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**AUTHENTIC DASEIN AND THE
ANXIOUS UNCANNY**

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“No prison can hold your passion to soar.” - Erté, (1892-1990)

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ABSTRACT

The philosophical reader cannot help but notice that some of the major assertions of Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger are thematically intertwined. Perhaps even more clearly, the viewer who approaches the work of Edvard Munch with a philosophical frame of mind will discover how the thoughts of Kant and Heidegger often illuminate key aspects of his paintings. *Authentic Dasein and the Anxious Uncanny* strives to analyze the main works of Edvard Munch, the father of Expressionism. This thesis uses Heidegger's concepts of anxiety and being-towards-death, as well as Kant's notion of the Sublime as laced with anxiety, to re-examine nineteen of the artist's masterpieces. The first chapter explores the relationship between Kant and Munch, while the second focuses on artist's works through the philosophy of Heidegger. The third and concluding chapter brings together Kant and Heidegger through a series of paintings to demonstrate how Munch's achievement can be interpreted philosophically.

Introduction: Comparing Notions of Anxiety

“I often feel that I must have this life - *Angst* - it is essential to me - and that I would not exist without it.” Edvard Munch

Both fear and anxiety are pivotal when it comes to literature, art and philosophy. Nevertheless, the two are often confused, at least partly because they are in many cases intertwined. Both terms can be distinguished easily enough. Fear is in reference to a certain object or situation-one is afraid of “something.” Anxiety, on the other hand, is a state of mind, or mood; its object and/or source is never clear and remains a source of torment for the person who experiences this emotion.

Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger provide us with the tools for distinguishing fear and anxiety. Kant in *The Critique of Judgment* discusses anxiety in relation to the sublime. Distinguishing between the mathematically and the dynamically sublime, the former gives birth to anxiety through its size, i.e. by enforcing a feeling in man of being diminished; the latter, which is evident in nature, resonates anxiety when the subject feels helpless in the face what is overwhelming - as long as a certain distance or safety is in play. In such cases, anxiety produces a sense of and the sublime.

For Heidegger, anxiety lies at the core of the authentic Dasein. For this reason, anxiety performs a crucial role in *Being and Time*. Through anxiety the Self is revealed, and since the Self is transcendental, it is irreducible to the object-world. In moments of anxiety, we confront ourselves; we come to terms with what defines us; the world is the background to understanding the ontological “who.” In this situation, anxiety allows the self to emerge as unique to the individual; it is no longer collective and does not follow “the they.” In other words, anxiety allows the Self to be authentic.

Fear is almost always noticeable. In literary texts, the tone and the language used by the author can communicate fear directly. Both description and dialogue can indicate that fear is felt on a simple emotional level. Anxiety, however, is not as easy to detect. In some cases, the word “anxiety” appears, thus asserting its presence; however, in other instances, one needs to read between the lines in order to understand the complexity of the character in question, along with the situation at hand. This allows the reader to detect the air of anxiety, which is commonly present throughout the text. Anxiety can appear in many forms; it can be the result of frustrations, mental complexities, stress, insanity and/or depression; nevertheless, in every case, this pivotal mode of existence needs to be deeply examined and contemplated if the reader is to fully grasp the meaning of the text. In the case of painting, anxiety can be expressed through a variety of techniques. Such techniques would include strong, rough, or short brushstrokes, variations in composition, the artist’s choice of color, and the positioning of figures in space. These techniques are sometimes possible to relate to autobiographical factors that give them special meaning.

Norwegian artist, Edvard Munch, was “painfully aware of not belonging in this world” (Schwabsky, 144). He is often labeled the father of Expressionism, an art movement that marks a high-point of anxiety in the

history of art. Labeled “degenerate” by the Nazi regime and often scrutinized by critics during his own lifetime, Munch nevertheless revolutionized art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When looking at the historical timeline of art, we cannot ignore that Munch’s leap of faith, in terms of style, marks a pivotal moment; without him, Expressionism, which “designates a dominantly subjective art,” would not developed when it did (Longman, 13). From the standpoint of art’s future, we might say that his paintings opened up (a) “world” (Heidegger, 41). The Norwegian genius was in fact the person who opened up this (new) world of art, making it visible and accessible. As a matter of fact, we might go as far as to say that he *became* “Munch” *because* he stepped beyond an age dedicated to realism, which dominated the art scene throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His work thus dramatizes an undeniable shift in style.

In *The Private Journals of Edvard Munch*, the artist says that his art “is a self-confession” but also expresses the view that it might “help others understand their search for sanity” (Holland, 20). Munch discovered himself in his art. Realism clearly could not express the feelings, moments, and issues that he wanted to present on his roughly-treated canvases, thus giving birth to the version of expressionism that came rather naturally to him. Furthermore, when looking at his works, we are faced with a continuously pulsating feeling of anxiety, which, to use Heidegger’s terminology, brushes away the veil of *Das Mann*, forcing spectators to view themselves in their utter nakedness - in terms of an authentic self.

Kant’s understanding of beauty would have been dominant in Munch’s Norway. His conciliatory view of the common world, or *sensus communis*, would have provided artists with public validation for their work. During this period, however, painting needed Munch to break out of a representational approach to art and allow for more authentic human expression. According to Munch, “what one paints must be done with will and feeling,” just as he strived to “paint people who love and suffer” (Holland, 29; TIME, 1). In other words, Munch was needed to help art free itself from the bonds of realism and naturalism. My thesis contains four major chapters that will follow through on the development of Munch’s expressionism and the philosophical implications of his new approach to painting.

For Heidegger, anxiety, referred to as *Angst*, is associated with a feeling of ‘uncanniness’, or not-being-at-home. It is a state of mind that lies within *Dasein*, which is basically the philosopher’s term for human being. *Anxiety* is usually hidden or ‘asleep’ and in due time it awakens and shakes *Dasein* to the core. *Angst* has two components: one is either anxious in the face of something or about something, and both refer to being-in-the-world. *Dasein* has anxiety about its involvements within the world and in the face of ‘thrownness’, or *Geworfenheit*: “The mood of *Angst* puts us in direct contact with nothingness, which goes hand in hand with being, for being is finite and only becomes accessible against the empty background of the ‘not’” (Harman, 70). Death also plays a role with respect to *Angst* for the authentic

Dasein. He or she understands that death is a possibility that at some point will be actualized and should thus be anticipated.

But why is anxiety so troubling? According to Heidegger, *Angst* drives *Dasein* out of its immersion in the world of things and forces it to confront itself - and thus, the latter experience cannot be explained by 'the they', or *Das Man*, the anonymous 'one' who constitutes most of those surrounding *Dasein*. Heidegger argues that *Angst* frees *Dasein* from the inauthenticity of *Das Man*. Additionally, "Dasein is thrown into death as a constant possibility of its being, as revealed in *Angst*. It is not death itself that interests Heidegger, but being-towards-death, since this attitude is with us at all times even when it is concealed" (Harman, 71).

For Kant, in contrast, anxiety is closely linked to his notion of the sublime, which cannot really be represented in aesthetics but forms the basis for the transition between aesthetics and morality. Kant argues that a lack of harmony is also closely linked to the experience of the sublime. The sublime is very subjective - one may refer to it as an evanescent experience - but it does reveal the mental situation of the person who experiences it: "true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the [subject] judging, not in the natural Object, the judgment upon which occasions this state" (Kant, 117). In a sense, one may say it individuates, as opposed to the beautiful, which entails a *sensus communis* and brings together a community based upon agreement. The voice of nature is expressed through the sublime and imposes a sense of respect upon us. Kant also distinguishes between the types of the sublime, namely the mathematically sublime (as related to the idea of absolute greatness) and the dynamically sublime (as related to the idea of might). These notions will be related to my discussion of the role of the sublime in Munch's paintings.

Hence, Chapter One: *Kant and Munch: the Sublime in Nature*, will zoom in on the dynamically sublime in relation to Munch with a special focus on Munch's "nature paintings." These paintings epitomize Kant's description of man as feeling overwhelmed with the grandiosity, power, strength and danger of nature. This feeling combines both pain and pleasure. Munch's "nature" paintings, namely *The Storm* (1908), *Forest* (1903), *Young Girl by the Shore* (1896), *The Sun* (1912), *Towards the Forest I* (1897), *The Wave* (1921) and *Starry Night* (1923), all express Kant's dynamically sublime and extend this experience to any possible audience of spectators.

Chapter Two: *Heidegger and Munch: Anxious Dasein*, will discuss Heidegger's definition of anxiety in greater detail in addition and take up the importance of anxiety with respect to authentic *Dasein*. Following an elaborate explanation, Heidegger's understanding will be applied to Munch's paintings in an attempt to underscore the role of anxiety in his work. In an article titled "Existential Anxiety: *Angst*," James Park discusses how "anxiety usually hides behind ordinary fears and worries," and assumes an "existential" form when it produces images that do not necessarily correspond to real threats:

Our existential anxiety can also create phantom fears: Are we pursued in the dark by impossible monsters? Or do we have dreams of horror, danger,

menace, threat? Even in our waking hours, we might sometimes dream up unlikely dangers to explain our anxiety to ourselves. (5)

Heidegger discusses the importance of anxiety in his works, beginning with *Being and Time*. Particularly when *Dasein* dwells in the inauthentic mode, anxiety lies dormant, but it nevertheless remains in force. Anxiety is one of the most vital moods and lies at the core of *Dasein's* innermost being. The tragic hero, as a special example of authentic *Dasein*, is aware of anxiety, experiences it, and thus feels caught up in a world where he or she feels thrown into a world of groundless existence. The paintings to be discussed in this chapter are *Anxiety* (1894), *Evening on Karl Johan* (1892), *Puberty* (1895), *Summer Night's Dream (The Voice)* (1893), and *The Scream* (1893).

Chapter Three: *Munch - Combining Heidegger and Kant*, will once again underscore the notion that anxiety is an essential feature of *Dasein* - that it is, specifically, the key to authentic *Dasein*. Here Kant's idea of pain, which indicates the experience of the sublime and also points to the realm of the supersensible, will be combined with Heidegger's understanding of *being-towards-death* as leading to anxiety. These paintings will be used to develop this comparison: *Vampire* (1893), *Ashes* (1894), *Death in the Sickroom* (1895), *Woman in Three Stages (Sphinx)* (1894), *Self-Portrait: Between the Clock and Bed* (1940-1942), *White Night* (1901), and *The Dance of Life* (1899-1900).

Numerous texts have been written on Kant, Heidegger, and Munch, but none before has offered a view of art that combines the work of all three figures. With respect to Munch, much literature discusses his mental illnesses along with his views on women and sexuality in relation to his works. Nevertheless, several aspects of the artist's work and life have not been addressed. Four basic questions remain unanswered: (1) How does Munch *become* the "Munch" known to the present-day art lovers? (2) How does Munch enter *and* exist in the frame of art itself? (3) How does the artist open up a "new" world? (4) Finally, in addition to the psychological aspect of his work, which already infuses the spectator's mind with anxiety, how and why is it that spectators shudder and "take off their hats in awe, the way they do in church" when confronting Munch's work (Strickland and Boswell, 123)? In relation to the final question, Munch's manipulation of space, color, composition, and texture will be thoroughly analyzed.

Chapter 1: Kant and Munch: the Sublime in Nature

“One doesn’t paint
after nature -
one takes from it.” (Munch, 60)

In his *Private Journals*, Munch once asked, “How should one paint true weeping after nature?” (Holland, 2) This was a question that truly puzzled him throughout his career. The artist strived in his own way to “copy nature” (Munch, 89), but then added, “we certainly could not catch nature anyway - better to give the feeling - in oneself” (Munch, 89). Inspired by Paul Gauguin’s reaction against Realism and James Abbott McNeil Whistler, who once claimed that “art is not an imitation of nature,” Munch believed that nature should be transformed according to how the artist experiences it. Of Gauguin’s work, the poet Stephane Mallarmé once wrote, “[. . .] symbolism: to evoke an object bit by bit in order to show a mood” (Munson, 62). Art historians agree that Gauguin strived to develop “an aesthetic based on simplification of forms” (Munson, 62), a notion that becomes evident in Munch’s paintings.

Munch’s art can also be seen in relation to Romanticism, which promoted imagination, emotion and genius, giving birth to an expressive theory of art during the late eighteenth century. “According to this theory, art was seen as the means of portraying the unique, individual feelings and emotions of the artist” (Bourne, 1). The Romantics were evidently against all forms of mimesis: “There is no copying, there is no adaptation, there is no learning of the rules, [. . .] there is no structure which you must understand and adapt yourself to before you can proceed (Berlin, 119). It was William Wordsworth who defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” (Abrams, 21).

As an important precursor to Romanticism, Kant believed that the laws of nature are grounded in human reason (Routledge, 1). The exaltation of nature led Kant to the notion of the sublime. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant wrote that “for the most part nature excites the Ideas of the sublime in its chaos or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation, provided size and might are perceived” (104). He also added that “we must seek (a ground) for the Sublime merely in ourselves and in our attitude of thought which introduces sublimity into the representation of nature” (104). The sublime is not to be found in nature, as such, but in the subjective apprehension of nature as grasped by the human mind. Surely Munch’s view of the sublime, as reflected in his paintings, can be related to the increasingly subjective attitude towards life and experience that entered mainstream European culture as a consequence of Romanticism.

Romanticism of a strongly Symbolist cast is clearly evident, for instance, in Munch’s *The Wave* (1921), a painting that has gone largely unmentioned in the available criticism. This painting is concerned with violent, strong waves and is dominated by indigo and marine blue hues - “colors Munch associated with worlds outside the everyday . . . the otherworlds of death and of art” (Steinberg, 13). The waves are formed of occasional splashes of turquoise, brown and white apparently to attack the shore, or better yet, devour it. Minus the brown intervals, the waves reflect the sky, which

would appear calm, if viewed as isolated from the rest of the work. The paint daubs are smoother than the artist's rough handling, and the results, which Munch referred to as *hestekur*, or "kill or cure" treatment, sum up his manner of treating canvases, which sometimes caused them to tear (Aslaksby, 1)

The background in *The Wave* presents a clear yet deformed landscape, dominated by shades of green on the right side, and gradually morphing into neutral and blue hues. Five tall trees bend in accordance with the blowing wind, supporting the wave's force and "pushing away" the remaining parts of the emerald scenery, forcing the elements to blend together, forming amorphous shapes. Behind the trees, deep indigo mountains produce a haunting effect and assert their presence in a minimalist manner. A curved brown line, created by mixing red ochre and red lake (Singer, et al, 283), almost splits the painting into two parts, and yet its function is not strongly evident. What starts as a coastline ends in a boardwalk, where, before the canvas ends, a distant, lonesome figure appears, suggesting a person "dwarfed" by the immensity and force of nature in a way that recalls Kant's definition of the dynamical sublime.

Nevertheless, what is it about *The Wave* that compels the spectator to perceive the painting in terms of the sublime? Munch closely studied and applied the intuitive color systems of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as well as more mystical and astral theories of the occultists to his color compositions (Steinberg, 11-12). He certainly believed that "blues and violets bring an anxious, tender, longing mood, because they always convey darkness and coolness; the deepest purple has an unsettling effect" (Steinberg, 13). Undeniably, the artist's choice of colors does play a major role in his use of the uncanny and the sublime. Naturally, the painter's violent brush strokes that appear in the foreground create the wave's force, resonate with strength, and also help depict the dynamically sublime. Furthermore, Munch's placement of the lone figure right before the canvas ends, as well as his decision to make him almost unnoticeable at first glance, emphasizes how small the human being really is when faced with the overpowering grandeur of nature, thus fulfilling the requirements of the dynamically sublime, which resonates anxiety when it evokes a feeling of helplessness in the face of nature.

Towards the Forest I (1897), a colored woodcut, fits more into the artist's "common" style, including a nude, female figure, "at once vulnerable and seductive" (Berman), a fully dressed male one, as well as the discernable and enveloping red hair - all common motifs evident in his *Frieze of Life* series. At first glance, the female nude, turned away from the spectator, stands out against the dark and dim colors of this work, asserting Munch's belief in the power of women's sexuality. The male figure, who also presents his back to the spectator, is fully dressed in dark garments. This figure appears in a stark contrast to the woman, whose red hair erotically slides down her back and onto the man's shoulder and head. Munch strongly believed in the power of hair, which can "envelop and strangle, or provide a sought-for connection" (Harris, 7). His use of this

motif is even more evident in works such as *Vampire* (1893) and *Ashes* (1894), which will be discussed later.

Both figures are moving forward - right leg first, at a pace, which seems to be rather slow or poised - while gazing at the unknown. They are trotting on green grass, broken up by pale yellow strokes, while the moon's reflection is hidden behind the large trees and reaches up towards the sky. The scene becomes darker and creates an uncanny undertone as they enter deeper into the unknown. The proposed "union" transforms into one that no longer seems passionate and loving (Zogaris, 23). The dark blue waters appear to fall into the world of Hades, where the ferryman, possibly the male figure, will escort the dying across the river to be submerged into the underworld for eternity. The erect trees, possibly a phallic symbol, amplify the man's role; he is taking her into *his* domain . . . but where, or for what purpose exactly (Slavoj, 3)? The spectator slowly forgets about the man and the woman and is overwhelmed by their uncanny surroundings, which arouse a sense of the sublime, due to the figures in the foreground, who are also spectators and appear at a safe distance from an engulfing nature, allowing them, and us, "to feel this soul-stirring delight" (Kant, 49). The uncertainty of the situation *is* what creates the sublime, because "obscurity is necessary" (Burke, 13). Last but not least, the visible grains of the wood, in addition to the evidently rough and textured strokes of the artist, add to an uncomfortable feeling that vibrates from this woodcut, especially since the strokes becomes rougher, shorter and faster as the eye wanders away from the central figures.

Munch's painting, *The Sun*, was painted in 1912, after his psychotic episode, which lasted from 1908-1909 (Steinberg and Weiss, 409). This painting formed the centerpiece for a set of works that were commissioned after Oslo gained independence in 1905 (Berman): "Originally, Munch had considered the Nietzschean idea of a mountain of men, struggling towards the sun's light, but the idea was disliked by the selecting authorities" (Smith, 21). Much different from his darker, more nocturnal works, "nature is shown [in this painting] as a constructive force with the sun as a life-giving force that energizes everything around it" (Berman). Here Munch opts for a brighter, more festive, color scheme but remains true to his iconic "column," which in this case was reserved for the reflection of the sun and once again might be interpreted as a phallic symbol. The powerful rays spring forth from the canvas in bright, daring shades of yellow and red, producing diagonal and "aggressive" strokes. This brush technique looks forward to German Expressionism, especially to Wasily Kandinsky's painting, *Der Blaue Reiter*, and captivates the viewer with its overpowering force (Smith, 112). The blue waters and sky act as a backdrop, which amplifies the grandeur of the "magnificent" and "causes the sublime" (Burke, 23). According to Kant "the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness" (40).

An earlier painting, *The Storm* (1893), is dominated by dark hues, specifically browns, yellows, greens, with neutral tones in between. This painting depicts Åsgårdstrand, which is normally "a haven of peace in his

work” but here becomes the scene of a natural disaster as witnessed by Jens Thiis, the director of the Oslo National Gallery and one of Munch’s personal allies (Smith, 64). Nevertheless, the background (as in many of Munch’s paintings) contains a degree of realism. Compared to *The Sun*, this work, which was executed prior to the artist’s major psychotic episode, is much darker, mysterious, and painted in abstraction (Steinberg and Weiss, 409). The rocks in the bottom-right corner gradually merge with the surrounding area in a water-like flow; the patch of grass gradually darkens until it turns black, thus echoing the houses in the background, with the exception of the central, stable, lit house.

In this painting, Munch “scratched” out yellow hues from the surroundings of the house, only to draw the spectator’s attention to the bright windows, forming the “safe haven,” which the women have left behind (Bischoff, 38). The painting “conjures a sense of psychic distress,” largely due to the “anguished gestures” of the protagonist, dressed in white, and her “followers,” who match the broader color-scheme (MoMA, 1). “Undeniably dramatic, the impersonality of the figures, like a Greek Chorus, has a lot in common with the dramatic ethos of symbolism and the quest for ‘universality’” (Smith, 64). The women, even though presented in minimalistic fashion with feathery brushstrokes and devoid of facial traits, echo the same gesture, which is present in Munch’s most iconic work, *The Scream* (1893).

In the bottom-left corner of the canvas, we might observe a darkened patch, possibly a small surface of water, and yet it could also serve a purpose that also performs a role in works such as *Puberty* (1895). Some scholars have argued that the later painting suggests links between the shadow and ancient traditions, but a more strongly psychological interpretation of this phenomenon has also been proposed:

Munch also wrote of a shadowy presence, perhaps attributable, at least in his view, to both a physio-and psycho-pathology of the brain. [. . .] shadowy presences appear frequently in Munch’s visual works as well, perhaps indicating, among other things, the burden of creative thought. (Cordulack, 49, cited in Kuuva, 68)

Unlike most of Munch’s other shadows, which more commonly appear *behind* the protagonist, the shadowy presence in *The Storm* appears in the foreground. For this reason, its existence seems vague and indiscernible compared to the previously mentioned shadows. It has been proposed in addition that the shadow symbolizes death (Schneede, 46).

Munch’s placing of the loud, “angry” storm against the safe and sound house clearly evokes Kant’s dynamical sublime, which involves boundlessness and terror before the forces of nature: “The ambiguity of pose and gesture of the huddled (women) [. . .] stresses the fragility of the human compact with nature, and the lack of security in the face of terrors” (Smith, 64). The women, however, seem to be motionless, with the exception of the protagonist in white, who appears to be moving towards the shore. The direction of her movements is easy to assume, since this specific location, favored by Munch, did have a sea view (Bischoff, 38). The woman in white is apparently turning away from the protected boundaries of society, i.e., the

warmly lit house, in order to dive into the unknown. She thus presents us with an interesting form of escapism. In *The Storm*, which is “primarily about the effects of nature on people,” the sublime acts like a “call,” as opposed to a “repelling” force (Smith, 64).

Munch’s *Starry Night* (1923) contains blue and green hues that might remind the spectator of Vincent Van Gogh’s painting, which carries the same name. This would not be a coincidence, since Munch saw Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* on display in 1889 and created his more uncanny version four years after the Dutch artist’s death as a tribute to him and a pessimistic commentary on the world. While Van Gogh’s work is filled with large, hopeful, fiery stars, Munch’s sky is dominated by darkness, barely allowing the yellow dabs of paint to shine in a gloomy atmosphere (Schneede, 55). Representing the coastline at Åsgårdstrand, south of Oslo, where Munch spent his summers from 1880 onwards, the artist used his favorite blend of blue-indigo-violet to represent the melancholy and mysticism of a familiar landscape.

Dominated by an abstract black mound in the foreground, this painting evokes sadness and a sense of the uncanny. With the exception of a single fine white line cutting through the “trees,” black is the leading agent. As the spectator’s eye travels to the middle ground, a faint black line divides the waters from the sky, marking a vacant horizon. A few pale yellow patches stand out in the sky, perhaps to represent nebulae, unless they are simply meant to conjure the realm of the unknown. A sense of the uncanny brings forth anxiety, while also introducing the presence of the sublime. Even though there is no obvious shelter visible in this work, the profound stillness of the scenery could serve as a safe haven, allowing the sublime to be present - by establishing and supporting the grandeur of nature - while ensuring safety when it projects an aura of silence.

Young Girl by The Shore (1896) is yet another early painting that resonates with sublimity. In this work, Munch’s *hestekur* technique is highly visible, especially in the foreground. The rough “scratches” on the canvas appear at the bottom of the canvas, eventually diverging into the unknown right under the protagonist’s white dress. The colors are dim and faded, which could be due to the artist’s rough handling of his canvases; nevertheless, the chosen effect could also be intentional. Stone-like patches appear in the foreground as well, slowly losing even more shape as the eye dives into the painting. Unlike the previously discussed works, the foreground, middle ground and background are clearly divided into indigo-purple, black, and sky blue, once again indicating Munch’s favored colors. The curved coastline gradually embraces the waters, which are not separated from the sky. The horizon is unclear, and the female protagonist seems to be frozen in time and space, staring into oblivion.

In this painting, the young girl dressed in white, represents the virgin, innocent and pure. Half of her figure is lit up by the sun, while the second figure, standing closer to the coastline, is darkened by a shade, or indirect shadow. The innocent girl, as often depicted in Munch’s works, stands with her back facing the spectator, at the farthest place from the unknown and with her hands presumably near her side. Her pose is suggestive of

contemplation, laced with worry. Is she capable of proceeding into the unknown? Will she face the challenge? Possibly she is lost in an “aesthetical judgment” as she gazes ahead in awe (Kant, 123). For now, she chooses to settle on the most distant point, the safe haven, her protected world, which enables the feeling of the sublime to issue forth uninhibited.

Finally, even a quick look at *Forest* (1903) fills the spectator with an air of anxiety concerning the powerful forces of nature, since “sublimity [. . .] does not reside in anything of nature, but only in our mind” (Kant, 129). The abstract globules of trees and rocks dominating the foreground serve to raise a question mark and produce strong anxiety. Starting with the foreground, the branches and rocks seem to be in a sort of whispering dialogue, creating muted voices while the storm subsides. In the middle ground, white froth dominates. Could this represent clouds that have fallen from the sky? What the white globules are remains a mystery. In the background, the pastel sky seems to come to a rest along with the sea. But two small sailing boats are visible at a safe distance from the forest, asserting the feeling of the sublime in which “the mind feels itself *moved*” (Kant, 120).

Chapter Two: Heidegger and Munch: Anxious Dasein

“Munch is a painter of ghastly masks, shattered by life’s horrors, of heads which seem gnawed off and wasted away from within. He is a painter of skulls which have been burnt and shrunk in the fires of modern hells.” (Salda, 149)

Throughout his life, Edvard Munch suffered from a deep, powerful anxiety, which he believed was pivotal to his existence. In his private journals he wrote: “Still I often feel that I must/ have this life - angst - it is essential/ to me - and that I would not exist/ without it - ” (18). The exact reasons behind his constant feeling of angst cannot be truly defined, and according to most scholars, the blame is to be placed on his troubled childhood. The latter explanation, however, is contradicted when one considers with Heidegger that “the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*. Anxiety ‘does not know’ what that in the face of which it is anxious.” Although anxiety does not have an object, we cannot infer on this basis that it is a mere vapor. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger goes on to say that anxiety in *not* being there “is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one’s breath, and yet it is nowhere” (231).

One cannot claim to have found the reason behind the artist’s anxiety when such a claim would go against the definition of the feeling itself. Heidegger believes that “anxiety [. . .] is the basic state-of-mind of the finite Dasein” (Cassirer, 162). Anxiety defines authentic Dasein’s being-in-the-world as well as its segregation from inauthentic *Das Man*, who fall under “the kind of Being of everydayness” (Heidegger, 164).

Several elements contribute to expressing the artist’s anxiety. The titles of Munch’s paintings, such as *Anxiety* (1894) and *The Scream* (1893), speak for themselves. Furthermore, the dominant colors in his works - indigo, blues, and reds - also aid him in terms of projecting his powerful angst. His choice of subject matter, especially in his earlier paintings that were finished prior to his psychotic episode ending in 1909 (Steinberg and Weiss, 409), along with his highly developed *hestekur* technique, further serve as an important tool of expression. Munch himself, as well as certain figures in his works, is the epitome of the anxious Dasein. Through his own words as well as his works and techniques, his overbearing anxiety shines forth, pulling him away from fallenness and “putting him into direct contact with nothingness” (Harman, 107).

Anxiety (1894), often referred to as “Angst,” evidently shares the red-and-yellow threatening sky of *The Scream* (1893). The blood-red sky vibrates with the soul of the uncanny, filling us with an air of anxiety even before we look at the figures in the foreground. Munch painted “mask-like numbed faces and eyes wide open with terror, as if driven by an invisible power and without a will of their own” (Xani, 48); the cropped, “groundless” figures appear to be at “the mercy of external forces,” being driven to follow a certain, unknown, and possibly discarded, path (Crockett, 63), highlighted by the demonic sky. The figures are staring at the viewers in a rather provoking manner as they walk towards the “unknown,” possibly

the pace of their death, and this movement emphasizes the temporality of Dasein, according to Heidegger (Sheehan, 10). They are moving towards both - the “all-knowing” and the “un-knowing” - faces of death (Kroug, 400), filling them with all-powerful anxiety.

Other than the strong coloring used by Munch for his sky, the yellow tones used for the faces of his figures is also salient and clearly symbolizes a loss of vitality and sense of corruption (Harris, 4). As the eye travels from the foreground to the background, the faces gradually start losing their features as they flow backwards into the horizon. Staying partly hidden, however, the figures stand out, being concealed, in other words, in not “showing it all.” The now-anxious spectator is forced to think, knowing that only a part of the whole is being presented, and this once again raises the level of anxiety. One could also wonder: Who are these figures? Are they each an authentic Dasein, or - since they seem to be following each other rather blindly - are they in fact Das Man? Is the artist trying to punish the masses, which possibly rejected him by casting a “spell of anxiety” upon them? The latter interpretation appears to be true, mainly due to the gradual deletion of facial features from many of his street figures, making them anonymous - a simple “crowd” - thus Das Man.

In 1893 Munch painted his most iconic work to date, *The Scream*, sometimes referred to as *The Cry*. “Obsessed by the tragedy of existence” (Karpinski, 126), the artist viewed life itself as fearful, haunted by painful memories and ailments rooted in his past. Most of his works are a clear depiction of his inner, anxious Being, allowing us to label him as “authentic,” according to Heidegger’s definition of the term. In his private journals he clearly described this overbearing and anxiety-filled experience. He “felt a great scream,” and “the lines of nature - the lines and colors vibrated with motion” (Munch, 64), explain the vibrating and undulating lines used in his work.

The epitome of existential agitation, the artist strived to depict the anxious and lonely human being, or Dasein, confronted with suppressed existential dread (Xani, 48) in nature, a nature that does not console, but rather screams (Bischoff, 53). Munch was known for painting what he remembered and not what he directly perceived. For this reason, *The Scream* is a perfect example of the artist’s recollection and heightening of specific memories. Facing the spectator, the somewhat nebulous figure once again provokingly draws attention to itself as it seems to move towards death. Better yet, it could be moving towards the death and anxiety of all mankind (Schneede, 50). Is this authentic Dasein, carrying the burden of anxiety due to the insensitivity of its inauthentic companions? In view of the latter possibility, “Munch shared the belief that illusions are shattered and all faith destroyed through contact with reality” (Lund, 64).

Munch’s pessimism in this regard resonates with Heidegger’s belief that authentic Dasein, once in contact with anxiety, suffers at least to some degree. Munch painted the head in a skull-like manner, suggesting that he was trying to free it from its case but also to produce the impression that he sought to keep it intact. The central figure was given a prominent spatial position to convey a powerful message, that of a break with reality (Eggum,

4). His “explosive statement of psychological excitement” (Longman, 13) is rooted in his ontological anxiety as well as in his fear of non-being (Lacoque and Loeb, 99). In addition, the central figure seems to have made his acquaintance with the uncanny, which in itself *is* bound up with anxiety (Bernstein, 111). The absence of nose and ears further supports the idea that the scream is not heard, at least by no one else, because anxiety is too taut for it to find an outlet in vocalization (Zizek, 46-48). Its “fetal features” (Zizek, 52) could suggest that the figure is once more being reborn, after having left an inauthentic life behind. According to Heidegger, “to undergo an experience . . . means that this something befalls us, strikes us, overwhelms us, and transforms us . . . the experience is not of our own making . . . we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us, and submit to it” (Kenny, 100).

It is no secret that Edvard Munch took an interest in the esoteric world and possibly saw auras, which are “fine, ethereal radiation or emanations surrounding each and every human being” (Panchadasi, 4). In *The Scream*, a mild aura seems to combine both a sickly lemon yellow, indicating intellectual power, and a slate, murky green, indicating deceit and malice (Panchadasi, 14). The artist’s free and large brushstrokes, which clearly resonate strength and movement, have a strong underlying emotional tone. The artist in this way captures a moment in which he cracks under the psychic forces that are pressing down on him - or the figure (McCarthy, 11). Munch represents a century’s anguish, as well as his own, but was well aware that his contemporaries would link his blood-red sky to the explosion of Karakatoa, the Indonesian volcanic island, which turned the skies, especially at sunset, into a bloodshot hue (Olsen et al, 133). Nevertheless, Munch managed to let his work “speak,” to use Heidegger’s terminology, thus transporting the spectator and “revealing the distant and deeper origin of being” (Long, 100). In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger explains that “in the work is truth, not only something true, that is at work” (54). In other words, a work of art *is* the authentic site for the happening of the truth (Long, 100).

In *Evening on Karl Johan*, painted in 1892, Munch chose to depict Oslo’s main road, with the parliament building as well as the Grande Hotel café (Schneede, 40). The spectator is faced with a moving mob, dominated by pale and ambiguous faces, coming closer and closer; “the crowded pavement is full of movement, yet the figures are dressed as if in mourning, and the features of the nearest walkers are almost skull-like - not much sign of spring here” (Ingles, 15). The staring faces are filled with apprehension and hostility, repeatedly viewed as a representation of the “clamp-down” by the Norwegian government - and that of the bourgeois - on the freethinking bohemians, a group to which Munch belonged (Ingles, 15). Another interpretation is linked to the artist’s breakup with Milly, his obsessional love; after she left him and returned to her stable marital life, he started frantically looking for her on Karl Johan (Seidel, 53), feeling “so alone . . . people who passed by looked strange and awkward . . . all these faces stared at him, pale in the evening light” (Smith, 56).

The looming force of the crowd is laced together with tremendous anxiety, due to Munch's cropping technique, which in itself creates an air of unease. The dark blue sky acts as a velvet shield, disguising the terror felt down below, keeping it intact; the sky forms a bubble around the inhabitants, or *das Man*. The sun has set far away, reminding us of human mortality. A terrified crowd moves away from this ominous scene, while a single figure gazes into the darkness ahead of him. The viewer catches sight of someone in the background who seems to be aware of his separateness - and also that death is inevitable. The viewer of the painting is also driven into the distance, just as the people themselves move steadily away from us and vanish into the remote background. The man looks on as the light fades and death seems to define this melancholy world as a whole.

Nevertheless, the latter analysis is not the sole one. The following should be considered as well: the single black figure, with its back towards the spectators, is moving against the stream, which "evokes Munch's own situation as a radical artist" (Smith, 56). Heidegger suggests, however, that the figure's movement could be interpreted more universally; the lone figure, presumably the artist himself, would then be interpreted as an authentic *Dasein*, moving against the stream of inauthentic beings in his midst. This one figure understands that he is a distinctive entity and thus has a sense of his own authenticity in contrast to what he must confront in his immediate surroundings (Warnock, cited in Hornsby, 3).

Puberty of 1895 is the third version of this work, while the first was destroyed in a fire. The artist in this painting depicts a naked young girl, an anxious protagonist, filled with the realization of her imminent physical and psychological transformation into a woman. Seated upon a bed, she is menaced by a large "amorphous" (Ehrenpreis, 499) shadow to her left that evokes the anxiety she feels. There is a feeling of tension in the painting that comes from the anxiety felt by the young girl threatened by the terror of the unknown (MoMA, 2), revealing her "determination and fragility." She confronts the viewer with a haunted stare (Ehrenpreis, 481). The young girl is without protection and is thus subject to *Existenzfurcht*, fear or existence, as well as *Todesängste*, or the fear of death (Schneede, 46). Sexuality is seen as an overwhelming force (Slatkin, 13), pressing down on its 'victim'. One may translate the latter awareness into an acknowledgement that death is near: with the girl's maturity comes her growing awareness of aging. Thus Heidegger's notion of being-towards-death seems appropriate as a phenomenological description in this case. She is completely alone, and the haunting shadow only serves to individuate her further as she "changes rapidly from virgin to femme fatal" (Ehrenpreis, 499).

The relaxed yet self-controlled (Smith, 70) protagonist in *Summer Night's Dream (The Voice)* of 1893 carries a calm and projecting expression. The lone figure is once again an adolescent girl "at the brink of sexual awareness" (Jayne, 28). In addition to her static pose, the lack of detail suggests the feminine as a symbol (Jayne, 28), as opposed to the depiction of a specific woman in relation to the artist. The young girl is depicted in the psychological state of "becoming aware" (Zogaris, 20). Filled with anxiety, she is evidently stiff, in other words, she feels her inner

sexual will rising for the first time; she is not yet accustomed to it, and is thus unsure of how to react. Dressed in white, carrying an innocent expression, the protagonist is eager, yet vulnerable (Jayne, 28). Her wide and staring “vampire-like eyes” (Zogaris, 20) could be linked to the protagonist’s slow, but gradual, transformation into the seductress, which later appears in another version of *The Voice* (1894-95).

Nevertheless, the chosen title still raises a few questions. Through looking at Munch’s works in relation to his titles, we observe that he favors ambiguous titles or multifaceted ones. In this case, according to Zogaris, the woman’s sexual desire is associated with an inner voice that is trying to push its way out of her (21). It is also vital to note the positioning of her arms, namely, behind her back. The latter appears in numerous works by the artist and symbolizes the figure’s readiness to present herself to the man, while also holding herself back (Frossman, 528). Nevertheless, her hair, which is tied up in a neat bun, shows the spectator that she has not yet reached the femme fatal stage, in contrast to some of the women depicted in other works, such as *Vampire* (1893), *Ashes* (1894), or *The Voice* (1894-95). The reflection of the moon, another symbol that appears in numerous works, clearly represents the male personage in this painting (Zogaris, 21).

Chapter 3: Munch - Combining Heidegger and Kant

“Let the body die but save the soul.”

(Munch, 183)

What began as a warm image of a nurturing woman, gently planting a kiss on her lover’s neck, gradually transformed into an evil, life-destroying, and blood-sucking ‘femme fatal’, giving birth to Munch’s *Vampire*, painted in 1893 (Ingles, 29). Possessing “a deceptive quality of floating gentleness” (Smith, 66), the work, originally titled *Love and Pain*, is far from soothing. The spectator is faced with a woman sucking the strength out of the man - enveloping and strangling him with her long fiery-red hair - while he passively submits to his fate (Smith, 66). The woman’s hair - which can both “envelop and strangle” (Harris, 7) - acts like a net, catching its prey to devour it, while at the same time uniting the figures as one; it also represents the desire for unity as well as the fear or being dominated and destroyed (Schneede, 60). Arne Eggum adds that “the woman dominates . . . [and] her red hair binds him to her like a Medusa” (qtd. in Nierhoff, 40).

Stanislaw Przybyszewski gives a sharp and descriptive analysis of the painting:

There is something terribly peaceful, passionless about this painting, an inexpressible fatality of resignation. The man rolls deeper and deeper into the abyss, powerless. He is happy that he can roll like a stone with no will of its own. He will never be able to get away from the vampire, nor from the pain, and the woman will always sit there and will bite him for all eternity with a thousand tongues of vipers, with a thousand poisoned teeth. (qtd. in Nierhoff, 39)

The embrace of the woman carries an air of the masculine - the dominant one. The male figure, on the other hand, is giving in out of weakness, not trust (Nierhoff, 41). The forceful dark shadow surrounding them ‘outshines’ the tender embrace, setting an anxious mood. The man is presented as a pitiful object, while the woman in her maturity becomes terrifying (Karpinski, 128).

Munch was suspicious of women throughout his life, “describing them as vampires” (Steinberg and Weiss, 413), and thus choosing never to marry. *Vampire* is an allegory “of the battle between sexes” (Heller, 82 qtd. in Nierhoff, 40), and whether the woman is kissing or biting him remains uncertain to some (Nierhoff, 41). Nevertheless, one is indirectly forced to wonder about the man’s stance; why is he not trying to protect himself? Is it possible that he is trying to erase his sins? Is he trying to eradicate a sense of guilt? Driven by sexual desire, he is driven to the woman for relief; nevertheless, he falls victim to the consequences of his desires (Zogaris, 24). In terms of Heidegger, another analysis could be developed. It is possible to view the woman as an authentic being, while the man, perhaps in this case, “Das Man,” is ‘being punished’ for his lack of authenticity. One could also think in terms of being-towards-death. The man senses “the painful brevity of (his) time and the arbitrariness of life that is not really in [his] control” (Lacoue and Loeb, 95), which is why he is passively ‘giving in’ to the woman. Dasein throws itself into being-towards-death in the *act* of love as

well as *through* love and/or care, which encompasses both death and guilt (Kroug, 404).

In *Ashes* (1894), the spectator is primarily faced with a troubled woman, grasping her head, dressed in a white half-open dress with long, flowing red hair. The man in the painting seems to be intentionally hiding his face. The setting is rather clear; a dark forest. The protagonist, the woman, stares straight-ahead - meeting the spectator with terror in her eyes, as opposed to looking at her lover. Her red hair extends to the man, trying to envelop or devour him (Schneede, 61). She is dressed in white, symbolizing the innocent virgin in accord with the majority of Munch's paintings. Nevertheless, it is clear that her dress is half-open; in addition to her flowing hair, she is gradually losing her virginal qualities - because presumably an erotic act has taken place (Zogaris, 24) - and turning into the artist's femme fatal. The enveloping hair is present to remind the couple of what was, or remains, a sign of pain (Schneede, 61). One could also look at this depiction in terms of original sin; the work presents a paradise lost, a break with an illusionary world. In more metaphorical terms, the figures in this painting have torn the veil of maya and are entering into their authentic existence. Echoing *Vampire* (1893), here, too, the sexual act has a negative impact on the man; it has driven him away in despair (Zogaris, 24). It is vital to note that in the 1980s "sexuality was seen as an overwhelming force embodied in the woman as seductress to which man must submit" (Slatkin, 13). The cut log on the bottom of the painting symbolizes thoughts of death and remorse (Loshak, 278); nevertheless, it appears to be transforming into smoke; according to Schneede, the latter symbolizes the dead flame of love, leaving only ashes behind (61).

In order to analyze the woman's mental state and to understand her clear gestures, one could look at this work through Kantian, as well as Heideggerian, eyes. The woman is currently standing in a dark forest, accompanied only by her lover, who seems to have abandoned her, and numerous trees. She feels alone and is overwhelmed by the forest. As she looks around, she only sees more trees and darkness. The woman suddenly feels the true might of the forest; in other words, she experiences Kant's dynamic sublime. She starts off filled with anxiety, due to her now-failing love affair, and then notices the surroundings, which she ignored before due to being consumed by lust. The protagonist is currently in a "crisis," which is supposed to be followed by "recovery" (Liu, 189), if the subject is to truly experience the sublime. Furthermore, she experiences "a certain loss and non-presence of self" (Bernstein, 1126); in other words, she experiences the sublime just as she looks up and notices her true surroundings.

According to Heidegger, "truth is set to work" in a work of art, and "to be a work, means to set up a world" (Heidegger, 43). *Ashes* as a work does indeed reveal a truth to the observer; it reveals the truth of the lovers - the earth - as well as the break with inauthenticity, or the plunge into authenticity - the world. "The world," Heidegger contends, "is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths in the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent

sheltering and concealing. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated” (Heidegger, 47). Earth shows us the obvious, which is the clear setting to be observed. World, however, goes beyond that, un-concealing the earth and exposing what lies beyond it. This work truly “makes manifest what beings as a whole are” (Bruin, 454) and is thus labeled “great art” in Heidegger’s discussion. From a simple love affair that is about to end, filled with remorse and regret, Munch allows the spectator to see that, in addition to opening up a ‘world’, art allows truth to happen.

In 1895, Munch painted *Death in the Sickroom*, one of the very few group portraits representing his entire family. Through his choice of color and space manipulation, he managed to clearly represent the anguish, despair, and grief experienced by his family as a result of tuberculosis. In the background, the spectator sees a bed, presumably where his oldest sister Sophie lies dying (Ingles, 34). Munch’s praying father next to the bed is a clear “protestant sentiment” (Smith, 62), on behalf of the artist. The figure leaning against the wall on the left is presumably the artist himself, while sister Inger stares at the spectators with their brother Andreas standing behind her (Smith, 62). Painting from memory, Munch commonly depicted “things he was afraid of losing” (Steinber and Weiss, 420), and through reading his private journals, we can learn that he lived under a constant shadow of fear and anxiety, especially when it came to losing family members and loved ones to an illness. “Cut off from one another in their mute suffering” (Hume, 2), each of the family members “stands isolated and numb in their emotion” (Kivelitz and Selter, 22); each stands in a preemptive state of mourning, laced with anxiety. “Frozen in passivity” (Kivelitz and selter, 22), the figures are depicted as they were at the time this work was completed, not as they were when Sophie died sixteen years earlier (Ingles, 34), an arrangement that once again highlights Munch’s active imagination.

Furthermore, we know that the Munch family lived in a small house, and yet the artist painted a large room, proving that “his presentation of his memory is . . . larger than life” (Lathe, 206). *Death in the Sickroom* focuses on the family rather than Sophie; hence, “death is depicted from the point of view of the survivors” (Kivelitz and Selter, 22), making this work more universal and granting “a definition to human reality” (Singh, 217), by presenting death, and thus opening up a ‘world’. The sickly green wall, orange shade of the floor and the black-framed picture in the background are all symbols of the family’s exhaustion, which appear in other works on the same theme that concern the passage from life to death (Smith, 62). Through the vanishing lines on the floor, the artist structures his perspective; furthermore, “figure and space are in a state of tension that metaphorically makes the moment of passage from life to death tangible” (Kivelitz and Selter, 22).

Dominated by “the surrounding menace of death” (Heidegger, qtd in Stulberg, 259), the figures around the child are unable to run away from their own death, or even form their own idea of death. The protagonists - or at least the artist’s sister, Inger - are experiencing “pre-abs-ence” (Sheehan,

314). Inger's immediate presence anticipates her future state, in other words, death. The only figure painted with clear, tired, and anxious eyes, Inger has accomplished her transformation from inauthentic to authentic, through her "incomplete presence that shades off into absence" (Sheehan, 314), and "here it can become manifest to Dasein [or Inger] that in this distinctive possibility of its own self, it has been wrenched away from the 'they'" (Heidegger, 307).

Upon first glance, *Woman in Three Stages (Sphinx)* (1894), is a depiction of three female figures along with one male. The three women remind spectators of the traditional representation of age, and yet they could also be the splitting of one woman into three (Schneede, 66). "The virgin, the whore, and the crone" (Ingles, 41) represent one woman who is a saint, a seductress and, at the same time, an unhappy lost soul (Schneede, 66). The young woman dressed in white symbolizes the beginning; in her youth, she is "self-absorbed, inhibited and unapproachable" (Karpinsky, 127). As she gradually transforms into a femme fatal, she becomes "a seductive menace, a danger to hopelessly attract man"; the woman becomes "withdrawn . . . disillusioned and emotionally withered . . . no longer agitated by passion, she has not emerged to peace of harmony"; nevertheless, in any of her facets, she is "a being who eludes man" (Karpinsky, 127). Hence, the woman once again confirms Munch's fear of intimacy as well as his belief that "woman with her different nature is a mystery to man - woman who is at the same time saint, whore and an unfortunate devotee" (Harris, 7).

Apart from the three women, a man stands to the right; his eyes are shut and his left hand is lifted towards his head. Could the three women be products of his imagination? One could arguably state that this is true; his body language, starting with his hand, implies the taking place of a mental process, followed by his standing position (with his back turned towards the women) could be interpreted in a symbolic manner: he does not see the women; he does not belong to their world. It is possible that the man is the protagonist, who, through his pain and grief, gives birth to the three different women (Schneede, 66)? What further separates him from the women is the red "blood flower" he carries in his right hand (Schneede, 66). Sometimes referred to as the "flower of pain" or "blood lily" (Xani, 49), it stands for pain and loss of luck, appearing in other works by Munch.

Painted in hues of black and brown, the man and the crone melt into the background of the dark woods. The artist chose to paint the third of the women in a dark color, signifying her withdrawn femininity, which allows her grief to prevail. In fact, she has become a "silhouette staring sightlessly towards the viewers out of deep-lying, dark eye sockets" (Xani, 49). She refrains from making contact, which becomes evident through her passive, yet rigid, pose. With her arms behind her back, she is ready to meet death (Xani, 49). It is vital to note the positioning of the arms with respect to the different women. As a virgin, her arms are in front of her, protective and innocent, unaware and unknowing. Looking at the central nude woman, we notice that her arms are gradually moving backwards; she is open for sexuality, completely exposed, and yet not passive; she refuses to let go. Looking at the woman, we see that she has moved her arms behind her

back, while staring ahead; she has abandoned “Das Man” and is now anticipating her own death. Her passivity is laced with anxiety, and “in this state of mind, [she] finds [herself] *face to face* with the ‘nothing’ of the possible impossibility of [her] existence” (Heidegger, 310).

The role of the male protagonist, whether an authentic Dasein or not, can be disputed. On one hand, he seems to be abandoning the women, by turning his back on them and walking away. If one were to say that the female figures represent “Das Man,” as those who “provide a *constant tranquilization*” (Heidegger, 298), would it be true to say that the male protagonist is in fact an authentic Dasein? On the other hand, if the women are figments of his imagination, he is the figure in whom “nothingness and anxiety meet [and] dwell together” (Meinertz, 51). At the same time, he is the one who is turning his back on authenticity; he is, in fact, running away, abandoning his anxiety and his awareness that death will surely catch up with him.

Heidegger’s concept of being-towards-death comes to life in Munch’s *Self Portrait: Between the Clock and Bed* (1940-42). This painting depicts the artist in his bedroom, literally standing between a faceless-and-armless clock, with his bed on the right and his paintings behind him. Judging from his tired facial expression, he is “an old man encountering death, where he is in his merciless self-analysis” (Eggum, 6). Almost an ‘object’, just like the bed and the clock, “it is as though Munch forces himself to stand to attention against Time (the clock) and Fate (the bed)” (Smith, 36). Facing the front “passively but stoically” (Loshak, 282), his arms hang down his sides - he is unable to paint - and mock the armless clock, while his stiffness is mocked by the nude female figure, possibly alluding to past lovers (Loshak, 282). While not presenting any self-pity in this work, he “seems to be accepting the inevitable final conflict between life and death.” (Harris, 24).

The clock with a blank face and hands suggests that “time has run out.” (Harris, 24). The latter also hints the erasure of time, “just as the lifetime experience contained in his own lifeless head will shortly be erased, but survive in the pictures around him” (Harris, 24). Blankly facing the front just like the protagonist, the clock only refers to the *passage* of time, since the exact time of death can never be clearly stated (Loshak, 282). The clock without hands is also a reference to a scene from Goethe’s *Faust* in which Mephistopheles announces the death of protagonist, while adding, “the clock has stopped.” (MoMA, 3). Furthermore, the choice of the clock’s location, namely, behind the artist, tells the spectators that most of his time has passed (Loshak, 282).

With his paintings hanging on every wall, representing his work and concerns, Munch has left his past and stepped forward into the bedroom that symbolizes “the passive phase of life adjacent to death” (Loshak, 282). Now in the foreground, the bed “in which we are born and die” is placed next to the artist (Harris, 24). The bed is now bed and waits to claim him (MoMA, 3). The red and black lines of the bedcover, which is “reminiscent of a flag draped over a catafalque” (Smith 36), show Munch’s awareness of the ongoing and never-ending struggle between life and death (Harris, 24). The

truncated bed also symbolizes a death-to-be-met-soon, and *because* the state of death is in itself timeless, the artist chose to paint a two-dimensional, flattened pattern (Loshak, 282).

During the two-year period needed to complete this painting, the artist was in constant anticipation of his own death, which “turns out to be the possibility of understanding one’s *ownmost* and uttermost potentiality for-Being - that is to say, the possibility of *authentic existence*” (Heidegger, 307). Smith contends that “the activity of self-presentation, matched by the swirling brushstrokes and dripping paint, particularly around the bed, suggests that Munch was worried that time might run out before he finished this painting” (36). Other than the strong symbols in this painting that are used to depict this state of apprehension, more subtle details also support it. Looking at the light distribution, we notice a warm yellow hue in the background that perhaps suggests the artist’s past, while the surroundings becomes harder as the figure moves forward into the present and approaches death. Furthermore, judging from the look on his face, the artist is not sad or anxious. As a matter of fact, he seems to have experienced strong anxiety from 1940-1942 and is now aware of having “lived through” something. In the process of creating this work, Munch has become an authentic *Dasein*, anticipating and accepting his own death, and he now walks willingly towards it.

White Night (1901) depicts Munch’s view of nature as eerie, moving and overwhelming. He chose a cool color palette to express the latter emotions, dominated by hues of grey, blue and green. The “frozen, glittering clarity, modulated by the forms of the trees in a panoramic view,” are a true evocation of the Norwegian landscape (Smith, 35). Depicting the sublime in nature, Munch chose to refrain from painting any figures in order to allow “an expansiveness to emerge” (Smith, 35), turning the spectator into the protagonist. An uncanny stillness in the trees in front of the pine-fence allows the viewer to feel safe haven. But in looking beyond the dense pines in the middle ground of the painting, one is overcome by an uneasy feeling, perhaps due to the “Idea of its infinity” (Kant, 116). The snow on the ground is, or was, in movement; either way, not much time has passed since *some sort of presence* was there. We surmise that the sun has just set from the timid rays that enter the painting from the top right. Furthermore, the chosen texture for the sky denotes chaos.

Munch chose to eliminate a human protagonist in order to force a “movement of the mind” (Kant, 105) with respect to his spectators, opening up a world for them to dive into and experience to the fullest. Presumably, Munch also believes that “the sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the [subject] judging, not in the natural object” (Kant, 117); in this case, the natural object is the artist’s depiction of nature. The further one looks into the painting, the smaller one feels, truly dwarfed by nature, frozen under its spell and powerfulness. Heidegger would relate this feeling of anxiety to a force that compels *Dasein* to face being-towards-death, and thus become authentic. The painting is also a strong depiction of Kant’s dynamical sublime, which is “a pleasure that arises only indirectly” (Kant, 102). By allowing us to experience the sublime through the painting, “we (the

spectators) can regard an object as *fearful* without being afraid of it; . . . if we judge of it in such a way that we merely *think* a case in which we would wish to resist it, and yet in which all resistance would be altogether vain” (Kant, 124).

Behind the young dancing couple in the foreground of *The Dance of Life* (1899-1900), lost in a moment of “tranquility and absorption” (Gerner, 28), “a wild crowd of people are whirling - fat men biting women in the neck - caricatures of strong men embracing the women” (Munch, qtd. in Smith, 94). The painting depicts the “allegorical division of the women into three stages of love that Munch discerned,” namely, a young virgin with open arms, a dancer dressed in red, obscurely associated with power and knowledge, and a figure in black who merely gazes at the dancing couple with “her hands clenched tightly in front of her” (Smith, 94). Unlike the crone in *Woman in Three Stages (Sphinx)*, the woman in black refuses to let go and meet death: the positioning of her hands in front contracts with the hands of the virgin that are kept behind her back. While this painting evokes the biological clock (Smith, 94), due to the identical facial features of the virgin and the crone, implying that they are the same person (Gerner, 29), one needs to note the mask-like face of the man embracing the white-dressed woman behind the crone.

According to Smith, this mask-like figure “has affinities with 16th century German images of death dancing with a young maiden” (94). The qualities of that face could suggest Munch’s knowledge of being-towards-death; in this case, ‘death’ is only dancing with the ‘virgins’. Whether they are aware of it or not, the artist is also making a simple point: death can come any time and at any age. If, however, the girls *are* aware of what they are doing, then they are literally embracing death, and are thus becoming authentic. In contrast, the crone stares at the dancing lovers, ignorant of what is going on behind her; a member of *Das Man*, she tranquilizes herself, turning her back on the presence of death, which is symbolized by her firmly clenched hands and her position on the canvas.

Munch’s works epitomize anxiety, fear, despair and - using Heidegger’s term - being-towards-death. The artist establishes truth, which is “the bringing forth of a being such as never was before and will never come to be again.” (Heidegger, 60). He opens up a new world in which one can *see* authenticity happen and also one in which the spectator can experience an inner transformation, as brought about through anxiety and in relation to the latter. Even when his painting is a harmoniously deceptive landscape, Munch’s rough brushwork, or *hestekur*, and his choice of darker hues overshadow his work, increasing its power, presence and effect, overwhelming the spectator, pulling the viewer in while also reversing that action. The internal transformation, due to the artist’s now open world, creates a struggle and yet stimulates the senses in a remarkable manner.

Munch entered the frame of art with pain, grief, and anxiety, and yet those same three elements, which first allowed his passage into art, grounded him, allowing him to daringly expose a different world with the hope of being understood. Through Munch’s creations, which are filled with pain yet intertwined with a certain beauty that forces the spectator to marvel

at them, Heidegger and Kant - two varyingly different philosophers - often meet, through the sense of pain in relation to a sublime threshold and in being-towards-death as a mark of Dasein's finite existence.

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