the same basic understanding of the work of art as an object of (aesthetic) experience. That is to say, that contrary to the early Christian frescoes and the medieval illuminations, neither Dürer's *Adam and Eve* nor *Metabolism* are devotional images, but *objects* of art; that is, of a different metaphysical essence. However, despite the many resemblances, we should understand *Metabolism* as taking a decisive step – indeed, a primordial leap [Ur-sprung; origin] – out

from the history to which it belongs. For although depictions of the fall of man in general might cease to be devotional images in the modern epoch, and although the understanding of being fundamentally changes – none of the modern works mentioned above (from Dürer to Stuck) challenges *essentially* the Christian understanding of the fall of man as the condition for salvation, and hence for Christian faith – including the essential understanding of the human being in relation to eternal life. That is, none except Munch's *Metabolism*. I do not contend, however, that this is a lack or omission in the pictorial history (which has had other artistic and aesthetics concerns than the pictorial thinking of being), but that through this brief overview of some pictures from the history of the fall of man, we can now begin to see and appreciate the radical gesture of *Metabolism*; namely that it is a response – a pictorial thinking – to an epochal change in the history of being. This response relates to one of the most central aspects of Western metaphysics, namely the essential determination of the human being and its mortality – which I suggested above to be characterized by an oblivion of death through its essential understanding of the human being in relation to eternal life, from Plato and onwards. Finally, then, I ask: what pictorial thinking of death goes on in *Metabolism*? How is the essencing of death being brought into view by the work?

Life as the Birth of Death, Death as the Birth of Life

Returning yet again to *Metabolism* [image 2], we can see that it depicts a nude man and woman, standing on each side of a tree, in the midst of a forest. The basic theme of the fall of man is emphasized in the work's first title, *Adam and Eve*. As a depiction of Adam [*ha adamah*; earth] and Eve [*chavah*; to breathe] – the first human beings, created by God – the work concerns the nature of the human being. Yet, as we have seen, the work is not simply a depiction of the Christian understanding of the human being and its essential determination through the Original Sin. The painting, one of its titles claims, is a picture of *Life and Death*. Or rather, as Munch later wrote, “the picture of life *as* death,”⁷⁹⁸ the relation of which is captured in the title *Metabolism* [Stoffveksling; literally, “substance-change” or “transformation/exchange of matter”] which, in the words of Cordulack, also quoted above, “refers to the chemical and physical processes by which nourishment is made into protoplasm, which is broken down to release energy for all vital processes. Living organisms take energy from their environment and use it to move, grow, and reproduce. In short, metabolism

⁷⁹⁸[billedet av livet som døden] Munch, “Livsfrisen,” [Appendix XIV]. Emphasis mine.

sustains life.”⁷⁹⁹ The metabolic process is the circle whereby decay and death sustains life, and life sustains decay; life belongs to death, death belongs to life. In this way, the work has been variously interpreted as an expression of Munch’s Christian beliefs⁸⁰⁰ or of his non-Christian *monistic* world-view,⁸⁰¹ and in any case, most often seen in relation to the influence by Ernst Haeckel on Munch and his friends in the 1890s.⁸⁰² However, this thesis does not seek to understand *Metabolism* in light of the historiological, social, or biographical aspects of its creator’s life. Hence, I do not make any claim concerning Munch’s religious beliefs or world-view, nor the relation between his beliefs and *Metabolism*. Rather, I attempt to approach the work in light of Heidegger’s unthought history of art.

Thus, in my view, the first crucial aspect of the work is also what most significantly distinguishes *Metabolism* from the entire pictorial history of the fall of man, namely the carved frame. The heavy, wooden frame consists of two panels of equal size, connected by two wooden planks.⁸⁰³ The top panel shows a carved and painted field displaying a city, while the lower panel displays the carved roots of a tree drawing nurture from the skulls of man and beast. In the previous literature on *Metabolism*, the two fields are often treated separately. Indeed, Høifødt writes that the top field relates to the theme of metabolism in an “obscure” way.⁸⁰⁴

Roughly put, there have been two main interpretations of the city; it has either been seen as a representation of “the heavenly Jerusalem”⁸⁰⁵ or as a “symbol of Christiania,”⁸⁰⁶ Munch’s home-town.⁸⁰⁷ In either case, the top field is often seen in light of Munch’s description of the painting as “man and woman in the forest with *the golden city* in the background.”⁸⁰⁸ Hence, Høifødt argues that “in terms of its content, one might say that the top

⁷⁹⁹ Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism*, 97.

⁸⁰⁰ Nome links the idea of metabolism to the “fundamental thought of the doctrine of God’s work of salvation,” namely “that God gave his life through his earthly Son for us to gain eternal life.” [grunntanken i læren om Guds frelsesverk... at Gud ga sitt liv gjennom sin jordiske sønn for at vi skal få evig liv] – as well as to the Eucharist. Nome, *Kunst som "Krystallisasjon,"* 240-242.

⁸⁰¹ Oftedahl, *Monism and Synaesthesia: Two Metaphysical Concepts in the Art of Edvard Munch*, 32.

⁸⁰² See for instance, *ibid.*, 34-36; Høifødt, “Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens "Beltespenne”,” 129; Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism*, 97.

⁸⁰³ According to Høifødt, the painting was exhibited with its original frame until 1926, after which it was exhibited with a simpler frame. Only in the 1970s was the frame restored. See Høifødt, *Kvinnen, Kunsten, Korset*, 88.

⁸⁰⁴ [Motivet står da også i et langt mer dunkelt forhold til stoffvekslingstemaet] *ibid.*, 88.

⁸⁰⁵ [Det himmelske Jerusalem] *ibid.*, 92. However, note that Høifødt is not categorical in his interpretation – and does explicitly question Eggum’s strict division between the interpretation of the top field as portraying Jerusalem or Christiania.

⁸⁰⁶ Eggum, “The Theme of Death,” 179.

⁸⁰⁷ In addition, Heller describes the “the silhouetted buildings of Kristiania” as “an artificial creation of his intellect, an urban allegory of art.” Heller, *Munch: His Life and Work*, 143.

⁸⁰⁸ [Mand og kvinde i skogen med den gyldne by i bakgrunden] Munch, “Livsfrisen,” 2. Emphasis mine.

field of the frame transgresses the materialistic frames of metabolism – transcends its immanence.”⁸⁰⁹ Indeed, he seems to suggest that the top field of the frame points towards some form of final “reconciliation” between man and woman in the beyond – although not necessarily in a “traditional Christian sense.”⁸¹⁰ What I find significant, however, is that contrary to a related, earlier watercolor [image 50], which indeed shows the city in the background; *Metabolism* juxtaposes the city with the roots of the tree, and is placed in the frame.⁸¹¹ The placement of the two fields in the same frame makes them *together* enframe the canvas, encircle the painting, and enclose the work around itself. Hence, rather than seeing the city as “transcending” the “immanence” of metabolism, I see it as an integral aspect of the work’s essential showing – and intimately connected with the lower field of the work.

Indeed, the lower field shows the roots of the tree that draws nurture from the remains of human beings and animals. It shows the subterranean realm of the dead, where rotting corpses and decaying carcasses are slowly broken down, and turned into new life. The top field is the realm of the living, the surface of the earth – the city, where the human beings of modernity are born, where they live, and where they die. This city, which “grows up behind the tree-crowns” is nevertheless ultimately reducible to the same, material nature as the forest and the earth. Placed in the top-field, mirroring the lower field, the city is the realm of the living, while the earth is the realm of the dead. Yet, the underground rotting corpses and carcasses is that which *gives* life; life is born through decay. Likewise, the realm of the living is what produces death; it is through the growth and decay of the human bodies that death is born. The juxtaposition of the two fields on the frame shows life and death as two sides of the same. Indeed, it shows life as death and death as life, i.e. it shows that life *is* only as emergent from the de-/regenerative process of death – and that death *is* only as emergent from the re-/degenerative process of life. The birth of death is not the fall of man, but life itself; as much as death gives birth to life. In a note from 1890, Munch writes the following:

I felt it as a pleasure having to go over – unite with this earth that always fermented – always lit up by the sun and which lived – living. I would become one with it – and from my rotting body plants and trees and grass and plants and flowers should grow and the sun would

⁸⁰⁹ [Innholdsmessig kan man si at øvre rammedel sprenger stoffvekslingens materialistiske rammer – transcenderer dens immanens] Høifødt, “Edvard Munchs Stoffveksling - Frisens “Beltespenne”,” 131.

⁸¹⁰ [Det betyr ikke at Munch trodde på et liv etter døden i tradisjonell kristen forstand] *ibid.*, 131.

⁸¹¹ In other words, I agree with Høifødt’s claim that the coral “ribbon” can hardly be seen as the distant lights of a city, but rather as a shore line, similar to *The Voice* (Woll 319 and 394). See *Kvinnen, Kunsten, Korset*, 102-103.

warm them and I would be in them and nothing would perish – that is eternity.⁸¹²

Around four decades later, a similar statement is formulated in a poem:

Up from my rotting
body flowers
shall grow –
and I shall be in
them – Eternity⁸¹³

These texts (which are only two of Munch's many written notes, formulations, poems, and statements on life and death),⁸¹⁴ provide a hint for my interpretation of the work. Yet, I do not see *Metabolism* as a pictorial illustration of the statements. In contrast, most notably, the texts describe the experience of participating in the metabolic process from the first person perspective – a perspective which might appear more related to a print called *Life and Death* possibly dating from 1902 [image 49]. However, what I find most significant about these written statements is that they explicitly link the metabolic process to the notion of 'Eternity' – that life and death is an ever-ongoing process whereby life generates death and death generates life. In this perspective, I think it is crucial to see that the city (the realm of the living) and the earth (the realm of the dead) as placed in the frame, en-circle the painting and hence emphasize the never-ending process of life as death. Thus, the 'eternity' which *Metabolism* brings forth is not a transcendent eternity beyond this world, but exactly the eternal circulation and exchange of matter [Stoffveksling] between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead in *this* world.

But what does the work show concerning the human beings and their place in the circle of life and death? The canvas shows a man and a woman standing on each side of a tree. The tree connects the lower field of the roots, earth, and skulls to the top field of the city – showing that the two realms are never entirely separate, but always united. The human beings are those who pass through the realms of the living and the dead, always standing in-between, on their way, as they emerge from life-bringing death on the path of death-bringing life. In *Metabolism* the human beings are placed in the forest, beneath the tree-crowns, sheltered from the sky and thus placed in-between the cultivated realm of the city and the subterranean earth. The human beings are nude, not naked; they are everyone and no-one, both concrete persons

⁸¹² Edvard Munch, *MM T 365*, trans. Francesca M. Nichols (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1890) [Appendix XV].

⁸¹³ *MM T 2547 (Kunskabens Træ paa Godt og Ondt)* (Oslo: The Munch Museum, 1930-1935), 55.

⁸¹⁴ See for instance the discussion in Nome, *Kunst som "Krystallisasjon,"* 233-246.

and deprived of individuality, Eve and Adam, woman and man; the first but also the last. Indeed, looking again at the woman, we can see that her head is shrouded in darkness, almost emanating a dense, warm, heat. Her eyes are dark and she has no mouth. In the previous section, I described how Heidegger claims that the entire history of metaphysics has understood the human being as the *rational animal* – *animalitas rationale* – *zoon logon echon* – the living being which possesses language.⁸¹⁵ In contrast, *Metabolism* shows the woman as the living being without language (mouth), hence emphasizing the *animalitas* of the human being.⁸¹⁶ Without mouth, she is no-longer Eve [*chavah*; to breathe], yet she raises her arm towards the man, who is reluctant to join her. His eyes are downcast, with their heavy, dark eye-sockets. His mouth is large and red, as if highlighting the contrast to the mouthless woman. Yet, the mouth is closed and the man is enclosed around himself. The reluctance shows the choice – or rather, the appearance of choice – of whether or not to participate in the creation of new human life, which is to say, to give birth to new death. It is a feeble attempt at rising above – or rather, recoiling from – the *animalitas* of the human being. For “metaphysics,” Heidegger writes, “thinks of man as *animal*, as a living being. Even when *ratio* pervades *animalitas*, man’s being remains defined by life and life-experience.”⁸¹⁷ And “the animal perishes.”⁸¹⁸ Thus, despite the man’s reluctance to be a participant in the eternal regeneration of life-death, he remains thought as animal – he cannot transcend his animality, and will for eternity, like the animal below ground, provide nourishment for new life. Despite the rationality – or language – he holds in his mouth, he remains thought as animal, as much as the mouthless woman.

How can we understand the essential understanding of death offered in the pictorial thinking of *Metabolism* from the perspective of the present thesis? Not only is the medieval misogyny retained by the work, but like the medieval illuminations which shows death as the condition of salvation (both through the fall of man and the death of Christ), *Metabolism* shows death as the condition of eternal life. In the previous chapter, I traced the outlines of the history of pictorial thinking of death concerning the theme of death and the pillow. Through its history, *The Sick Child* led us to the art of the ancient Greeks, and the understanding of death brought into view by an Archaic pinax displaying the *prothesis*. I suggested that the pinax should be understood in line with the pre-Socratic understanding of being as *physis* and *aletheia*, and more specifically, by way of Heidegger’s interpretation of fragment 48 by

⁸¹⁵ See for instance Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 246-247. (*GA* 9, 321-323).

⁸¹⁶ Note that the lack of mouth (and nose) is also clearly visible in image 47 and 50.

⁸¹⁷ Heidegger, “The Thing,” 176. [Appendix XII] (*GA* 7, 180).

⁸¹⁸ “The Thing,” 176. [Appendix XII] (*GA* 7, 180).

Heraclitus, which reads: “The proper name for bow is βίος [bios]...what it produces, however, is ‘death.’”⁸¹⁹ Thus, βίος, the ancient Greek word for both ‘life’ and ‘bow,’ is “itself ambiguous and expresses in such ambiguity precisely the essence of death-bringing life,”⁸²⁰ according to Heidegger. Seen from this perspective, the picture of *life as death – Metabolism* – might initially appear to bring into view the exact same understanding of death as the one articulated in the thinking of Heraclitus. However, if we return to the Archaic pinax and consider its pictorial thinking of death side by side with *Metabolism*, it seems to me that this could not be further away from the truth.

Brought forth through burnt clay which lets the man – lying on a bier with his head held up by pillows, surrounded by women and men – emerge from out of the terracotta; the *prothesis* of the Archaic pinax shows death as the presence of withdrawal. The death of the man “is” this withdrawal, as he is already fading into oblivion (lethe) and reclaimed by the self-concealment of physis. But he is nevertheless still retained in the openness of truth (a-letheia) by the setting forth of the prothesis. The retaining – whereby he is set forth, recognized, mourned, and honored – is possible only through the recognition of the withdrawal; by the acceptance of the concealed (lethe) that belongs to truth (a-letheia). Death “is” this withdrawal that belongs to life. It is the concealed realm that must remain concealed in order for the openness of truth to be.

In the pictorial thinking of death of Munch’s *Metabolism*, in contrast, there is no concealment. The earth is torn open; the realm of the dead is disclosed. Death does not belong to life as its concealed horizon; death and life are two sides of the same being (as a whole). Life is the same as death, and death is the same as life. And it is in this sense that the metabolic process of life-death *is* Eternity. In Norwegian, Munch writes ‘Evigheden,’ which is translated by Francesca M. Nichols as ‘Eternity.’ But the translation obscures the difference between the indefinite [Evighed] and definite [Evigheden] singular form of ‘Eternity’ in Norwegian (the latter of which is not the same as ‘the Eternal’ [det Evige], but rather ‘the Eternity’). In my view, what this nuance implies is that the word “Eternity” [Evigheden] *says* not only *an* eternally ongoing process, but *the* ongoing process as such and in its totality. Eternity, as the totality of life-death, the closed circle, is thought as the highest being. The frame – the realms of the living and the dead – enframes the human beings, and as such

⁸¹⁹ *Parmenides*, 108. [„Dem Bogen nun eignet der Name βίος” – der Bogen heißt und “ist” im griechischen Dasein (das) “Leben” (nicht “biologisch”, sondern als geschickhafte Lebensbahn); was er aber her- und beistellt, ist der “Tod.”] (*GA 54*, 160).

⁸²⁰ *Parmenides*, 108. [Das Wort βίος ist in sich zweideutig und nennt in solcher Zweideutigkeit gerade das Wesen des den Tod bringenden Lebens] (*GA 54*, 160-161).

encloses them within the confinement of the image of being in its totality. And the silhouette of the two human beings traces a vaguely oval, yet circular shape. In this way, *Metabolism* still thinks the human being in relation to eternal *life* – although eternal life now also means eternal death – and thus remains within the metaphysical understanding of being first articulated in Plato’s metaphysics. Therefore, rather than re-articulating the pre-Socratic understanding of death, *Metabolism* participates in letting the metaphysical essence of death arrive as the late-modern epochê of being – which (as we saw in chapter two) according to Heidegger is first thought by Nietzsche in his doctrine of *the will to power as the eternal recurrence of the same*, and which is articulated in Heidegger’s thinking of the essence of technology as *Gestell*.

The pictorial thinking of *Metabolism*, however, is not identical to Nietzsche or Heidegger’s thinking, yet it thinks the same. In my view, it is, too, a thinking response to the history of being which is let arrive through its being *let* appear, and thus *shown* by *Metabolism*. Death is not mastered and controlled, but brought out in the open and represented alongside life. If seen from the perspective of Heidegger’s later writings on the essential determination of the human beings as the mortals – with death as the shrine of the nothing, which harbors the essencing of being – we can see that the pictorial thinking of *Metabolism* offers no enshrinement for the nothing. Indeed, Munch writes in the note quoted above that through the metabolic process “nothing would perish – that is eternity.”⁸²¹ As I read it, the statement says two things: It says first that everything will remain and endure, in the sense that no being will pass from being into non-being; securing eternal presence. But it says also that (the) nothing would perish – and with it, the concealment, the very shelter of being, will be obliterated – and thus that pure and total openness will prevail for eternity. That is to say, in a way analogous to one of Heidegger’s statements on the “calculative thinking” of the late-modern epoch: it “is about to abandon the earth as earth.”⁸²²

But although the thinking of death in *Metabolism* shows death by setting it forth in the unconcealed, the work *as work* remains within the strife between world and earth; i.e. in the concrete openness that the work sets up through its setting forth of the earth in the work-material. But how is the essencing of death thought pictorially? And to what truth of being does it *correspond*? That is, how can we understand the poetics and metaphysics of *Metabolism*?

⁸²¹ Munch, *MM T 365* [intet skulde forgå – det er evigheden]

⁸²² Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 84. [Dieses Denken ist im Begriff, die Erde als Erde preiszugeben] (*GA 12*, 179).

On the Poetics and Metaphysics of *Metabolism* | Symbolism overturned

In the first section of this chapter, I quoted Munch's claim that *Metabolism* is as necessary to *The Frieze of Life* as "the buckle is to the belt"⁸²³ – a claim which led me to discuss *The Frieze of Life* and its relation to Symbolism. This discussion concluded with the suggestion that *The Frieze* works within the limits of pictorial intelligibility first established by *The Sick Child*. This limit, I argued in the previous chapter, is established by a transgression of the poetics of Naturalism and its limits of pictorial intelligibility, hence extending the observable field also to include affectivity. This extension, however, paradoxically contests and weakens the subject's privileged position as the guarantee of the reality of the real, yet it keeps within the same understanding of truth as certainty. In other words, *The Frieze's* correspondence with reality – indeed as an objectification of the subjective – paradoxically appears more accurate but less certain. That is, it accounts for "more" of the real but its claim to truth is less certain (one cannot point at the affect or "prove" it).

The Sick Child lets death come into view as it saturates the mood of the world of the sick girl and her mother. The work shows us nothing about the "afterlife," which nevertheless is excluded from the representable realm due to its unobservable nature. Rather, it shows how death is present in its affective reality. According to *The Sick Child*, death "is" disclosed in its affective presence – as a horizon of existence which presences through grief, sorrow, and despair. In my view, this essential understanding of death is not let appear in Krohg's *Sick Girl*, in the engraving of the *Ars Moriendi*, or in the Archaic pinax. Nor is death thought in this way in *Metabolism*.

Metabolism is a large oil painting, with a heavy, carved and painted frame. It is painted over a decade after *The Sick Child*, and its execution and pictorial idiom are different. But in my view, this difference is not only a difference of style and pictorial idiom, but a difference of style in its *essential* sense, that is, of poetics. *Metabolism* does not share *The Sick Child's* insistence (despite its weakening) of the individual, subjective point of view as the guarantee of the reality of the real. It appears not as an extension of the field that is observable from the subject's point of view. The intelligibility of the work's showing – its depiction of the man and women as enframed by the eternal transformation of matter between the realms of life and death – does not work in alignment with the understanding of being as what is representable from a subjective point of view. Yet, *Metabolism* does not simply show

⁸²³ Munch, "Livsfrisen," [Appendix XIV].

a “higher” reality, as was argued to be the case in the discussion of Symbolist poetics above. How, then, does *Metabolism* mean?

In the first section, I argued that Symbolist art (both “conservative” and “avant-garde”) seems to abandon the claim to certainty of representation and aims rather at *suggestion* (as formulated by Redon). This, in order to intimate a “higher” reality, for instance in the sense of a neo-Platonic “ideal” of Puvis [image 52], the “new and modern form of sacred art”⁸²⁴ of Van Gogh [image 54] and Gauguin [image 55], in the sense of the spiritual reveries and fantasies of the subject of Redon [image 95], or still essentially Christian Symbolism of Hans Thoma’s *Adam and Eve* [image 62]. In contrast, *The Sick Child* and *The Frieze of Life* might be seen as more post-Naturalist than anti-Naturalist. That is, they remain within the same understanding of truth as certainty (as for instance Krohg’s Naturalism), yet alter the field of observation. *The Sick Child* enables the possibility of showing a more intense and affective reality – a “lower” reality even, maybe. Indeed, it is an *expansion* of what is considered to be representable and thus real, but not an entirely different understanding of what the reality of the real is as such.

But if “Symbolism was...neo-platonic”⁸²⁵ as Denis claimed (or at least *one* form of Symbolism understood the work of art in its correspondence with “the ideal.” That is, like Plato, that contrary to the world of appearances, “the supersensuous is the true world”⁸²⁶), *Metabolism* is its inversion and overturning. Contrary to Van Gogh’s *The Sower*, for instance – which Silverman argues aims at the “sacred, eternal, and invisible world beyond the self and the senses,” although “by naturalizing divinity”⁸²⁷ – *Metabolism* shows “Eternity” as something belonging to *this* world, the world of appearances – not a supersensuous and invisible world beyond this.

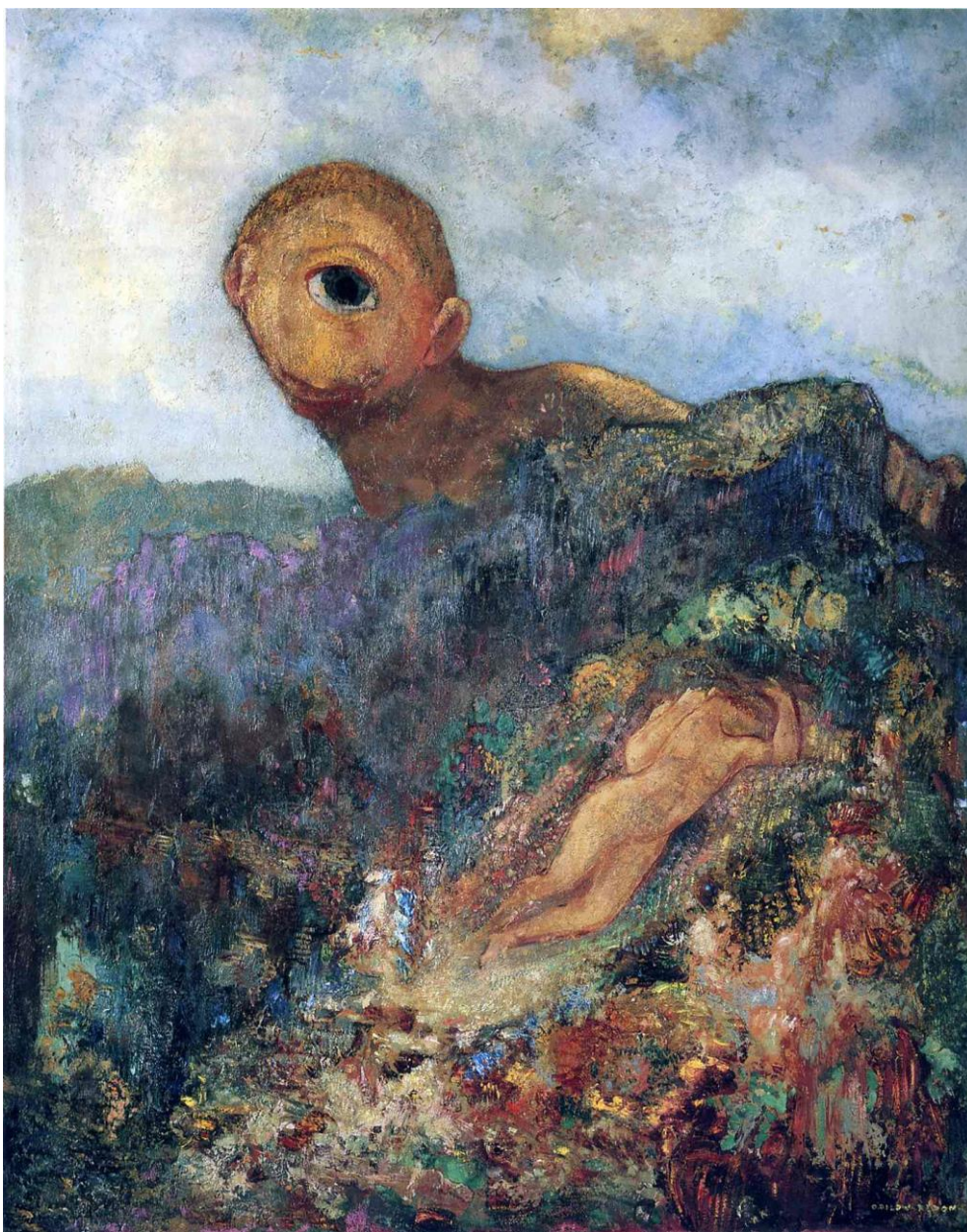
The work shows the eternal transformation of life *as* death first by letting the city in the frame bring into view the realm of the living as such, and by letting the subterranean roots, earth, and skulls bring into view the realm of the dead as such; they enframe the man and the woman, Adam and Eve, which then brings into view the human beings. *Metabolism* thinks beings as such and as a whole by *showing/saying* beings as such and as a whole; it

⁸²⁴ Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art*, 3.

⁸²⁵ Maurice Denis quoted in Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 23.

⁸²⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, 201. [Für Platon ist das Übersinnliche die wahre Welt] (*GA 6.1*, 203).

⁸²⁷ Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art*, 50.



95. **Odilon Redon, *The Cyclops*, ca. 1914.**
Oil on cardboard mounted on panel, 65.8 x 52.7 cm.
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

brings into view the Eternal “transformation of matter” [Metabolism; Stoffveksling], and the human beings’ place within the Eternal: the human being, like any other *being* (*animale* (*rationale*) or not) comes to an end, it will rot and decay, and eventually provide sustenance for new life. What *is* is the transformation of matter through life *as* death, unified in the totality of Eternity. However, the poietics of *Metabolism* is indeed *symbolic* in the sense that what it shows is beyond itself as a material object. *Metabolism* brings together [sumballein] the suprasensuous understanding of the reality of the real with the sensuous object of art. And thus, also in its overturning of Symbolism, “there still is metaphysics.”⁸²⁸ For (the) “Eternity” is not only a characterization of a process, but the process itself in its highest and total form – beings as a whole.

As a *work* of art, however, it opens up a world and sets forth the earth. The poietics of the work is the concrete bringing forth in alignment with the historical configuration of world and earth (the truth of being), a limit of intelligibility traced by the rift and fixed in place in figure; that is, the *concrete*, essential showing of the work – *its* being as a happening of truth. The paint on the canvas and the relief of the wooden frame does not only occasion the appearance of the city, the roots and skulls, the human bodies and the forest; they occasion the appearance of the realms of the living and the dead, and the human beings. Moreover, the work-material itself is let appear in the openness of the work. The darkness and brightness of the colors are let appear through the tenebrous forest and in the bodily flesh. The coarse grains of wood are let appear through the carved frame. However, the symmetry of the figures, the rigidity of their poses, the red outlines along the silhouette of the bodies, the variable distribution of light; the variable distance and points of view in the three pictorial fields, along with the simple yet exaggerated nature of its pictorial rendering, are all offered by an object [Gegenstand] standing against the perceiver-subject. When mounted on the wall of the Munch Museum in Oslo, the work is offered for the perceiver’s experience [Erlebnis]. But the intelligibility of the work – its essential showing – is not aligned with the understanding of being as what is representable by the individual subject. The work does not correspond to the subject’s point of view, but points beyond itself; to the realms of the living and the dead *as such*, and the human beings *as such*. In this way, the work does not point to a reality beyond this world, but to the reality *of* this world. It is a world, the intelligibility of which is less and less guaranteed by the subject – which here is subsumed in the totality of Eternity, one being among other beings. *Metabolism* thus sets up and works to hold open the world of the late-

⁸²⁸ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister"*, 25. (GA 53, 29).

modern epoch – and shows a “wherein” where the human being participates (at times reluctantly) in the eternal, circular process of the transformation of life from death and death from life. It shows the human being as one being among others, characterized as a phenomenon of life-death, belonging to the totality of Eternity.

Conclusion | The Demise of Death

In summary, in the first section of this chapter I introduced Munch's painting *Metabolism*, and discussed its relation to Symbolism and *The Frieze of Life*. The section ended by posing the question concerning the understanding of what death *is* so that it can at all be an issue for pictorial thinking. In order to address this question, I turned in the second section to a discussion of Heidegger's interpretations of death in *Being and Time* and in the post-war texts concerning 'the mortals.' Through this discussion, I suggested that Heidegger's later writings on death might imply that to the oblivion of being (which Heidegger argues is characteristic of the history of being as metaphysics) follows an oblivion of death. In this sense, metaphysics is revealed as the continual estrangement of the human being from its mortal essence whereby the human being is rather understood in relation to eternal life.

In the third and final section, I returned to *Metabolism*. After outlining a pictorial history of the fall of man, stretching from the first centuries AD to Munch's time, I argued that Munch's work discloses an understanding of death *as* life, unified in the totality of Eternity. Through the depiction of the realms of the living and the dead placed in the frame of the work, the work shows an understanding of being as a whole where the eternal circularity of life and death enframes the human beings. Although the work shows life and death as belonging to each other, the work still understands the human being in relation to eternal life (although in the sense of the eternal re-/degenerative process of life and death), and hence speaks out from the metaphysical oblivion of death. According to *Metabolism*, death is only an aspect of life – which itself is eternal. Indeed, in this sense, the work seems to me to bring forth and articulate an understanding of beings as a whole that in its showing departs from the modern epoch's understanding of the subject as the guarantee of the reality of the real. Rather, I suggested that the work brings into view the fundamentally late-modern understanding of being whereby the human being is equated to be a being among other beings, all of which participate in the eternal circulation of matter [Stoffveksling]. As I discussed in chapter two, according to Heidegger, this late-modern metaphysics is articulated first by Nietzsche in his understanding of beings as a whole as *will to power as the eternal recurrence of the same*, and by Heidegger himself in the understanding of beings as a whole as resources [Bestand] and Gestell.

However, I have not claimed that Munch illustrates or articulates Nietzsche or Heidegger's thinking, but that *Metabolism* is an original contribution to the thinking – through its *pictorial* thinking – of the truth of being that is sent as being's history. In this sense, *Metabolism* is a listening response to the history of being, whereby the truth of being is *let* establish itself in a concrete being – a work of art. Similar to Nietzsche's overturning of Platonism, I suggested that *Metabolism* could be seen as an overturning of (neo-Platonic) Symbolism. For while the latter employs the poetics of symbolization to intimate a higher reality beyond the sensuous world, *Metabolism's* symbolizing brings into view the reality of the sensuous world as a whole.

In conclusion, I suggest that Munch's *Metabolism* contributes in thinking the arrival of the essencing of death in the late-modern epoch. The death of the individual becomes mere perishing, the animalistic coming to an end. Death as death becomes a senseless and incomprehensible phenomenon in light of the human being's belonging to the circle of eternal life as death. If seen in accordance with Heidegger's understanding of the late-modern epoch's essential understanding of truth as technology – whereby only what is effective is valuable, and only what is valuable is real, i.e. only what serves the absolute serviceability of *Gestell is* in being – this means that death as death becomes insignificant and eventually unreal. As such, death as death is transformed, like everything else that is, into a technical problem. In this way, the human being faces the ultimate danger of the final demise of death, i.e. the ultimate danger of the complete forgetting of the truth of being. And as I see it, what makes the complete forgetting of the truth of being – and with it, the final demise of death – be the ultimate danger, according to Heidegger, is its claim of absolute totalitarianism insofar as it “drives out every other possibility of revealing.”⁸²⁹

However, as discussed earlier, Heidegger does not claim that an adequate reply to this danger is to take refuge in the past. In other words, Heidegger does not claim that a restoration of Christian or ancient Greek faith will contribute to the preparation of overcoming metaphysics. As I mentioned above, in his discussion of the technological essence of the late-modern epoch, Heidegger quotes Hölderlin: “But where danger is, grows / the saving power also.”⁸³⁰ Thus, I suggest that if seen from a Heideggerian point of view, the emergence of the essencing of death in the late-modern epoch as mere nothingness – i.e. the very danger of the

⁸²⁹ "The Question Concerning Technology," 27. [vertreibt es jede andere Möglichkeit der Entbergung] (GA 7, 27).

⁸³⁰ "The Question Concerning Technology," 28 and 34. [Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst/ Das Rettende auch] (GA 7, 29 and 35).

final demise of death – is paradoxically what might make possible the non-metaphysical recognition of death *as death*, as Heidegger articulates it in relation to the notion of the mortals. That is, not as mere nothingness, but as the shrine of nothing.

In this thesis, I have attempted to see and recognize the pictorial thinking of death in Munch's paintings *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism* from the perspective of Heidegger's unthought art history of being. In turn, this attempt led me to a recollection in the history of pictorial thinking on death and the essential transformations in the understanding of death that accompany Heidegger's history of being. Through my approach, I have argued that *The Sick Child* and *Metabolism*, each in their own way, can be understood as letting the arrival of the essential transformation in the truth of being, from the modern to the late-modern epoch, take place in beings. In this way, I have shown how the essential transformation of truth *corresponds* to, and speaks out from, at least one path of the essential history of Western art. Thus, if it is so, as Heidegger claims, that "only the way back will lead us forward,"⁸³¹ I like to think that the present thesis can be seen as taking a few steps back in the attempt at moving forward.

⁸³¹ *On the Way to Language*, 12. [sogar der Weg zurück uns erst vorwärts führt] (GA 12, 94).

Appendix

I.

F: (...) Ich gebrauche seit langem nur ungern das Wort „Sprache,“ wenn ich ihrem Wesen nachdenke.

J: Aber finden Sie ein gemäßeres?

F: Ich meine, es gefunden zu haben; mochte es jedoch davor bewahren, daß es als geläufiger Titel verwendet und zur Bezeichnung für einen Begriff umgefälscht wird.

J: Welches Wort gebrauchen Sie?

F: Das Wort »die Sage«. Es meint: das Sagen und sein Gesagtes und das zu-Sagende

J: Was heißt sagen?

F: Vermutlich das Selbe wie zeigen im Sinne von: erscheinen- und scheinenlassen, dies jedoch in der Weise des Winkens.

J: Die Sage ist darnach nicht der Name für das menschliche Sprechen.⁸³²

II.

Das Dichten bewegt sich im Element des Sagens, insgleichen das Denken. Besinnen wir uns auf das Dichten, dann finden wir uns zugleich schon im selben Element, darin das Denken sich bewegt. Hierbei können wir nicht geradehin entscheiden, ob das Dichten eigentlich ein Denken sei, oder das Denken eigentlich ein Dichten. Dunkel bleibt, wodurch sich ihr eigentliches Verhältnis bestimmt und woher dies, was wir lässig genug das Eigentliche nennen, eigentlich stammt.⁸³³

III.

14. Streit

Die Erde nicht ein Ausschnitt aus dem Seienden im Ganzen. Die Welt nicht ein Ausschnitt aus dem Seienden im Ganzen. Das Seiende nicht auf diese zwei Abschnitte verteilt. Erde ist Wesung des Seienden im Ganzen.

Welt ist Wesung des Seienden im Ganzen.

Erde und Welt gehören dem Sein des Seienden im Ganzen und deshalb ist zwischen ihnen der Streit, den wir nie zu denken vermögen, wenn wir uns eine Zwietracht oder einen Wettkampf vorstellen.

Der Streit selbst muß aus der Durchkreuzung der Entgegnung und beide müssen aus dem Ereignis begriffen werden.⁸³⁴

⁸³² GA 12, 136-137.

⁸³³ Ibid., 178.

⁸³⁴ GA 69, 19.

IV.

Die Frage nach dem Ursprung des Kunstwerks will nicht auf eine zeitlos gültige Feststellung des Wesens des Kunstwerks hinaus, die zugleich als Leitfaden zur historisch rückblickenden Erklärung der Geschichte der Kunst dienen könnte. Die Frage steht im innersten Zusammenhang mit der Aufgabe der Überwindung der Ästhetik.⁸³⁵

V.

Immer wenn das Seiende im Ganzen als das Seiende selbst die Gründung in die Offenheit verlangt, gelangt die Kunst in ihr geschichtliches Wesen als die Stiftung. Sie geschah im Abendland erstmals im Griechentum. Was künftig Sein heißt, wurde maßgebend ins Werk gesetzt. Das so eröffnete Seiende im Ganzen wurde dann verwandelt zum Seienden im Sinne des von Gott Geschaffenen. Das geschah im Mittelalter. Dieses Seiende wurde wiederum verwandelt im Beginn und Verlauf der Neuzeit. Das Seiende wurde zum rechnerisch beherrschbaren und durchschaubaren Gegenstand. Jedesmal brach eine neue und wesentliche Welt auf. Jedesmal mußte die Offenheit des Seienden durch die Feststellung der Wahrheit in die Gestalt, in das Seiende selbst eingerichtet werden. Jedesmal geschah. Unverborgenheit des Seienden. Sie setzt sich ins Werk, welches Setzen die Kunst vollbringt.⁸³⁶

VI.

Die Frage nach dem Ursprung des Kunstwerks will nicht auf eine zeitlos gültige Feststellung des Wesens des Kunstwerks hinaus, die zugleich als Leitfaden zur historisch rückblickenden Erklärung der Geschichte der Kunst dienen könnte. Die Frage steht im innersten Zusammenhang mit der Aufgabe der Überwindung der Ästhetik und d. h. zugleich einer bestimmten Auffassung des Seienden als des gegenständlich Vorstellbaren. Die Überwindung der Ästhetik wiederum ergibt sich als notwendig aus der geschichtlichen Auseinandersetzung mit der Metaphysik als solcher. Diese enthält die abendländische Grundstellung zum Seienden und somit auch den Grund zum bisherigen Wesen der abendländischen Kunst und ihrer Werke.⁸³⁷

VII.

Deshalb sind z. B. die griechische Vasenmalerei, die pompejischen Wandgemälde, die Reichenauer Fresken der ottonischen Zeit, die Gemälde Giotto's, ein Gemälde Dürers und ein Bild von C. D. Friedrich nicht nur ihrem Stil nach verschieden, sondern der Stil selbst ist verschiedenen metaphysischen Wesens. Was in Dürers Bild der „Akelei“ Wirklichkeit heißt, ist anders bestimmt als das Wirkliche in einem mittelalterlichen Fresko; genauer: beide Kunstwerke bringen das Wirkliche in einem verschiedenen Sinn von Wirklichkeit zur bildhaften Erscheinung.⁸³⁸

⁸³⁵ GA 65, 503.

⁸³⁶ GA 5, 64-65.

⁸³⁷ GA 65, 503-504.

⁸³⁸ GA 53, 28.

VIII.

Aber diese verschiedenen Wesensarten von Wirklichkeit halten sich dennoch in den Grundzügen der metaphysischen Gliederung der Welt. Wenn zum Beispiel im Unterschied zu Platon das einzelne sinnlich wahrnehmbare Wirkliche als das eigentlich „Reale“ gefaßt wird und die Kunst sich die Aufgabe stellt, „realistisch“, „naturalistisch“ das Wirkliche in seiner Besonderung und Eigentümlichkeit zur Erscheinung zu bringen, so bleibt auch im extremsten Naturalismus noch dies das erste und einzige Anliegen, nicht ein einzelnes Wirkliches, sondern gerade die Wirklichkeit, wie sie ist, darzustellen. Die Wirklichkeit des Wirklichen, z. B. einer Landschaft, ist aber nicht etwas, was innerhalb der Landschaft, wie der einzelne Baum und der einzelne Stein und der einzelne Wolkenfetzen vorkommt, sondern die Wirklichkeit des Wirklichen ist selbst ein Nichtsinnliches. Auch da, wo die platonische „Entwertung“ des Sinnlichen nicht vollzogen wird, ist noch Platonismus, ist Metaphysik.⁸³⁹

IX.

Das Vorstellen verhält von sich aus und auf sich zu alles Begegnende daraufhin, ob es und wie es dem standhält, was das Vorstellen als Vor-sich-bringen [sic] an Sicherstellung zu seiner eigenen Sicherheit verlangt. Das Vorstellen ist jetzt nicht mehr nur die Leitbahn zur Vernehmung des Seienden als eines solchen, d. h. des anwesenden Beständigen. Das Vorstellen wird zum Gerichtshof, der über die Seiendheit des Seienden entscheidet und sagt, daß künftighin als ein Seiendes nur gelten solle, was im Vorstellen durch dieses vor es selbst gestellt und ihm so sichergestellt ist. In solchem Vor-sich-stellen stellt jedoch das Vorstellen je notwendig sich selbst *mit* vor; dies aber nicht nachträglich und gar als einen Gegenstand, sondern zuvor und als jenes, dem alles zugestellt sein muß und in dessen Umkreis allein ein jegliches sichergestellt sein kann.⁸⁴⁰

X.

Die Sterblichen sind die Menschen. Sie heißen die Sterblichen, weil sie sterben können. Sterben heißt, den Tod als Tod vermögen. Nur der Mensch stirbt und zwar fortwährend, solange er auf der Erde unter dem Himmel, vor den Göttlichen bleibt. Nennen wir die Sterblichen, dann denken wir schon die anderen Drei mit, doch wir bedenken nicht die Einfalt der Vier.

...
Die Sterblichen wohnen, insofern sie ihr eigenes Wesen, daß sie nämlich den Tod als Tod vermögen, in den Brauch dieses Vermögens geleiten, damit ein guter Tod sei. Die Sterblichen in das Wesen des Todes geleiten, bedeutet keineswegs, den Tod als das leere Nichts zum Ziel setzen; es meint auch nicht, das Wohnen durch ein blindes Starren auf das Ende verdüstern.⁸⁴¹

XI.

Der Himmel ist der wölbende Sonnengang, der gestaltwechselnde Mondlauf, der wandernde Glanz der Gestirne, die Zeiten des Jahres und ihre Wende, Licht und Dämmer des Tages, Dunkel und Helle der Nacht, das Wirkliche und Unwirkliche der Wetter, Wolkenzug und blauende Tiefe des Äthers.

⁸³⁹ Ibid., 28-29.

⁸⁴⁰ GA 6.2, 295-296

⁸⁴¹ GA 7, 152-153.

XII.

Die Sterblichen sind die Menschen. Sie heißen die Sterblichen, weil sie sterben können. Sterben heißt: den Tod als Tod vermögen. Nur der Mensch stirbt. Das Tier verendet. Es hat den Tod als Tod weder vor sich noch hinter sich. Der Tod ist der Schrein des Nichts, dessen nämlich, was in aller Hinsicht niemals etwas bloß Seiendes ist, was aber gleichwohl west, sogar als das Geheimnis des Seins selbst. Der Tod birgt als der Schrein des Nichts das Wesende des Seins in sich. Der Tod ist als der Schrein des Nichts das Gebirg des Seins. Die Sterblichen nennen wir jetzt die Sterblichen - nicht, weil ihr irdisches Leben endet, sondern weil sie den Tod als Tod vermögen. Die Sterblichen sind, die sie sind, als die Sterblichen, wesend im Gebirg des Seins. Sie sind das wesende Verhältnis zum Sein als Sein. Die Metaphysik dagegen stellt den Menschen als animal, als Lebewesen vor. Auch wenn die ratio die animalitas durchwaltet, bleibt das Menschsein vom Leben und Erleben her bestimmt. Die vernünftigen Lebewesen müssen erst zu Sterblichen *werden*.⁸⁴²

XIII.

Det var om aftenen den 8 November 1877 Storjohan var hos Johanne Sofie og gav hende absolutionen – Da talte hun så godt med ham. Han forundret seg over hendes klare svar – Hendes far og jeg våket hos henne om natten som synlig ble hendes sidste. “La mig få være god mot deg papa” sa hun engang. Hun havde da ingen smerte og vilde ofte skifte leie men hun talte så rolig med os. Hennes far spurte om hun kunde ønske at leve længer sammen med oss: “Ja papa for det er så hyggeligt. Aa hvor det svaret gjorde os godt for det er jo så meget at angre på – Da hennes far sa henne at nå skulde ære sit egentlige (?) tog hun dette så roligt ba farvel og kysset oss alle og tok hilsen med til sin mamma akkurat som til en reise – Så la hun sine hænder sammen og sa “Fader I dine hender anbefaler jeg min ånd, min sjæle er frelst” så døde hun stille og rolig næsten umærkeligt.⁸⁴³

[It was the evening of November 8th 1877 Storjohan visited Johanne Sofie and gave her the absolution – then she spoke so well with him. He was amazed over her clear answers – her father and I stayed with her during the night which obviously was going to be her last. “Let me be good to you dad” she said once. She had then no pain and would often change posture but she spoke so softly with us. Her dad asked whether she would have wanted to stay longer with us: “Yes dad because it is so pleasant” Oh how good the answer did us as it is so much to regret – When her father said that now should honor her true (?) she took this so calmly bade farewell and kissed all of us and brought greetings to her mother just like for a travel – Then she put her hands together and said “Father in your hands I commend my spirit, my soul is redeemed” then she died softly and quiet almost unnoticeable.]⁸⁴⁴

XIV.

Frisen er tænkt som et digt om livet, om kjærligheten og døden. Motivet i det største billede med de to, manden og kvinden I skogen, ligger kanskje noget til siden for idéen i de andre felter, men det er likefuldt nødvendig for den hele frise som spænden er det for beltet. Det er billedet av livet som døden, skogen som suger næring av de

⁸⁴² Ibid., 180.

⁸⁴³ MM N 3736.

⁸⁴⁴ Translation mine. “Hyggeligt” is translated “pleasant” but does also mean good, delightful, nice, welcoming, and cozy. “Egentlig” is translated “true,” but could also mean authentic, proper, or real. Punctuation in line with the original.

døde og byen, som gror op bak trækronerne. Det er billedet paa livets setrke, bærende kræfter.

...

Livsfrisen bør ogsaa sees i sammenhæng med Universitetsdekorationerne – hvilke den i flere henseender har været forløber for og uden hvilke disse kanskje ikke hadde kunne utføres. Den utviklet min dekorative sans. Som idéindhold bør de ogsaa sees sammen. Livsfrisen er det enkelte menneskes sorger og glæder set paa nært hold – Universitetsdekorationerne er de store evige kræfter.

Baade livsfrisen og Universitetsdekorationerne møtes i livsfrisens store billede Mand og kvinde i skogen med den gyldne by i bakgrunnen.⁸⁴⁵

XV.

Jeg følte det som en vellyst at skulde gå overi – forenes – med denne jord der alltid gjærede og som alltid levede – levede – og jeg skulde blive et med den og der skulde voxte op af mitt rådnende legeme planter – og træer og planter og blomster og solen skulde varme dem og jeg skulde være i den og intet skulde forgå det er evigheden⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁵ Munch, "Livsfrisen,"

⁸⁴⁶ *MM T* 365.

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