

HEIDEGGER'S HOLY AND QUIET JOY:
BODY HERMENEUTICS OF TWO PAINTINGS BY LAWREN S. HARRIS

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Abstract.

How would our lived human body experience Heidegger's holy? This dissertation uses a phenomenological method of body hermeneutics to develop a lived experience of the notion of the holy from Heidegger's later thought with the help of two paintings by Lawren S. Harris.

Body hermeneutics, developed by Samuel Mallin, is a method of systematically feeling out and describing the experience of phenomena through the four regions of the lived body: the perceptual, the motor-practical, the affective, and the cognitive/linguistic. The artworks hold the phenomena and create situations through which the viewer can repeatedly access and explore the phenomena. The artworks also speak to the whole body, not just to the cognitive aspect of our being, and thus make it much easier for us to recognize and overcome our cognitive preconceptions and to develop a fuller bodily experience of the phenomena.

The first part of the dissertation, working with the painting *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, explores how one can phenomenologically experience and describe that which is not an entity, since both being and the holy in Heidegger's understanding are not entities. By describing the contrasts between the experience of figures and lines in the painting on one hand and colour and light fields on the other, a new bodily attitude can be felt and developed that is quite different from our everyday attitudes towards phenomenology and perceiving things in general. This new bodily attitude is helpful for describing phenomena like being and the holy as understood by Heidegger.

The second part of the dissertation, with the help of the painting *Northern Lake*, further develops the understanding of the new bodily attitude. It explores a particular kind of darkness to better understand the phenomena of depth and abyss, and a particular kind of light to describe the haleness as the experience of the holy.

*To the Primordial Mother, the Adi Shakti,
whose mild embrace and healing presence
have sustained me through this work
and brought it to completion*

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in parentheses to provide references to Heidegger's texts, both German and English, followed by page numbers. Full information can be found in the bibliography.

A	Heidegger, "Andenken."
AAP	Heidegger, <i>Der Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie</i> .
AS	Heidegger, "Anaximander's Saying."
AWH	Heidegger, "As When On a Holiday..."
BC	Heidegger, <i>Basic Concepts</i> .
BDT	Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking."
BH	Heidegger, "Brief über den Humanismus."
BT	Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> .
BWD	Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken."
BWP	Heidegger, <i>The Beginning of Western Philosophy</i> .
D	Heidegger, "Das Ding."
DWM	Heidegger, "...dichterisch wohnet der Mensch..."
ECF	Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of Φυσικς in Aristotle's <i>Physics B</i> , 1."
EM	Heidegger, <i>Einführung in die Metaphysik</i> .
FT	Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik."
G	Heidegger, "Das Gedicht."
GB	Heidegger, <i>Grundbegriffe</i> .
HD	Heidegger, "Heimkunft / An die Verwandten."
HE	Heidegger, "Homecoming/ To Kindred Ones."
HEHD	Heidegger, "Hölderlins Erde und Himmel."
HEHE	Heidegger, "Hölderlin's Earth and Heaven."
HID	Heidegger, <i>Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister."</i>
HIE	Heidegger, <i>Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister."</i>
IM	Heidegger, <i>Introduction to Metaphysics</i> .
L	Heidegger, "Language."
LH	Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism.'"
OWA	Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art."
P	Heidegger, "The Poem."
PMD	Heidegger, "... Poetically Man Dwells ..."
PR	Heidegger, <i>The Principle of Reason</i> .
QT	Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology."

R	Heidegger, "Remembrance."
S	Heidegger, "Die Sprache."
SA	Heidegger, "Der Spruch des Anaximander."
SG	Heidegger, <i>Der Satz vom Grund</i> .
SZ	Heidegger, <i>Sein und Zeit</i> .
TH	Heidegger, "The Thing."
UA	Heidegger, <i>Über den Anfang</i> .
UK	Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes."
WD	Heidegger, "Wozu Dichter?"
WL	Heidegger, "The Way to Language."
WBF	Heidegger, "Vom Wesen und Begriff der Φύσις. Aristoteles, <i>Physik B</i> , 1."
WPF	Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?"
WWF	Heidegger, "Wie wenn am Feiertage..."
WZS	Heidegger, "Der Weg zur Sprache."

Introduction

This project was born from my fascination with Heidegger's notion of the fourfold of earth, sky, mortal, and divinities, which is one of the central themes of Heidegger's later thought. When I encountered Heidegger's fourfold for the first time, I was amazed to see how this seemingly old notion opened up for us such new ways of seeing the world and things in the world. Among the folds of the fourfold, the most cryptic one for me was that of the divinities or gods. Whereas I could see ways of entering into and working with earth, sky and the mortals, the sphere of divinities seemed much more difficult to approach in a forward-going manner, rather than looking backwards at the divinities that have been in the past.¹ In the most inspiring lecture *The Poem* (1968), Heidegger quotes Hölderlin saying, "because the present gods are so near / I must be as if they were far away ..." (P 212)² and then continues a few pages later:

¹ A recent book by Andrew Mitchell provides a detailed study and interpretation of Heidegger's fourfold. Instead of interpreting the fourfold through the prism of early Heidegger or through other philosophers, Mitchell explores the fourfold as an original thought in its own right. He traces the theme of the fourfold itself and of each of its folds as well as the notions related to them through Heidegger's texts. (Mitchell, *The Fourfold*.) I found this book extremely helpful and thought-provoking.

² "Aber weil so nahe sie sind die gegenwärtigen Götter / Muß ich seyn, als wären sie fern ..." (G 185)

Too near, too near-going in the direction of the poet are the arriving gods who are present to him. Apparently their arrival lasts a long time, and is, therefore, still more pressing, and thus, still more difficult to say, than is their completed presence. For man is also incapable of openly and directly perceiving their perfect presence, and thus of receiving the good bestowed by them. (P 214)³

If we cannot perceive the coming to presence or the complete presence of the gods directly as Heidegger seems to be saying here, how then can we perceive it? This question has guided my project initially, and while it has not been answered yet, I feel that I now understand the place where this question can be asked much better than I did before.

The scope of this dissertation has been limited to working on the experience of Heidegger's notions of "being" and "the holy". While I have not yet engaged with the question of divinities, Heidegger himself suggests in "Letter on 'Humanism'," that we need to experience being and the holy before we can experience the divinities. We will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 1. The ultimate task of this dissertation is to

³ "Zu nah, zu nahegehend sind die in der Richtung auf den Dichter zu, gegenwärts zu ihm, ankommenden Götter. Offenbar dauert dieses Ankommen lange Zeit, ist darum noch bedrängender und deshalb noch schwerer zu sagen als die vollendete Anwesenheit. Denn auch diese vermag der Mensch nicht geradehin unmittelbar zu vernehmen und das durch sie gespendete Gut zu empfangen." (G 187)

explore and describe our human experience of the holy that we can develop through the body hermeneutics of the artwork. This is done in Part 2 of the dissertation. As preparation for the experience of the holy, Part 1 explores the shift from experiencing and describing entities to the experience of being which is not an entity.

At the same time when I started reading Heidegger's later texts, I was also exposed to Samuel Mallin's method of doing phenomenology, which he called body hermeneutics⁴. It was striking to see a similar kind of a drive or passion behind this method, as what I saw behind Heidegger's fourfold. It was first of all about going back to the basic elements, to the aspects that are most fundamental, simplest and closest to us, that are always already there with us, and yet are mostly overlooked and taken for granted. Then, with the help of these elemental aspects, and while working through them, the task was to find a different and perhaps a more genuine way to engage with things, with people, and with the world. In the case of Mallin's method, our own body with its multiple layers or regions helps us explore the plurality of ways in which we engage with and respond to things, situations, people, and being itself.

Body hermeneutics is a phenomenological method that describes and reflects on the lived body in a concrete situation dealing with everyday concerns, institutions, people, nature, and art. The particular strength of body hermeneutics is that it is not

⁴ For the first descriptions and applications of this method see Mallin, *Art Line Thought*. The method has been further developed as body hermeneutics in Mallin, *Body on My Mind*.

limited to working exclusively in the cognitive sphere. It develops its insights with the help of different “regions”⁵ of the lived body, that is, the perceptual, motor-practical, social-affective, and cognitive regions of existence. Body hermeneutics describes how the lived body responds to a concrete situation through these different regions of the body. Similarly to the traditional textual hermeneutics, the goal of the method is to describe, clarify, articulate, and elucidate what one is working on. However, both the “toolbox” and the “field” to which the method can be applied are broader. Body hermeneutics is carried out by the whole body, that is, not only by cognition, but also by other aspects of the body, like emotions, sense perception, motility, and so on. Also, body hermeneutics can be applied not only to texts but to artworks, or to everyday situations in which we constantly find ourselves.

While doing body hermeneutics of a situation or an artwork, we try to purposely and systematically feel it out, paying attention to the perceptual, motor-practical, social-affective, and cognitive regions of the body. When we describe an artwork or a situation, we pay attention to how it attunes these different aspects of our body, how it makes us move or feel, how our eyes see the colors and shapes in it, how it changes our perception of space, what emotions it brings out in us, what it calls for in terms of practice and action, how it affects our posture or breathing, and so on. We explore,

⁵ Bodily regions in Mallin’s method come mainly from Merleau-Ponty, for introduction of the regions, see Mallin, *Art Line Thought*, 275-8. For a more detailed descriptions of each of the regions and their distinctive ways see Mallin, *Body on My Mind*, 6-118.

circling through the regions as well as through the lines and areas of the artwork or situation, describing different aspects of being in touch with phenomena we are working on. As with traditional textual hermeneutics, we do not merely make the same circle over and over, but with time we go deeper, our descriptions become sharper, more precise, and at the same time thicker, more fecund. Different sides and aspects of phenomena that we describe begin confirming each other. The phenomena themselves become fuller and more “alive.” They show themselves better than before. We start feeling and understanding them better; we learn something about them, how to be with them; we also learn about ourselves.

Body hermeneutics is no doubt a bodily “exercise” and yet it is always carried out within language and with help of a language. It always remains hermeneutics, and as such, it has the purpose to articulate, clarify and develop our concepts, our cognitive habits, and our ways of cognitively understanding phenomena by naming and describing them. When doing body hermeneutics, we bring our concepts to meet things, artworks, and situations to which we feel they might relate. In working out this relationship between the name and the named, between the surface and the layers of depth, between the abstract and the rich ambiguity, between cognition and flesh, between concepts and phenomena contained in and brought out by things and situations, the concepts become less and less abstract. They become deeper and fuller, more accurate and precise in some ways, yet thicker and livelier in others. The concepts

become in touch with phenomenal reality; they grow and stretch, focus and sharpen, they adapt and develop.

In this dissertation I am working on Heidegger's theme of the holy, as well as on a number of related phenomena, by doing body hermeneutics of two paintings by Lawren S. Harris, *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920) and *Norther Lake* (1923). While this whole project is inspired by what Heidegger has said or written, the main questions of the dissertation are not about what is the most appropriate interpretation of Heidegger. Rather, they are: how can we experience and how do we experience the phenomena that Heidegger described or mentioned? Because of the organic manner in which body hermeneutics as a method normally develops the themes that are being worked on, and because of the way that the insights and "results" are not quite predictable and depend very much on the overlaps between the philosopher, the artist, and the person who is doing body hermeneutics, such projects do not normally result in a total and complete interpretation of a theme or a concept. Instead, one can expect that in some "areas of condensation" one will end up with significant discoveries and insights, while other areas will remain relatively obscure and unexplored. In my conversation with Heidegger, present through some of his texts, and Harris, present through his two paintings, only the themes and phenomena that resonate for all three of us will be possible to develop properly and find insights that are reliable, repeatable, and in that sense solid. Body hermeneutics, though rewarding and enjoyable, is a difficult and

time-consuming method. It cannot give insights about phenomena that are not in the painting (or a lived situation), nor about themes that might be in the painting but are not interesting enough for the person engaged in body hermeneutics to sustain hours and hours of engagement. If one is fortunate, as I got to be with Harris's two paintings, the overlaps will be significant enough to find the living phenomena that one can keep coming back to, describing, learning from, and ultimately becoming friends with. These overlaps create the "localities" within or around which one can develop the interpretations of concepts and follow through the themes. At the same time, there will always be other undeveloped or underdeveloped areas. For example, in my exploration of Heidegger's holy with the help of Harris's *Northern Lake*, I could develop the theme relating to joy because it was present very strongly in my experience of the painting. However, I would not be able to work on the holy mourning that Heidegger also writes about, because I did not find it sufficiently present in this particular painting. It is quite possible that a different painting by Harris would be able to hold that other phenomenon well enough to be felt out and articulated, so one could continue exploring Heidegger's holy in ways not discussed in this dissertation.

Because of the "localized" nature of body hermeneutic exploration, and also because of the limitations of space, I have not provided a complete account of the

notion of the holy in Heidegger's texts⁶. Instead, I have inserted sections outlining themes in Heidegger's texts when I thought they were important to introduce, or have Heidegger's voice heard in the conversation among him, Harris and myself. There are introductory chapters for each of the two parts of this dissertation where aspects of Heidegger's texts that are central for the respective part of the dissertation are discussed in detail, and additional sections or parts of sections interspersed throughout the body of the dissertation. I also refer to Merleau-Ponty and there is a section on Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh and chiasm.

One of the main challenges I encountered in the initial stages of the project was the question of how to do body hermeneutics, or perhaps even phenomenology in general, of that which is not an entity, of being and the holy. We are generally used to

⁶ Even though many have written about the question of god in Heidegger, surprisingly few of them write in detail about the holy, especially in English-speaking literature. Even fewer see Heidegger's thinking on its own terms rather than within a theological or religious context. And yet, there are several studies that are comprehensive enough to justify my not repeating the same work here. Of the earlier texts, Danner writes about Heidegger's holy throughout his book and gives a very good summary of holy in the texts published at the time (Danner, *Das Göttliche und der Gott bei Heidegger*.) Among the earlier interpretations on Heidegger's holy in English, I should mention Stambaugh's article (Stambaugh, "The Question of God in Heidegger's Thought.") Among the more recent books, Helting provides a detailed interpretation of the holy in Heidegger's texts on Hölderlin with a purpose to apply it later to a concrete use in Daseinanalysis (Helting, *Heideggers Auslegung von Hölderlins Dichtung des Heiligen*.) Vedder takes up Heidegger's holy and gods from a point of view of philosophy of religion and provides a helpful summary of the key texts (Vedder, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion*.) Mitchell has a chapter on divinities and within it sections on the holy and the hale that are detailed and very helpful (Mitchell, *The Fourfold*.)

dealing with entities, to perceiving and describing them. How do we perceive and describe that which is not an entity? While I was looking for an answer to this question by doing body hermeneutics rather than by thinking, an image from Heidegger's text stayed in the background as inspiration and guiding light, even though it shines farther than where I have reached in the dissertation. In "... Poetically Man Dwells...", while elucidating Hölderlin's words about what is the measure against which we, human beings, measure ourselves, Heidegger says:

The measure consists in the way in which the god who remains unknown, is revealed *as* such by the sky. God's appearance through the sky consists in a disclosing that lets us see what conceals itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its concealedness, but only by guarding the concealed in its self-concealment. Thus the unknown god appears as the unknown by way of the sky's manifestness. This appearance is the measure against which man measures himself. (PMD 220-221)⁷

⁷ "Das Maß besteht in der Weise, wie der unbekannt bleibende Gott *als* dieser durch den Himmel offenbar ist. Das Erscheinen des Gottes durch den Himmel besteht in einem Enthüllen, das jenes sehen läßt, was sich verbirgt, aber sehen läßt nicht dadurch, daß es das Verborgene aus seiner Verborgenheit herauszureißen sucht, sondern allein dadurch, daß es das Verborgene in seinem Sichverbergen hütet. So erscheint der unbekannte Gott als der Unbekannte durch die Offenbarkeit des Himmels. Dieses Erscheinen ist das Maß, woran der Mensch sich misst." (DWM 201)

The image of the sky concealing the presence of the unknown god prompted me to choose artworks that had the sky strongly present in them for this project. Even though the presence of the sky is different, even opposite in these two paintings, that difference made it much easier for me to articulate the experience of each kind. Heidegger continues further:

A strange measure for ordinary and in particular also for all merely scientific ideas, certainly not a palpable stick or rod but in truth simpler to handle than they, provided our hands do not abruptly grasp but are guided by the gestures befitting the measure here to be taken. This is done by a taking which at no time clutches at the standard but rather takes it in a concentrated perception, a gathered taking-in, that remains a listening. (PMD 221)⁸

⁸ "Ein seltsames Maß für das übliche und im besonderen auch für alles nur wissenschaftliche Vorstellen, in keinem Fall ein handgreiflicher Stecken und Stab; aber in Wahrheit einfacher zu handhaben als diese, wenn nur unsere Hände nicht greifen, sondern durch Gebärden geleitet sind, die dem Maß entsprechen, das hier zu nehmen ist. Dies geschieht in einem Nehmen, das nie das Maß an sich reißt, sondern es nimmt im gesammelten Vernehmen, das ein Hören bleibt." (DWM 201-2)

Heidegger's image of our hands being "guided by the gestures befitting the measure" in this passage has been a key signpost for this whole project. If one is to develop and describe an experience of that which is invisible, or unknown, or not an entity⁹, one would have to try to find a way of perceiving that is not modelled on "abruptly grasping" and "clutching" but instead on a receiving that is slow and laid back, that is listening and awaiting. I believe that this image of the hands that are gently open and receptive instead of being tensed in a firm grip has stayed in the background while I was doing body hermeneutics of the artworks and ultimately called forth the notion of "bodily attitude." I believe that the development of the notion of "bodily attitude" as a phenomenological category distinct from Mallin's four bodily regions is the most useful contribution this dissertation makes back to the method itself, since it opens up an additional venue of phenomenological descriptions and broadens the toolbox of the method of body hermeneutics.

While the term "bodily attitude" is not new and has been used by Merleau-Ponty, yet it has not been a focus of phenomenological exploration, nor has it been described or established as a term. As such, it also has not been discussed as a possible "category" in body hermeneutics. Unlike the four regions of bodily consciousness,

⁹ While in the passage Heidegger refers to god, who, for Heidegger is an "entity", a particular being, albeit the "unknown" one, this same approach has proven fruitful when trying to do body hermeneutics of our experience of non-entities, of being and the holy.

bodily attitude has not been considered as an aspect of phenomenological body that can offer and hold a specific and unique perspective, through which one can phenomenologically describe both the world that is experienced by the body, and the body while it is experiencing the world.

Merleau-Ponty uses the expressions “bodily attitude” or “the attitude of the body” several times in *Phenomenology of Perception*. For example, in the section where he discusses the experiments on the postural responses to colors, he gives examples of cases when the color stimuli were too weak or too short to be “seen,” and yet were still recognized by the test subjects through their bodily responses:

In this case the colour, before being seen, gives itself away through the experience of a certain bodily attitude appropriate only to that color and precisely indicative of it: ‘there is in my body a sensation of slipping downwards, so that it cannot be green, and can only be blue but in fact I see no blue’, says one subject. Another says: “I clenched my teeth and so I know that it is yellow.”¹⁰ (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 211)

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty is quoting from Werner, *Untersuchungen über Empfindung und Empfinden*, I, p.158-9

Merleau-Ponty gives multiple examples of bodily responses to different colors, most of which could be categorized as postural or motor, and summarizes by making a claim about what we are and what we are not:

The subject of sensation is neither a thinker who takes note of the quality, nor an inert setting which is affected or changed by it, it is a power which is born into, and simultaneously with, a certain existential environment, or is synchronized with it. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 211)

Here Merleau-Ponty not only provides the critique of both rationalist and empiricist interpretations of what human being is, but also highlights the bodily attitude as our response to what we encounter in the world, in this case, colors and color fields. In another place, Merleau-Ponty stresses that a bodily attitude is always there in our response to things: “my body is permanently stationed before things in order to perceive them and, conversely, appearances are always enveloped for me in a certain bodily attitude.” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 303)

Bodily attitude is developed in this dissertation as a phenomenological concept starting with how Merleau-Ponty seems to understand it, as a response to how the artwork attunes the viewer. As we will see in Part 1, in body hermeneutics of *Beaver Swamp*, *Algoma*, two different aspects of the painting attune the viewer each into a very

different bodily attitude. They start as particular kinds of motility in the visual field; however, they are not limited to the perceptual region and can be followed through in all other regions of the body. We will be able to see that the attitude that is felt and described in the different bodily regions fits together, has one “style”, and reflects the same “state.” The bodily attitude described in this way has a distinct, coherent and unique way of manifesting across the bodily regions. It cannot be reduced to a single region; rather, it could be seen as a more general way that our bodily being manifests a particular way of responding to a situation. This is why the bodily attitude, as a phenomenological concept, can be helpful as an additional “category” to keep in mind while working on phenomenological descriptions in body hermeneutics. Further, we will see that the shift of bodily attitude that occurs when one becomes attuned by white light in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* enables us to start feeling out the phenomena that are not entities and will give us an entry to being itself. In Part 2, we describe in detail the bodily attitude experienced in response to the yellow light in *Northern Lake*. Again, this experience is not limited to a particular bodily region, but instead permeates the whole phenomenological body, and seems to correspond to the haleness, as the experience of the holy.

The body hermeneutic work on each of the paintings was done over the span of several years, with significant gaps between the work periods. I would work on the artwork for 4-6 months, coming weekly, taking notes, and after having developed a

significant body of notes, I would take a break for as long as a year or two before coming back to work with the artwork again. The long breaks were needed in order to safeguard from “wishful” or overly subjective interpretations of the artworks, from settling into a habitual way of approaching the artwork that would become slanted or over-determined by one’s current situation and would prevent the “inconvenient” intrusions that the artworks make into our interpretations. While each session of body hermeneutics with an artwork, which takes me about half a day, is attempted with a fresh approach, with setting aside the past experiences and future expectations as much as possible; still, some degree of continuity with previous sessions is unavoidable and also helpful for reaching deeper and further. This is why significant breaks between several main work periods are helpful to reset the background and ensure that the phenomena one claims to meet in the artwork are indeed there, that they can be experienced repeatedly and reliably.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation begins with a thematic introduction to Part 1, where we look at Heidegger’s notion of destitute times that we live in, and then discuss the possible path out of this destitution. Heidegger suggests, one could reach from the truth of being to the essence of the holy and then in turn to the essence of divinity. This path sketched out by Heidegger has defined the structure of the dissertation. Part 1 is attempting to phenomenologically develop our experience of being itself, rather than only entities, and Part 2 is making a shift from the experience of being to the experience

of the holy. The shift from the holy to the divine is not taken up in this dissertation. The second section of Chapter 1 discusses the notions of being, the uncanny, and the homely in Heidegger's *Ister* lecture course. It prepares us for working on the phenomenological experience of being.

The body hermeneutics of *Beaver Swamp Algoma* begins in Chapter 2, which focuses on the trees in the painting, on the qualities of red color that highlights the branches and on the disintegrating textures and shapes of the trees. These aspects of the painting bring out in the viewer a distinct bodily attitude that is focused on relating to the entities, in this case the trees. Chapter 3 discusses the limits and transitions between and across limits in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, and combines body hermeneutics of the artwork with the discussion of limits in some of Heidegger's texts. Chapter 4 concludes the body hermeneutics of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* by working on the shift of the bodily attitude from relating to entities to relating to being, which is created by the brightening of the light in the painting.

Chapter 5 contains thematic introductions to Part 2, which prepare us for bringing the body hermeneutics of *Northern Lake* into dialogue with Heidegger's thinking of the holy. The section on being and the holy explores the similarities and differences between these two concepts, and while it does not provide the answers, it clarifies the questions and sets up the context for the work with the artwork. Chapter 6 is working on the phenomenology of surface, ground, depth and abyss through the

body hermeneutics of the hill in the background of *Northern Lake*. It further develops the discussion of limits in Chapter 3 and by the end of the chapter carries out the transition from the phenomenology of being to the phenomenology of the holy. Finally, Chapter 7 develops the phenomenology of the hale as the human experience of the holy, through the body hermeneutics of yellow light and the leaves in *Northern Lake*.

Part 1. Beaver Swamp (Beaver Swamp, Algoma. 1920)

Chapter 1: Thematic introductions to Part 1

This chapter is meant to start situating the context of the dissertation by bringing into the conversation some of Heidegger's concepts that are central to this project. We will begin with a short section on lack of god in destitute times, and on the path that Heidegger suggests might be possible of tracing our way back from the destitution and homelessness of our current situation, via nearness to being, to the holy, which, in turn, could make it possible for us to eventually encounter the gods. In the second section, we will look at being and entities, the uncanny and the homely in Heidegger's *Ister* lecture course. This will prepare us not only for the themes that will come out from the body hermeneutics on *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* in Part 1 of this dissertation, but also, to some extent, it will begin opening up the themes of Part 2, the body hermeneutics of *Northern Lake*.

1.1. The lack of God in the destitute time.

Where do we start thinking and talking about the possibility of an experience of holy and divine in our present time? Perhaps, we can start right here, in our present time. In "*Wozu Dichter*" (1946), Heidegger calls this time of ours "destitute" time, the time that lacks God. He says:

The default of God means that no god any longer gathers men and things unto himself, visibly and unequivocally, and by such gathering disposes the world's history and man's sojourn in it. The default of God forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have the gods and the god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history. The time of the world's night is the destitute time, because it becomes ever more destitute. It has already grown so destitute, it can no longer discern the default of God as a default. (WPF 89)¹¹

It is no news for us, that "proximally and for the most part," as Heidegger often says in *Being and Time*, God does not seem to play much role in our lives. It is, perhaps, still not thoughtfully understood and not felt. We do not understand what the lack of God has to do with our lives and in what ways it could be defining our world. The translation of German "*Fehl*" with "default" in this passage is somewhat misleading and yet, strangely appropriate for us. We, the generation that feels at home behind the computer screen, do not perceive the word "default" as a "lack" but rather as a usual state of

¹¹ "Der Fehl Gottes bedeutet, daß kein Gott mehr sichtbar und eindeutig die Menschen und die Dinge auf sich versammelt und aus solcher Versammlung die Weltgeschichte und den menschlichen Aufenthalt in ihr fügt. Im Fehl Gottes kündigt sich aber noch Ärgeres an. Nicht nur die Götter und der Gott sind entflohen, sondern der Glanz der Gottheit ist in der Weltgeschichte erloschen. Die Zeit der Weltnacht ist die dürftige Zeit, weil sie immer dürftiger wird. Sie ist bereits so dürftig, daß sie nicht mehr vermag, den Fehl Gottes als Fehl zu merken." (WD 269)

affairs, as that which has been set up automatically and does not require our input or attention and what can be generally ignored. This is what we mean when we do something “by default” or set certain settings “as default”. This meaning and this attitude seem to be the opposite of how Heidegger understands “the lack of God.” For him, it is ominous, perhaps even dreadful, while for us “default” is something usual, habitual, and insignificant. And yet, at the same time, the word “default” and our perception of it seem to be strangely appropriate here, for we have grown so accustomed to this lack of God, that for us it has become the usual condition which we do not even notice. Neither are we aware of the lack as a lack, nor of the significance of that lack for us.

It does seem that our age has grown more “destitute,” or, to translate Heidegger’s word literally, “needy,” for we need someone like Heidegger to tell us what that lack of God means. Otherwise, it is hard for us to see what we are missing when God or gods are no more present. It does not occur to us that God would gather together us and things in a way which defines history and ties our human living into that history. It would seem that Heidegger also does not expect us to easily understand what God’s role might be. In fact, five years later in “...*dichterisch wohnet der Mensch...*” Heidegger shies from the question “Who is the god?” saying, that “perhaps this question is too hard for man, and asked too soon.” So he suggests: “Let us therefore first

ask merely: What is God?" (PMD 222)¹² Even that question is not in any way easy to answer, and so Heidegger feels it is fortunate and helpful to be able to find hints in Hölderlin's poem. Still earlier, in his 1942 lecture course *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* Heidegger mentions the difficulties of talking about the gods of Hölderlin, without falling into the trap of mistaking them for something we have "figured out." He clarifies:

If, from time to time, we are forced to talk of the "gods" and "goddesses" in our remarks on Hölderlin's poetry, then we must not let this give the illusory impression that we are enlightened about this in the way that an academic must be enlightened concerning that about which he is speaking. The names "gods" and "goddesses" here merely make evident our lack of knowledge, if not indeed something more fateful, more needful. (HIE 33)¹³

¹² "Wer ist der Gott? Vielleicht ist diese Frage zu schwer für den Menschen und zu voreilig. Fragen wir darum zuvor, was von Gott zu sagen sei. Fragen wir erst nur: Was ist Gott?" (DWM 203)

¹³ "Wenn wir nun bisweilen gezwungen sind, in den Anmerkungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung von den "Göttern" und "Göttinnen" zu reden, dann darf dies nicht den Schein aufkommen lassen, als seien wir darüber unterrichtet, wie eben ein Gelehrter über das unterrichtet sein muß, worüber er spricht. Die Namen "Götter" und "Göttinnen" machen da nur unsere Unwissenheit, wenn nicht gar noch Verhängnis- und Notvolleres kenntlich." (HID 39)

We are also not yet prepared to start answering the questions of God or gods, so perhaps it will be easier for us to sense out the destitution of our age through a slightly different angle and set of questions.

Heidegger gives us a pointer about how this question could be approached in “Letter on ‘Humanism’” (1946), where he says the following about nearness to being:

In such nearness, if at all, a decision may be made as to whether and how God and the gods withhold their presence and the night remains, whether and how the day of the holy dawns, whether and how in the upsurge of the holy an epiphany of God and the gods can begin anew. But the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been cleared and is experienced in its truth. Only thus does the overcoming of homelessness begin from being, a homelessness in which not only human beings but the essence of the human being stumbles aimlessly about. (LH 258)¹⁴

¹⁴ “In dieser Nähe vollzieht sich, wenn überhaupt, die Entscheidung, ob und wie der Gott und die Götter sich versagen und die Nacht bleibt, ob und wie der Tag des Heiligen dämmt, ob und wie im Anfang des Heiligen ein Erscheinen des Gottes und der Götter neu beginnen kann. Das Heilige aber, das nur erst der Wesensraum der Gottheit ist, die selbst wiederum nur die Dimension für die Götter und den Gott

What Heidegger seems to be saying here is that before we can even think of having an experience of the holy, and then in turn of the divine, and then of the gods, first of all we would have to turn towards and experience being itself, and make the first step towards overcoming our homelessness. Only after that first step, when the being has cleared itself¹⁵ and is experienced by us in its truth, the next steps from the being to the holy, to the divine, and to the gods can gradually take place. He reaffirms these steps again later in the text, saying:

Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy is the essence of divinity to be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify. Or should we not first be able to hear and understand all these words carefully if we are to be permitted as human

gewährt, kommt dann allein ins Scheinen, wenn zuvor und in langer Vorbereitung das Sein selbst sich gelichtet hat und in seiner Wahrheit erfahren ist. Nur so beginnt aus dem Sein die Überwindung des Heimatlosigkeit, in der nicht nur die Menschen, sondern das Wesen des Menschen umherirrt." (BH 338-9)

¹⁵ The translation is somewhat misleading when it says, "being itself ... has been cleared". This passive phrase might be misinterpreted as "being has been cleared by something or someone else", while the original "das Sein selbst sich gelichtet hat" says that it is being itself that clears or lights itself.

beings, that is, as eksistent creatures, to experience a relation of God to human beings? (LH 267)¹⁶

Let us then follow Heidegger's hint and consider how we relate to being. We will begin by looking at Part Two of the *Ister* lecture course, where Heidegger discusses being with the help of the notions of uncanniness, homeliness, homecoming and the hearth in Sophocles' *Antigone*. This will, in turn, prepare us for the encounter with the first artwork, Lawren S. Harris's *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920), where we will begin to feel out in a bodily way, what the experience of being might be and how it might attune the regions of our body. Towards the end of our engagement with Harris's *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, we will be much better prepared to ask questions about the relationship between being and the holy and how understanding one can lead us to think the other.

1.2. Being, the uncanny, and the homely in Heidegger's *Ister* lecture course

We begin our engagement with the question of being by taking a look at the notions of uncanniness and feeling at home in Heidegger's discussion of the choral ode

¹⁶ "Erst aus der Wahrheit des Seins läßt sich das Wesen des Heiligen denken. Erst aus dem Wesen des heiligen ist das Wesen von Gottheit zu denken. Erst im Lichte des Wesens von Gottheit kann gedacht und gesagt werden, was das Wort "Gott" nennen soll. Oder müssen wir nicht erst diese Worte alle sorgsam verstehen und hören können, wenn wir als Menschen, das heißt als eksistente Wesen, einen Bezug des Gottes zum Menschen sollen erfahren dürfen?" (BH 351)

from *Antigone* in the *Ister* lecture course. We will compare them with similar notions in *Being and Time*. This introduction and comparison with the early Heidegger is important because it will shed some light on the differences, or rather, the development of Heidegger's thinking from the earlier towards the later Heidegger. The ontological difference, that is, the difference between beings (entities) and being itself, and the difference of our human attitude, whether this attitude is defined by involvement with entities or by attentiveness to being, is what is crucial in distinguishing between what is "proper," and what is not. It is this difference that prepares us for the changes we need to work through and absorb into the way we are and the way we relate to entities and non-entities so that we can begin to feel out the possibility of the holy, which itself is not an entity.

The choral ode in *Antigone*, which Heidegger discusses in detail in his 1942 lecture course *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* is about human beings and what they seek in life, about death, about what human beings achieve, and they fail to achieve. In the first lines of the ode, the human being is placed within the manifold manifestations of the uncanny and called the most uncanny of all. The chorus sings of human pursuits to conquer the sea and the earth, the animals, language, governance and everyday life. These human activities are fruitless in the end: "Everywhere venturing forth underway,

experienceless without any way out / he comes to nothing.” (HIE 67)¹⁷ A similar tension of continuous effort which in the end does not satisfy the seeking is also described in the realm of a πόλις, a particular historic site, into which human being is placed, and within which it lives, dealing with entities. The ode concludes with not allowing those who carry out such deeds anywhere near the hearth.

According to Heidegger, the decisive word of the beginning of the choral ode, as well as of Greek tragedy in general, is τὸ δεινόν, which Heidegger translates as *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny¹⁸. Sophocles begins the ode by saying that the uncanny is manifold, yet the human being is the most uncanny of all. (HID 74, HIE 61) The notion of uncanniness is familiar to us from *Being and Time*, where *Unheimlichkeit* is a mood that accompanies angst as the basic "state-of-mind" (*Befindlichkeit*). It is an uncomfortable feeling of "not being at home." Human beings flee from uncanniness by turning away from it and towards the entities within the world which provide the familiarity, security, and a possibility to lose oneself in one's daily concerns and involvements. The opposite to the uncanniness in *Being and Time* is "being-at-home" ("Zuhause-sein"), which is the "tranquillized self-assurance" of the "they". This "being-

¹⁷ "Überall hinausfahrend unterwegs erfahrungslos ohne Ausweg/ kommt er zum Nichts." (HID 82)

¹⁸ Whether such a translation by Heidegger is correct or not, whether it is justified or not, is beyond the scope of our engagement with this text. Our goal is not to evaluate Heidegger, but to find hints that will help us understand better the phenomenological context of Heidegger's later concepts, and the ways that we can explore them, also phenomenologically, rather than theoretically.

at-home" is only seen in the sense of Dasein's inauthentic turning away from its own being and finding comfort in the involvement with other entities. (BT 232-235, SZ 188-190) However, this "at home" ("zu Hause") of *Being and Time* is not always the same as "at home" ("daheim") and "homely" ("heimisch") of the *Ister* lecture course, and some of Heidegger's later texts.

Whereas in *Being and Time* "at home" is always a deficient mode of avoiding being, in the *Ister* lecture course, perhaps under the influence of both Hölderlin and Sophocles, Heidegger starts seeing the potential of this notion as something genuine and insightful, something that could bring us into nearness of being, and perhaps do that differently than the notion of angst in *Being and Time*. Perhaps, this is one of the manifestations of the shift of attitude between the early and the late Heidegger.

In the *Ister* lecture course, Heidegger chooses to translate Sophocles' τὸ δεινόν as *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny, because the word "uncanny" ("unheimlich") is related to the word "unhomely" ("unheimisch"). Both these words have within them the root "home" ("-heim-"). This original meaning of the word "unheimlich", related to home is what Heidegger is interested in.

We mean the uncanny in the sense of that which is not at home – not homely in that which is homely. It is only for this reason that the unhomely [*das Un-heimliche*] can, as a consequence, also be "uncanny"

[“unheimlich”] in the sense of something that has an alienating or
“frightening” effect that gives rise to anxiety. (HIE 71)¹⁹

Heidegger continues, by making another step beyond explaining the connection
between the uncanny and the unhomely, by suggesting an interpretation of Sophocles,
that talks of a human being, as someone whose care or concern is to become homely:

In that case, Sophocles’ word, which speaks of the human being as the
most uncanny being, says that human beings are, in a singular sense, not
homely, and that their care is to become homely. (HIE 71)²⁰

It seems, the difference between the uncanniness of *Being and Time*, and the uncanny,
that is the unhomely of the *Ister* lecture course (as well as the other texts of this and later
period that are in some way influenced by Hölderlin or the Greeks) lies in that
connection, or, rather, the passage that begins to open up, through the uncanny, the
unhomely back to the homely. Moreover, it is the connection with, or rather the

¹⁹ “Das Unheimliche meinen wir im Sinne dessen, was nicht daheim - nicht im
Heimischen heimisch ist. Nur deshalb kann das Un-heimische in der Folge dann auch
“unheimlich” sein in der Bedeutung des befremdlich und beängstigend und
“furchtbar” Wirkenden.” (HID 87)

²⁰ “Das Wort des Sophokles, daß der Mensch das unheimlichste Wesen sei, besagt dann,
daß der Mensch in einem einzigen Sinne nicht heimisch und daß das Heimischwerden
seine Sorge ist.” (HID 87)

directedness towards the homely, that defines whether the uncanny (unhomely) taken up by the human being is genuine or not.

Whereas in *Being and Time* the notion of the uncanny could be understood as that which is associated with authenticity while “being-at-home” is seen as inauthentic, in the *Ister* lecture course both feelings of “not being at home” and of “being at home” can be understood either superficially, as the ways humans turn away from being, or in the light of a genuine seeking for that being. For instance, Heidegger juxtaposes the search of the one who is properly unhomely with that of an adventurer, who finds satisfaction in a constant change of location, wandering through the foreign, and who is merely rootless:

Yet this is no mere homeless wondering around that merely seeks a location in order then to abandon it and take its pleasure and satisfaction in a mere traveling around. The human being here is not the adventurer who remains homeless on account of his lack of rootedness. (HIE 73)²¹

Heidegger summarizes a few pages later:

²¹ “Aber das ist doch kein bloßes heimatloses Umherirren, das einen Ort nur aufsucht, um ihn alsbald zu verlassen und im bloßen Umherfahren die Lust und das Genügen zu haben. Der Mensch ist hier nicht der Abenteurer, der aus seiner Bodenlosigkeit heimatlos bleibt.” (HID 89)

For the heart that seeks adventure, this distinction between the homely and the unhomely is altogether lost. The wilderness becomes the absolute itself and counts as the “fullness of being.” (HIE 75)²²

The distinction between the homely and the unhomely, which is lost for an adventurer, is directly related to forgetting or remembering of being. The adventurer Heidegger is writing about seems to be the one who replaces being by the totality of entities. It would seem, the destitution of our postmodern times also shows itself in the spirit of mere adventure, which is not looking for the homely, which does not believe that there is something more than an accumulation of trophies through the continual mastering of entities, and which denies any possibility of truth, ground, and being.

Similarly, the superficial notion of the homely manifests itself in the choral ode of *Antigone*, as human beings run around everywhere, going into the sea and plowing the earth, catching the animals and domesticating them, mastering language, politics and tricks of warfare. In these pursuits, human beings become familiar with entities with which they engage; they become “at home,” and here Heidegger uses the same word “*zu Hause*” that he used in *Being and Time*:

²² “Für das abenteuerliche Herz geht diese Unterscheidung des Heimischen und Unheimischen überhaupt verloren. Die Wildnis wird zum Absoluten selbst und gilt als die “Fülle des Seins”.” (HID 91)

Human beings are “at home” on every passageway through beings.

Human beings reach everywhere, and it seems that in this way they also

“come to something” and, as we say, earn a living. (HIE 76)²³

This is, however, only an apparent achievement. In the end, it does not bring what human beings are seeking. It is so because, while engaging with entities and focusing only on them, human beings overlook, turn away from, and forget being. A few lines later Heidegger explains:

In human beings reaching everywhere, however, and in each case coming to “something” they still come to nothing, because they remain stuck with particular beings in each case and fail to grasp their being or essence in such beings. The “nothing” to which they come is that which, turning counter to being, directly excludes human beings altogether from being.

(HIE 76)²⁴

²³ “Auf allen Gassen des Seienden ist der Mensch “zu Hause”. Überall kommt der Mensch hin, und es scheint, daß er so auch “zu etwas komme” und, wie wir sagen, ein Vermögen erwerbe.” (HID 93)

²⁴ “Allein, indem der Mensch überallhinkommend je zu “etwas” kommt, kommt er doch zum Nichts, weil er ja am jeweiligen Seienden haften bleibt und in diesem das Sein und Wesen nicht faßt. Das “Nichts”, zu dem er kommt, ist das, was, gegenwärtig zum Sein, den Menschen unmittelbar vom Sein schlechthin ausschließt.” (HID 93)

This feeling of being “at home” within the familiarity of things only seems to give comfort and security; it only seems to satisfy the human urge to be homely. In truth, however, while trying to feel homely among beings, human beings remain unhomely:

In those beings they come to, and in which they think themselves at home, they come to nothing. Thinking they are homely, human beings are those who are unhomely. (HIE 76)²⁵ (Note, that here Heidegger switches from “*zu Hause*” to “*heimisch*”.)

The superficial feeling “at home” as an attempt to master entities comes to nothing and leaves human beings unhomely. The one who is properly unhomely (*der eigentlich Unheimische* (HID 91)) is the one who genuinely seeks the homely, and relates to it, albeit by not being able to attain it.

To summarize, there can be superficial or inauthentic ways human beings substitute the genuine unhomeliness and the seeking for the homely. Either one takes on an attitude of a “permanent wanderer”, a homeless adventurer, who does not relate to the homely at all, and only goes for a constant change of location and scenery, or one

²⁵ “Im Seienden, zu dem er kommt und worin er sich heimisch meint, kommt er zum Nichts. Er ist als der vermeintlich Heimische der Unheimische.” (HID 94)

tries to satisfy the longing for homeliness by filling it up with entities, and forgetting being. However, when it comes to the genuine and the true, the homeliness and the unhomeliness belong together – the genuine unhomeliness is directed toward the homely, it is the homely that defines the unhomeliness and makes it genuine, even if the homely is not experienced as present itself, but rather as a lack or deprivation.

The unhomely one is deprived of the homely; deprivation is the way in which the unhomely one possesses the homely, or to put it more precisely, the way in which whatever is homely possesses the unhomely one. (HIE 75)²⁶

The reversal, which Heidegger stresses here, is one of the moves he often makes in his later writings. This reversal often illustrates the difference between his new way of thinking and the “metaphysical” attitude. In this case, in the relationship between the human being who is unhomely and the homeliness which has to do with being itself, Heidegger reverses the two sides of the relationship, making one that was assumed to be somehow less important into the one that in truth is more important. Heidegger does not merely flip the top to bottom arbitrarily, making the whole system relative and the

²⁶ “Der Unheimliche entbehrt das Heimische, das Entbehren ist die Art, wie der Unheimische das Heimische besitzt, genauer gesagt, die Weise, wie dieses, das Heimische, jenen, den Unheimischen besitzt.” (HID92)

“order” or “hierarchy” completely irrelevant. Instead, by making the reversal, Heidegger is restoring the proper grounding and the balance of weight that has been obscured and misplaced in the metaphysical attitude. Here the weight, the importance, and the defining power are shifted from the anthropocentric focus on the unhomely human being back towards the homely (the being itself), which in the first place defines the homeliness and the unhomeliness, and thus also the state and condition of the human being. And so, in the above passage, Heidegger corrects himself that it is not the human being that possesses or owns the homely (being); instead, it is the homely (being itself) that possesses, or owns, or defines the human being.

Further in this dissertation, we will see several other ways Heidegger makes this same shift. For example, we will see how Heidegger re-interprets τὸ χρεών of Anaximander from the necessity that penalizes entities for their transgressions, into that which holds entities, supports them, and takes care of them. Consequently, the entities’ relationship with this being changes from reactive and obstinate selfish insistence, which needs to be curbed and controlled, to the respect and appreciation, giving what is due, submitting and belonging to being. Later, when working on the painting *Northern Lake*, we will come back to the issue of home and homecoming in Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin. We will see how the shift occurs in the attuning of the mood, from the joyful mood of Hölderlin’s cloud towards the holy itself that does the attuning and that creates the mood in the first place.

Another point that is crucial in this reversal for understanding later Heidegger and for working out real bodily ways of dealing with the notions of his later thought, is that the step “beyond” metaphysics does not consist in abandoning metaphysics, leaving it completely behind, and creating a whole new language never used before. Rather, it is a matter of a simple shift of weight and importance, a shift from the human being to being itself, from “I” to “it”, from ordering to listening, from grasping to thanking. As simple as it sounds, it is not simple to think through and to carry out, for often this shift changes everything. It opens out very different and unexpected horizons and subtleties of what we can see, do, and feel, and it leaves behind the “old” ways. Yet it is simple and seemingly small, or, as Heidegger would perhaps say following Hölderlin, “fine”, or “humble,” for it does not require us to jump off the cliff into the abyss, just to shift our weight slightly, and to let the abyss come out on its own. Let us see now, how this shift works out in Harris’s *Beaver Swamp*.

Chapter 2: The place of the trees in Harris's Beaver Swamp, Algoma

Harris painted *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* in 1920 towards the end of his “Algoma period”. It could be said that the Algoma period was transitional for Harris in more than one way. Perhaps it was the transition from the paintings of things, entities, to the paintings about light, about being. In terms of style, it is a transition from the more colorful, detailed, lively and expressive style, perhaps inspired by Tom Thomson and emulated to a greater or lesser degree by the rest of the Group of Seven, to the cleaner and clearer, simplified, not quite abstract yet, but already hermetic style of Lake Superior and Arctic and Rockies paintings, for which Harris is so famous. The painting is well known and held by the Art Gallery of Ontario. It has been a part of Group of Seven and Harris's personal exhibitions from early on, and, unlike *Northern Lake*, which is the other major artwork of this dissertation, *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* has been reproduced in the literature on Harris, on the Group of Seven, and Canadian art, and has been written about. While working on this artwork, we will try to take full advantage of what has been said by several art critics about the artwork itself, and Harris's art in general, especially because the luxury of their contribution will not be available when working with *Northern Lake*.

In quite a few paintings of the Algoma period (1918-1921) and early Lake Superior period (1921-1928), Harris places a screen of trees in the foreground. The paintings with such a screen, which are central for this dissertation, are *Beaver Swamp*,

Algoma (1920), *Above Lake Superior* (1922), and *Northern Lake* (1923). In these paintings, Harris uses and works on the difference between the foreground plane of the trees and the background. There is generally a great distance between these two planes, a space that Harris leaves completely open. This open gap highlights even more the separation of the two major planes, and yet at the same time makes it quite easy for one's vision to shift between them, and to see them both together. The screen of trees enables and encourages the movement between the two plains, through the screen itself and the open space in the middle.²⁷

Beaver Swamp, Algoma, is a painting with a "destitute times" feel to it, especially at the beginning stages of the work with this artwork, which are centered around the foreground of the painting, before the movement through the screen of the trees has started. However, after some time with the painting, a feeling of hope, a promise of the future gradually develops as the attention shifts through the screen of the trees into the

²⁷ In contrast, a number of later paintings, which do not have a screen of trees in the foreground, also do not have a clear background, instead a mountain is placed in the middle between what used to be foreground and background, and that changes significantly the dynamic quality of the painting, the kind of "motility" it calls for in the viewer. For example, in *Lake and Mountains* (1928), even though there is quite a distance between the shore at the bottom of the painting and the mountain in the middle, there is no screen of the trees, to separate the mountain from the viewer, the mountain is standing right there, and it holds the viewer at a distance from itself, anchors the viewer in one place. In both *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920), and *Northern Lake* (1923) the viewer is not held in one place, but pulled through the painting, and it is that movement which really defines both paintings. We will talk in detail about this movement in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* in the next chapter on transitions.

open area in the middle and further towards the horizon, changing the attitude of the viewer from being locked into relating only to entities, to becoming open and aware of something else beyond the entities.

These first two sections of the body hermeneutics of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, on the red and on the dying of the trees describe the phenomena, which come to presence in the foreground of the painting. They bring out an aspect of this painting that reverberates much more with the themes of “early” and perhaps “middle” Heidegger. The section on the red could be helpful, if one were to do a phenomenology of affects, passions, and feelings in Heidegger’s *Nietzsche I*, or to work on Nietzsche’s notions of will to power and life. The second section on the dying of the trees could relate very well to *Being and Time*’s notions of angst and death. It could lead one to understand how it is that everydayness, the way we are “proximally and for the most part,” is what attunes us in such a particular manner that the only way for us to feel something real, to get a glimpse of being, is through angst and death. One could draw further connections between these notions in *Being and Time* and the attitude of Antigone, since, in the *Ister* lecture course, Heidegger talks about her death as becoming homely, hearing the call of being and abiding by it. However, this engagement with the notions of “early” and “middle” Heidegger, though fascinating, would prolong the introductory sections of this dissertation and take away from dealing with the main questions and notions of this particular project. Perhaps one could say that the phenomenology of early

Heidegger is the phenomenology of homelessness, where the guiding feeling is the sense of the uncanny, while the later period of Heidegger's thought begins with "homecoming." Moreover, the homecoming must not necessarily be of the deadly kind achieved by Antigone. Instead it might be light and joyful, where the holy's healing presence is felt, where the gods and mortals of the fourfold join together in the round dance with earth and sky, and playfully reflect into each other. Hopefully, the phenomena that the artwork itself holds so well will shine through the descriptions provided in these first two sections with enough substance for us to feel them and somewhat grasp them, without them being fully articulated "theoretically", and we can rely on them to some extent when approaching those notions of late Heidegger, which we are really after.

Without much more delay, let us plunge directly into the phenomenology of the painting and see where it takes us and what we can learn from it. That will bring us closer to feeling out and understanding Heidegger's notions of entities and being, and the nearness of being, which, Heidegger told us, is the pre-requisite of understanding the holy, the divine, and the gods.

2.1. Phenomenological qualities of the flowing red

It seems best to start with the red, because the red is definitely the most attractive aspect of this painting, both in terms of sheer attractiveness of color, and also in the way

that it attunes the viewer and makes one feel so fully alive. It is not immediately obvious in the painting at first glance, and it is not clearly visible in most reproductions, and least not with the brightness and liveliness with which it comes out from the painting after some time in close-personal proximity to the artwork. When it does come out, though, the red captures and holds the viewer, pulls the viewer into its flow in the painting and does not easily release its hold.

As we will see in this section, the red, through the patterns of movement it creates around the trees, sketches out and draws together the whole foreground of the painting, the whole “world of the trees.” It appeals powerfully to the feelings, not just emotions defined narrowly, but the entire social-affective sphere with the multitude of affects, passions and attitudes, convictions and loyalties, questions and fears. It is no wonder then that the red becomes most powerful after one has spent some time in closer proximity to the artwork, within a “personal” distance to the trees, close enough for the artwork to take up most of the visual field of the viewer. The red loses its grip and gradually dissipates as one moves farther away from the artwork, or if one shifts the attention into the sphere of the white light coming from the middle of the horizon, the other one of the two main aspects of the painting.

As mentioned earlier, there are many phenomena that could be of interest while describing the red in this painting, two of them are especially important with regard to this project. The first one is a particular visual or perhaps even motor-visual quality of

the red, the dynamism of its flow, which on its own would be interesting, but becomes even more important in contrast with the visual quality of the white light coming from the horizon of the painting. This contrast is important for it provides an entrance into different bodily attitudes, different ways we can be attuned. While the “red” attitude is quite familiar to us, though it is by no means “regular” or “dull”, the “white” attitude is new and quite unusual, and would be difficult to articulate without the contrasting help of the attitude created by the red.

The second phenomenon of interest to us is the affective and perhaps even socially-passionate quality that works in this painting on the one hand in the contrast between the red and the black. While the red brings out the excitement and struggle and the deep passionate involvement with life, the black attunes one into dark and gloomy hopelessness and the imminence of death. On the other hand, even though there is an important juxtaposition between the feelings created by the red and the black, yet both of them are still directed towards the entities. However, the white light brings out a very different sense of acceptance and hopefulness which is not anchored onto any particular entity.

Let us now begin with the visual aspect of the red. First of all, the red is strange. It does not make any “logical” sense for the red to be on the trees in this painting. Even if one were to assume a sunset, still, this red would be “out of tune,” for it does not have the ethereal and fuzzy quality of red light, and instead is thick and feels concrete and

tangible. Secondly, the red flows, and the eyes of the viewer flow with the red. It seems there is nothing special about the eyes moving. They do so most of the time in our everyday life. They follow lines, glide on surfaces, dance around the details, and so on. Rarely do our eyes slow down to the point of almost stopping, rarely do they sink into the depth, rarely do they stay around the same place for a while. Yet this happens in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* when the eyes attune to the light of the bright spot on the horizon. It is important, because this shift in the motility of the visual field opens up for us a shift in the whole bodily attitude from the usual and familiar running around and dealing with entities, to the attitude that becomes sensitive to background and ground, to the generalities of light and color fields, but with that also, as we will see later, to the possibility of sensing out being and the holy. However, before we can shift into that attitude and that sphere, it is important to feel out and describe the “more usual” attitude and motility highlighted in this painting by the flow of the red.

I have named it the “focused vision.” It is already there as a pre-given, “default” way of looking when the eyes start examining the painting from a closer distance. It seems the “focused vision” never stops and never has enough, trying to study and master the painting to the smallest details, trying to become “at home” in the painting and figure it out as much as possible. Similarly to how the eyes create patterns and “routes” when learning a particular face, and can recognize the face through those

patterns²⁸, they also create, or, rather, discover the patterns of movement within the artwork, the “routes”, which highlight the main features of the space of the artwork, its depths and perspectives, its tensions and regions. These patterns, when learned, help the viewer regain some of the familiarity within the space of the artwork established during previous encounters and allow one to feel out and study the other or the subtler aspects of the artwork.

Here in *Beaver Swamp*, the focused vision follows the artist’s lines in the artwork: the lines of trunks and of branches, the reds, browns, and blacks. It follows the ridge of the top of the forest wall on the horizon. It glides on the surface of the lake in the distance, sometimes moves along the lines of clouds in the sky. It follows up and down the trunk of the tree on the right, which still has some green foliage left on it, and it “checks” the green in passing. The focused vision loves to pass; it loves to follow, to slide, to move, and not just to move, but also to move on, to be always on the move, in motion. It likes details and readily dances around them for a bit. It likes what is definite,

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* gives us an amazing phenomenological description of how our gaze recognizes a face, which he concludes: “To see a face is not to conceive the idea of a certain law of constitution to which the object invariably conforms throughout all its possible orientations, it is to take a certain hold upon it, to be able to follow on its surface a certain perceptual route with its ups and downs, and one just as unrecognizable taken in reverse as the mountain up which I was so recently toiling and down which I am now striding my way.” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 253)

defined, particular.²⁹ The favorite route of the focused vision in this painting that the eyes keep repeating over and over is going upwards from the red at the bottom of the trees on the left side of the artwork, curving in a half-circle along the longest red branch that is pointing to the white spot in the middle of the horizon, hanging there and back horizontally, and unable to hold on to anything there moving back to the red area, where it started, and doing whole the movement all over again. This movement is guided by the textures and shapes in the painting, by branches and trunks, by browns and blacks. It is, however, the red that really fuels the circular run of the eyes and makes it repeat. It is the red that attracts the eyes towards those branches again and again as only red could attract, and it is the red that actually “runs” through this movement, taking the viewer along.

The red draws the viewer into its movement; it is attractive to the point of being irresistible. The dynamism and curiosity of the focused vision are immediately taken on by the whole body; the posture becomes focused too, gathered and directed outwards.

²⁹ It is important to stress, that the “focused vision” is indeed geared into “particularities” – the lines, the figures, the “entities”, while the “background vision”, which is called for in the painting by the light of the bright spot on the horizon, is attuning the viewer to the color fields and light, to “generalities” rather than “particularities”. As we will see towards the end of this chapter, the “background vision” has a completely different style and manner of movement, to the point that we could perhaps even call it the vision of stillness, and it is one of the main perceptual entries for us into developing a sense of the different bodily attitude, the one which is sensitive to background and field, rather than figure and line, “generality” as opposed to “particularity”, and so it could bring us closer to feeling out in perceptual and motor ways being itself rather than only entities.

One leans forward towards the painting, following and chasing the red through the arteries of the trees, feeling directly in touch with the red, excited and at the same time extremely capable. The writing in this state becomes easy and fun, it is fast and colorful. Attention becomes dynamic and switches easily back and forth between different planes and tasks following the flow of the red in the painting, and at the same time the flow of thoughts and phenomenological descriptions as I write the notes. The red opens a bodily attitude through which the whole sphere outlined by the red also becomes open to the viewer. At the same time, the attitude of connecting with the red weakens the bodily involvement with the other side of the painting. The other main perspective, or perhaps the whole cluster of visual, motor, affective, postural perspectives³⁰, which are brought out in the viewer by the light of the white spot on the horizon, are tuned out when the viewer is in the flow of the red. When in the mode of focused vision, the white of the bright spot on the horizon becomes almost inaccessible. Not only is there nothing for the sight to follow, hold on to or dance around in that white spot, but also the bright spot itself seems to resist the outward projection, the probing and poking of the focused vision attitude. The white spot seems to close itself off from such treatment and actively pushes the viewer away. It is somewhat similar to how the mountain in *Lake and Mountains* does not allow any frivolousness in an attitude of the viewer toward

³⁰ For a detailed account of bodily regions as perspectives, see Mallin's *Body on My Mind* p.56-70

itself and demands humility and utmost respect. There is a difference, though, in how that which demands respectful treatment is revealed and concealed in the two artworks. In *Lake and Mountains*, that which dictates such careful and respectful attitude seems magnificently present and powerfully imposes its presence, even though what is visible, the mountain, might just be a shell, a “garment” or a veil behind which it hides itself from the viewer. In *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* that which defines the attitude when facing the white spot of the horizon is completely concealed behind the thick layers of white and yellow paint in that area. We will come back to the white spot and what it does later. In the meantime, it is important to note the movement of the red that involves the viewer and creates a certain kind of bodily attitude, which, while being familiar to us, clashes with the other attitude created by the white spot.

Let us now move on and talk about the affective side it brings out. It has to be noted that while the attitude created by the red is much more familiar to us than that of the white in this painting, still it is by no means usual. It is not about everydayness, the habitual and the ordinary in the *Being and Time* sense. It does not create a “pallid lack of mood,” as Heidegger called it. On the contrary, the emotional sphere bursts out with affects and feelings and pulls the whole body into the rush of the red. It is thick and fluid at the same time; it makes one feel the flow, the pressure, and pulsing of one’s own blood within one’s body. If one gives into the flow of the red, it somehow touches on the deepest sense of animality, the most basic instincts. It feels hot and sweaty like

running, and not just any running, but running for life, be it chasing or being chased on all fours, running that run with everything one has.

Our everyday contemporary Western life seems so much sheltered from these kinds of extreme experiences. Perhaps this is why we are so hungry for the thrillers, for seeing blood, explosions, and chasing on our screens. The red in this painting gives us a sense of what it feels like to be extremely and fully alive, to live out the limit of one's possibilities, to put everything on the line. It is the overflow of the red in the way that it runs through the trees, some sense of it being out of hand, out of the normal pace and measure that makes this painting dramatically exciting and disturbing at the same time. It is the sense of the red spilling, leaking, spreading out, instead of being contained, preserved and concealed that brings out the affect in this painting. This kind of affect is not well-defined and clearly directed, like rage or fear; rather, it seems to be bare affect, a basic sense of urgency and necessity which borders on violence, that which underlies and gives force to all other particular affects.

The red of the trees is indeed very powerful. It flows and stirs. It is both blood in the veins and at the same time the branches on fire. It is quite amazing how, in this painting, it is on the one hand absolutely obvious that the red is not "actual"; it is not the representation of a physical presence of the red color in the represented scene of the woods, neither in the form of surface color, nor in the form of light. At the same time, the added red is not merely "symbolic"; it is not a trigger for some mental or

psychological association, which would make us “think of” blood, or fire, or life and death³¹. Rather, the red comes to presence phenomenologically; it feels like blood, it feels like fire. The life of the blood flowing in the veins, the life of fire burning, its movement, its heat, are not what one “thinks of” when one sees the red; rather, life is already present and felt as life in the flow of the red, while “blood” and “fire” are just the familiar phenomena which help us feel out, communicate and understand how and why this red feels like life.

Similarly, the black, which covers the brown and red flesh of the branches is not a “symbol” of what is cold, dark and dead. We come to the notion of death from black not because we mentally associate it with the ashes of burnt wood or with the darkness of night, where we are lost or confused. Rather, the blackness already holds death within itself, as the red holds a certain quality of life, while the green holds a different aspect of life. The trees in the painting and the play of colors in those trees, their contrasts and layering, their texture, their linearity or bulkiness, all help us feel out the intricacies of the relations between life and death and of our multifaceted ways of relating to them and dealing with them. It is not about some absolute qualities of colors and how those “pure” qualities are perceived, but it is about what those colors hold for us, as humans, in sensual and visceral, postural and motor, affective and emotional,

³¹ Similarly, Merleau-Ponty stresses: “The gesture *does not make me think* of anger, it is anger itself.” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 184)

social and mental, and countless other ways. It is about how we, through all those ways, relate life and death, living and dying, by feeling out and living out the phenomena like friendship, pain, compassion, community, time, fate, boundaries, and limits through the medium of color, form, shape, texture, spatiality of composition, light, and so on.

It might be interesting to note that for Harris, with his theosophical background, red is predominantly the color of *manas*. It is insightful to see his painting *Atma Buddhi Manas* (1962), where *manas* is a figure of red with one green stripe as opposed to the figures of *buddhi* and *atma* dominated by yellow and white. In the tradition, *manas* refers to the “personal” aspect of human consciousness, a kind of emotional intelligence, a capacity to have feelings, the power of the heart. However, this symbolic significance of the color can only be there, because it is based on the phenomenal experience of red, in the way that red attunes the aspects of our body, the way it stirs and strains our perception, posture and movement, and the way we feel out ourselves, other people and things in the world.

Merleau-Ponty writes about the experiments with the color perception which show that the color is felt, and the bodily attitude of meeting that particular color is adopted, before we are cognitively aware of seeing the color: “In this case the color, before being seen, gives itself away through the experience of a certain bodily attitude appropriate only to that color and precisely indicative if it ...”. (Merleau-Ponty,

Phenomenology of Perception, 211) He continues half a page down about the attitude of red:

We must therefore stop wondering how and why red signifies effort or violence, green restfulness and peace; we must rediscover how to live these colors as our body does, that is, as peace or violence in a concrete form. When we say that red increases the compass of our reactions, we are not to be understood as having in mind two distinct facts, a sensation of redness and motor reactions – we must be understood as meaning that red, by its texture as followed and adhered to by our gaze, is already the amplification of our motor being. The subject of sensation is neither the thinker who takes note of a quality, not an inert setting which is affected or changed by it, it is a power which is born into, and simultaneously with, a certain existential environment, or is synchronized with it.

(Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 211)

It is very important in this passage to see Merleau-Ponty's refusal to take either the rationalist interpretation of perception, in which the "subject of perception" would be seen as "a thinker who takes note of a quality," or the empiricist interpretation of a *tabula rasa*, "an inert setting" affected by a sensation. Instead, for Merleau-Ponty, a

human being is always already in touch with what is felt, before even being aware of it. Moreover, being in touch happens when bodies meet bodies, when here not just the eye meets the red, but the whole body reverberates to, with, and according to the red that it meets.

Back to the red in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, when the grip of the affect created by the red subsides after some time, or if one moves a few meters farther from the painting but still remains in the foreground with the trees, the affect gives way to more subtle feelings.³² In the next section, we will talk more about the trees in Harris's paintings, which have a very human feel and attune the viewer much like another human being would, most directly through their posture, but also through the emotional or social-affective sphere. Here, feeling out the red that runs through the trees, we feel with the trees, we feel their living, their struggle, their transition from living to dying, from being to not being. The affect and excitement turn then into sadness, compassion, and grief for the dying trees. The pain that is felt emotionally brings out closeness and loyalty, sincerity and a sense of community, togetherness with the trees. These feelings are still attuned by the red, but rather through a sense of the red "after-taste," not so

³² This slight change of the feeling, perhaps from "affect" to "passion", a change that is felt as a difference in intensity of both the feeling and our response to the feeling, as a shift of attitude from outward to inward and from "proactive" to rather "passive", might have something to do with a slight change of perceptual quality, when the red, rather than being seen as a color of a figure, in this case, the color of lines, shifts closer in spectrum to a "background" color, or perhaps even the color of light, it begins to look more fuzzy, somewhat dispersed, not so concentrated.

much the direct grip of the affect of the red. In the next chapter we will see that the gradual transition from the foreground of the trees in this painting towards and into the white light coming from the bright spot on the horizon is accompanied by a subtle shift in the moods and feelings, from the dramatic affects and feelings brought on by the dying of the trees, towards somehow digesting and incorporating the experience of the trees and developing a feeling of surrender and acceptance of their death, and even a sense of hopefulness when facing the approaching light.

The trees in this painting are not dead yet. They are still “looming.” This half-alive and half-ghostly presence of the trees, which we will talk about in detail in the next section, speaks of death. However, through that, and by virtue of showing that threshold quality, the transition from life to death, it also speaks powerfully of life. As we will see in the next section, the trees are still grounded in the earth, still coming out of the earth, they are earth themselves, and their earthiness is so strikingly visible in their bodies, which are going back to the earth soon. But they are still tall, still standing, still reaching beyond the frame of the painting higher into the sky, even though their standing is shaky and uncertain. While they are standing, they are still trees, they are still alive. Through this artwork, we feel out and come to terms with this paradoxical logic of life and death, whereby they do not contradict each other, but somehow fuse into each other. From the trees and their dying, we are learning about life, living and dying, about contingency, time, struggle, limits, all these existential issues. Yet, as we

will see later, in the movement from the sphere of the trees towards the sphere of light, a different quality becomes present, which seems almost anti-existentialist, at least if existentialism is seen in a narrow way, as the philosophy that stresses the individual, choice and freedom. That new quality is the theme of acceptance, and humility, perhaps even affirmation and embracing of the destiny which brings death, much more in the spirit of Antigone than that of textbook existentialism.

2.2. The dying of the trees

After the introductory section on the stunning red, we are coming to perhaps the more difficult section of this chapter, dealing with the trees and their dying. It is difficult because it deals with dying and disintegration, the gloomy and daunting phenomena. But it is also more difficult phenomenologically, because the majority of the descriptions brought in are “noematic” rather than “noetic.”³³ We are describing the trees themselves, the textures, shapes and colors, that is, what is happening in the painting, more than how these aspects of the painting are perceived by us, how they attune us, and how our body responds to them. With “noetic” descriptions, which are rather self-reflective and answer the question “How are we meeting the phenomena?” there is always a higher risk of a skeptical response from the reader, both academically

³³ “Noema” and “noesis” are Husserl’s terms, they are the two aspects of the intentional arc, though here they are applied in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body, rather than Husserl’s phenomenology.

and in our everyday life. We are more and more conditioned into a sort of psychological solipsism, and extreme relativism, where we are inclined to deny the possibility of actually feeling the other person, understanding and knowing what is happening “inside their head”, let alone sharing an experience with them. And yet, at the same time, if we set aside this skepticism, “noetic” descriptions are much easier to understand, much easier to attune to. We might agree or disagree about how the red makes us feel, but it is relatively easy to understand what we are talking about. With the “noematic” descriptions, we are trying to answer the questions: “What are the phenomena that we are meeting in what we see, and how are these phenomena present in what we see?” While these descriptions are rooted in the things themselves, in this case in the artwork, they might seem more substantial, yet at the same time they are more hermetic, more difficult to describe and to interpret. Additionally, the advantage of being rooted in the painting works much less when the reader is unable to see the painting “in person,” and has to rely solely on phenomenological descriptions provided in the text and on the reproductions, which provide no match at holding the phenomena compared to the original artwork. Of course, both “types” of descriptions usually work together and complement each other, for they are describing two sides of the same “intentional arc”, to keep using Husserl’s term, or the chiasm of the perception and the perceived, the touching and the touched, to use the language of Merleau-Ponty’s *Visible and Invisible*. And yet, the following section on the trees is relying more

on the “touched” than the “touching,” which, considering the seriousness of the phenomena “touched,” makes it quite challenging.

With regard to the phenomena and issues of this section, we continue to talk about the dying of the trees that has been introduced in the previous part and is now further developed. In the process of describing the dying, the phenomenon that comes out as having to do with living, or staying alive, is the outlines, limits, or borders, that seem to hold an entity together. The notion of a limit is important for this dissertation, for it provides a bridge between the “practice” of body hermeneutics as the descriptive phenomenology, and the “abstract”, or at least not so easy to grasp philosophical concepts. The outline, edge or limit is bountiful and at the same time quite easy to find and hold on to while describing, both in art and in life situations. Unless we are facing completely even color fields without any visual interruptions, the edges, limits, lines or outlines will be there in the painting. Everything has limits upon limits in a live situation except, perhaps, the sky, so it is very easy to find this phenomenon and describe it at any time. At the same time, as Heidegger shows to us, following Anaximander, the Greek notion of the limit, *πέρας*, is one of the key entrances into understanding the difference between entities and being. While entities are, in a way, defined through their limits and borders, being is limitless, *ἄπειρον*. In Heidegger’s interpretation of Anaximander, the relationship of being to entities is such that being, which is limitless itself, gives limits to entities. Our first phenomenological introduction

of the notion of limit, outline, or edge in this section on the trees, will be further developed in the next section. This in turn will be very helpful in preparing us for the work on the next artwork, *Northern Lake*, where the contrast between clear and fuzzy limits or edges, as well as their shifting and moving, will bring more complexity both in the phenomenological descriptions and the understanding of the philosophical notions themselves. So let us go back to the body hermeneutics of the artwork.

The first glance at this painting is always startling. The contrast between the darkness of the trees and the light coming from the middle of the painting is so strong and it has such a powerful grim presence that it dominates the first impression and almost completely blocks out other aspects of the painting. Even the red, which becomes one of this painting's focal points once the eyes have adjusted to the light and the viewer is at a comfortably personal distance from the artwork, is almost invisible at first glance. As in most reproductions of this artwork, the red initially seems dark and merges into the darkness of silhouettes of the trees that are looming against the light on the horizon. No matter whether you are returning to the artwork after a few years of absence, or a short coffee-break, the first encounter is always somewhat shocking. It is always about these strained trees set against the ominous-looking clouds in a blinding contrast of their blackness with the whiteness of light which sets them off.

The whole sky in the painting is covered with thick and seemingly quite low clouds, there is no blue anywhere in the sky. Perhaps it is the sky that creates the

muffled and closed mood on the initial encounter with the artwork. The atmosphere of the painting is cold. The forest seems unfriendly and unlivable at the beginning. Even though this painting is definitely not colder than, for example, *Lake and Mountains*, which feels frosty and crisp, but at the same time bright and open, the *Beaver Swamp* feels damp and soggy. The dampness seems to pierce right through one's bones, making one want to snuggle, wrap tighter into one's clothes, and to avoid staying with the trees for a long time.

In the initial encounters with the artwork, there is a lot of resistance against describing the trees directly. One tends to escape from the immediacy and concreteness of their bodies to other aspects of the painting, to the flow of the red that, even though is right in the trees, draws all attention to itself, overpowers tree-trunks and branches, making them less significant, or to the sky that gradually takes the trees over and covers them up, or to the light on the horizon that eventually brightens the painting. However, it is the trees and their disintegrating dying bodies that are really the beginning of this artwork. It is from and through them that the movement of this painting towards the brightness of light unfolds. So, after a while of enjoying other aspects of the artwork, one has to come back to the trees and describe them, even though the situation of the trees is unpleasant and disturbing.

Harris's trees in general seem to be very "personal" and "human." They have clear postures, and seem to carry an attitude with their postures. Their way of

presencing easily translates into our human way of being in a situation.³⁴ Perhaps it is their upright position, being in a spatial relationship with earth and sky similar to how humans, are posited. Or perhaps it is their ability to be distinctly individual in some situations and merge into communities or even masses in other situations. Perhaps it is their lifespan, so comparable with our human lifespan, or maybe it is something else. Suffice it to say, that in many of Harris's paintings we relate to his trees right away, and very differently from how we relate to hills, islands, mountains, boulders, or clouds. "The Group of Seven" artists did not portray people in their wilderness landscapes. However, we relate to Harris's trees almost as we would relate to people. We respond to them and mimic them as if they were human. We feel for them and with them as if they were akin to us. This is probably why there are so many seemingly "anthropomorphic" images in the descriptions of the trees in this painting, but these images and analogies are not a result of some mental symbolic operation; they rather come from an affective, that is, emotional engagement with the trees in this painting³⁵.

³⁴ We will see later when talking about *Northern Lake*, how the "posture" of the trees attunes the general bodily posture and motility of the viewer.

³⁵ The critics also notice this human-like quality of trees in Harris's paintings. Larisey comments about Harris's use of anthropomorphism, that in his wilderness landscapes, especially in the Lake Superior works, "the dead trees are often stand-ins for human beings." (Larisey, 72) Adamson describes the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* in the following way, also perhaps referring to their similarity to human remains: "In the foreground is a stand of dead spruce drowned in the beaver-made lake. An eerie quality, produced by the looming, dark skeletal shapes of the trees, is intensified by the spectral glow of light that floods the evening sky." (Adamson, 94)

Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that the affective sphere holds the key to our specifically human understanding of entities and the world and somehow opens up more than a non-affective “natural” perception would:

Indeed the natural world presents itself as existing in itself over and above its existence for me; the act of transcendence whereby the subject is thrown open to the world runs away with itself and we find ourselves in the presence of a nature which has no need to be perceived in order to exist. If then we want to bring to light the birth of being for us, we must finally look at that area of our experience which clearly has significance and reality only for us, and that is our affective life. Let us try to see how a thing or a being begins to exist for us through desire or love and we shall thereby come to understand better how things and beings can exist in general. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 154)

As we can see, Merleau-Ponty goes as far as saying that the social-affective aspect of our lives holds a key to understanding life in general. Perhaps this is why there is such an irresistible drive to see in Harris’s trees some personal, human-like presence, to relate to them first of all affectively, as we relate to people or animals, and to empathize with them. And yet, it is important to note again and again, that this is not just a phantasy, a

mental projection or some form of sentimentality that leads us to see the affectively significant image where there is, in fact, no emotion present. Harris paints these trees for us, and for our affective and social eyes. He makes these trees such that we would relate to them in an affective way, and this is part of the fullness of our experience of this artwork and the world that not only includes the affective sphere as a side layer of our existence, but endows this layer with a special meaning and a special access to understanding who we are as human beings, as people, as a society.

So, what can we say about these trees? The trees are dying, and it can be seen in several aspects of the painting. Perhaps the most dramatic and the least symbolic way in which Harris shows their dying is that the trees are literally falling apart. They are disintegrating, losing their “identity” in a twofold manner: firstly, they are losing the sense of separateness from other trees, slowly merging into an unidentifiable and chaotic bunch of sticks; secondly, and more importantly, they are losing their sense of integrity and wholeness within themselves. The dying and disintegration of the trees is visible in their posture, in the shape of trunks and branches, and also in the very texture of their bodies. Let me walk you through these, describing them systematically one after the other.

The posture of the trees³⁶ is strained, almost stiff, stretched to the limit, yet at the same time tired and helpless. Perhaps that strained and helpless posture would not be so clearly visible if one could not compare these trees to other trees Harris painted, like the trees in *Above Lake Superior* (c.1922) or *Northern Lake* (c.1923). Usually, Harris's trees have a "clean" shape; they tend to be clear-cut and sculptural to the point of being column-like. They tend to stand firmly, look healthy, reliable, substantial, even if they are not standing trees but trunks lying on the ground. Instead, these trees are looming rather than standing, and they hang down their branches instead of holding them. They seem to be torn apart and at the same time crowded with each other to the point of losing that healthy integrity and individuality of Harris's typical trees. As opposed to the trees in *Northern Lake*, which stand clearly and confidently, which are strong and balanced but at the same time gracious, which are solid yet at the same time relaxed, not strained in any way, the standing of the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* seems neither clear nor solid; instead, it is shaky and confused.

Larisey compares Harris's trees in *Above Lake Superior* with Tom Thomson's trees:

³⁶ Here we can see an example of how the noetic and the noematic descriptions in body hermeneutics inform each other and interrelate chiasmically. Of course, the trees do not have postures in the way that animals and humans do, and yet, these trees of Harris with the way that their trunks and branches are painted by the artist, immediately attune our posture, call on us to respond with our own posture to what seems like the posture of the trees. We feel the posture of these trees reflected in our own posture, and this is why talk about the "posture of the trees" as something obvious and immediately recognizable.

Although Harris responded to the landscape of the North Shore of Lake Superior with new approaches in his painting, these approaches show the influence of Tom Thomson. Thomson's *Burnt Land*, which Harris had owned for years, depicted dead trees silhouetted against a distant, simply painted row of hills and the sky. One of the important differences between *Burnt Land* and *Above Lake Superior*, however, is that Thomson's tree-trunks, although sloping this way and that, are roughly textured and straight. The trees in Harris's painting have smooth surfaces and curving contours. (Larisey, 92)

Even though Larisey never mentions *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* it is striking to see the similarities in his description of Thomson's trees with those in Harris's *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. Another parallel between the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* and Thomson's painting pointed out by Adamson is the red on the branches of the trees:

The use of the dark red undercoat of pigment, seen on close examination at the edges of the screen of branches, amplifies the somber mood. This technical feature had earlier been used by Thomson to obtain a similar effect in *The Jack Pine* of 1916-17. (Adamson, 94)

Perhaps *Beaver Swamp* is a sort of tribute to Thomson's style and mood, and maybe this is what makes this painting so strikingly different from Harris's paintings just a year or two later.

Trunks and branches in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* are skinny and uneven, pointy and interrupted. The "shape" or outline of these trees is crowded and overpowered by the intertwining branches sticking out in all directions and making it almost impossible to literally "figure-out", that is, to follow and grasp the shapes of these branches. While the trunks and main branches can be somewhat made-out, the web of smaller branches, especially in the left part of the painting, confuses the eyes and makes them want to run away. The eyes try to figure out the shapes, to find the lines they could follow, for this is what eyes do, but after a few scattered movements around this crowded web of reddish-black branches the eyes escape by following the longest branch which points from the left towards the bright spot in the sky in the middle of the painting. This movement of the eyes is not something that happens occasionally or accidentally. The eyes actually repeat this movement over and over. This pattern becomes obvious once you have spent some time with the painting. Perhaps with the help of my description this movement can be "imagined," or perhaps even "mapped out" to some extent when looking at the reproduction, but it is much easier to see if standing before the original. We have already talked about this movement when dealing with the red in the

previous section. At this point it is important to note the confusion of the eyes created by the confusion of the branches and the tendency of the eyes to escape that confusion of the trees.

The falling-apart and disintegration of the trees can also be seen in the texture and layering of paints in the body or “materiality” of the trees themselves. Texture-wise, and this can be clearly seen from a close-up examination of the canvas, the trees show what would be the “bare bones” of the painting. The grain of the canvas is barely covered by a thin layer of paint, creating the impression of raw material, not defined or outlined in particular ways or shapes, not covered up by an appearance of a surface. The disintegration of the “body” is clearly visible in the branches. The three thickest trunks still hold their presence as trunks, though the lines lack the clean smoothness otherwise so much present in Harris’s trees. However, most branches have already lost that integrity and defined presence. Even the branches that point into the opening in the middle of the painting and are not crowded by other branches, still, look as though they are falling apart, barely holding themselves together. Also, from a distance, when their details are not so much visible, and they rather fuse into one long dark shape contrasted with the brightness of the sky at the background, their shape itself looks shaky, lacks solidity and continuance, seems wobbly and unstable.

There is a tilt in the wavy lines of the clouds, flowing down from the top left corner to about the middle of the canvas on the right side. Another line present in the

sky, though not as clearly, is almost perpendicular to the flow of the clouds. It runs from the bright spot on the horizon to the top of the group of trees on the right. This combination of spatial planes adds depth to the space under the sky, stretching from the farthest area of the brightening on the horizon all the way to the sky almost above the viewer's head. The whole sky then becomes tilted, opening up and brightening the group of trees on the left while somewhat obscuring the trees on the right. The trees on the left that are brought closer to the center of the composition by the tilt of the sky, are the ones that are more clearly falling apart. They have much less of green foliage left on them and are more highlighted by the red; their dying is more obvious. The trees on the right, that still seem to be holding together to some degree, have more of the browns and greens and less of reds and blacks, are pushed to the side, appearing less significant and drawing less attention. We can conclude that Harris is bringing the viewer's attention to the very dying of the trees, to their immediate present that is already clearly facing the approach of death, to the transition and transformation that is occurring in the process of dying and that has already clearly commenced.³⁷

Let us pause here, take a step back from these "hands-on" descriptions of the trees in the painting, and see what is happening here in this process of body hermeneutics. First of all, and most importantly, through the phenomenological

³⁷ Harris uses a similar technique of contrasting the trees on the right and the left side of the foreground in *Northern Lake*, where the difference between the two groups of trees is much more significant than here in *Beaver Swamp*.

descriptions of the artwork, we are feeling out and becoming familiar with the phenomena present in the artwork. Here it is, of course, the phenomenon of death first and foremost, but the descriptions of the dying trees also bring out for us what it means to be, to live, to exist as an entity, a bodily entity.

The key phenomenon that defines here what it means to exist as a bodily entity as opposed to not existing anymore, that is, dying, is some sort of integrity, a holding together, as opposed to disintegration and falling apart. It is interesting to see here something that will keep coming up later in this dissertation, namely that this integrity of bodily entities, which defines their existence or “presence”, to use Heidegger’s term, could be seen in a two-fold manner. On one hand it can be seen as some sort of inner or structural holding together, and on the other hand it could be perceived through the outline, the shape or limit, which also could be seen as the surface, that holds the entities together as if “from the outside”. These two ways of seeing and describing the integrity or “holding together” of bodily entities do not have to be seen as contradictory. However, at this stage, they are surfacing in forms of questions rather than answers, so there is not much more that can be said about them besides pointing them out and also noting that the notions of limit and the unlimited, Anaximander’s *πέρας* and *ἄπειρον*, will become crucial when talking about the difference between entities and being itself.

In terms of the method of body hermeneutics, what we start seeing in these descriptions, is how the same phenomenon present in the artwork, here the dying of the body as disintegration, shows itself through several angles, several aspects of the artwork. These different takes not only do not contradict each other but actually confirm the same insight, including but not limited to the “content” of the artwork, its theme and images being confirmed by the style, manner of expression, textures, colors, and lines. And yet at the same time, the way that the phenomenon comes to presence in the artwork is not completely determined, unambiguous, with a singular and definite meaning. Instead, it has no problem holding together different interpretations, bringing out questions, not just answers, and maintaining the tensions created by the openness of those questions. Here, for example, asking whether the integrity of things is maintained from the inside, or outside, or both, and if so, then what are the consequences of that for our understanding of the nature of things, our metaphysics, or ontology. Let us return back to the trees, look in detail at the colors in combination with textures and lines, and see how those contribute to the feeling of death and dying in the painting.

It is easier to see the falling apart of the trees when their texture, form and colors are examined more closely. For instance, one can look at the longest branch, which is pointing from the left tree into the middle of the painting. It seems especially messy with the pockets of green foliage still on it, but with the “body” that looks like it has been ripped and lacks the usual holding together that would normally come with the

wholeness of surface protected by the bark, the “skin” of the tree. Here, that “body” is punctured, torn apart, exposing the naked structure of the branch, painted over by the red. The brown paint has the “woody” quality; it still looks solid in those branch fragments that are somewhat holding together. The red, however, is not solid at all. It flows over the brown and is indeed painted over the brown by the artist. In some places, the red flows where the brown was supposed to be but got thinned out, had already faded away. The red does not bulge up with “fluid” as does the yellow in *Northern Lake*; it rather “leaks”, it remains linear. It does not come over the remaining green chunks of foliage, instead it flows “under” them, as if to suggest, that it comes from the inside, from “under the skin”, out of the “flesh” itself. The red is right inside the branches; it becomes most visible where there seems to be almost no more wood left. At the same time, the red is not felt like something normal or “natural” here. On the contrary, the red looks like it has been “spilled”. It looks like blood, it feels exposed and excessive, and becomes dramatic precisely because it is so much exposed in these branches, instead of remaining “hidden,” “concealed,” and “internal.” The flowing quality of the red is supported by the long strokes of the brush outlining the lines of the red, which occasionally make the red look washed out. The thick clouds seem to come over the considerably thinner coat of paint on the branches, which makes the branches look like grooves, increasing even more the impression of the red flowing along these “grooves” of the branches.

There is a very strong contrast between the black and the red in how they relate to the “natural” brown and green colors of wood and foliage. The black comes on top of the red as if stopping the its flow, and its cold blackness suggests ashes, a burned, hard, lifeless matter.³⁸ This painting has so much contrast and so much darkness in it that even from a comfortably close distance to the artwork, it is often hard to distinguish, so to speak, “objectively” between black and dark brown or dark green. Yet, when described phenomenologically, the difference though subtle, is clearly visible. There is something particularly cold, particularly sharp and hard in the black proper, the way in which it cuts into the eyes much more than dark brown or dark green, the way in which it seems more than merely dark as if it has a different dimension of darkness altogether.³⁹ The thickness and consistency of the paint in the dark green patches of foliage on the branches is not much different from the black ones except the green patches are more “chunky,” whereas the black ones are more linear. Yet, the green ones come almost naturally out of the flow of the red over the brown lines of the branches,

³⁸ The motive of burnt trees becomes much more pronounced in Harris’s Lake Superior paintings, but even in Algoma it has been present in the paintings of the Group of Seven, see for example Frank Johnston’s *Fire-Swept Algoma* (1920).

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty says similarly about the black: “I say that my fountain-pen is black, and I see it as black under the sun’s rays. But this blackness is less the sensible quality of blackness than a sombre power which radiates from the object, even when it is overlaid with reflected light, and it is visible only in the sense in which moral blackness is visible. The real color persists beneath appearances as the background persists beneath the figure, that is, not as a seen or thought-of quality, but through a non-sensory presence.” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 305)

whereas the black patches feel odd and seem to seal and petrify the surface of that flow. This black is one of the “signs” of death here, but not only of a particular dying of these trees, but also, as we will start seeing eventually, of the dark nothing that comes along with death, shelters the beings that have disappeared from being present in our world, into some realms beyond, behind or underneath the face or surface of the world that is brought together for us by the light.

It has to be noted that the trees and their dying are not “contagious”; there is nothing stinky or rotting about them. Their situation is not nauseating; it does not provoke in the viewer the typical physiological reactions to death and dying. Despite the clear visual descriptions, the disintegration and dying of trees does not take the viewer hostage. Even the red, which grabs the viewer quite powerfully, releases its hold with time. The trees seem to live through their “drama” within their own realm. Even though their struggle, their dying, and their survival are portrayed and described in very literal, direct, visceral ways, the engagement and response to their drama is not visceral. Rather, it manifests in subtler, more ethereal, though not in any way less intense, emotional attitudes, affects, passions, and feelings. Perhaps this slight distancing from the trees, both in the emotional way mentioned here and in terms of space, as we will see in the next sections, allows for a change of mood and with it the whole bodily attitude of the viewer.

We will continue to work on the trees and the phenomena they hold in the next sections. However, instead of relating to them from the perspective of the “place of the trees” in the foreground and being anchored and somewhat limited by that perspective, we will instead begin to shift into different spaces of this artwork, which will change our attitude, attune us in a different way, and, simultaneously, shift the philosophical framework. While the themes will remain more or less the same, the way these themes are understood and the language will change quite a bit. In the following sections, we will see how the trees bring out the elements of earth and sky, in tune with these notions in Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin, and in preparation for the notion of the world as a fourfold of earth, sky, mortals and divinities in the late Heidegger. Their shapes and outlines, as mentioned before, are related to πέλας and ἄπειρον, and in turn relate to the difference between the entities and being in Heidegger’s reading of Anaximander, and a different attitude towards death and dying.

Chapter 3: Transitions between and over the limits

The title of this chapter and its content are very much inspired by Heidegger's reading of Anaximander, namely by his take on Anaximander's fragment in the second part of the 1941 lecture course *Grundbegriffe*, and in the 1946 essay *Der Spruch des Anaximander*. Anaximander's saying is talking about the entities and the origin of their coming to presence, and return into absence. In the *Grundbegriffe* version of the interpretation of Anaximander, Heidegger is stressing that it is not only about coming to presence and receding into absence, but also about a transition from one "edge" to the other, and the domain that remains open in this transition from emergence to elusion. (GB 108-9, BC 93-4) Perhaps simplifying a bit, or at least not going into the full technical details of this earlier take on Anaximander's fragment, I take from this text of Heidegger the three-fold movement, of a) coming into presence, b) returning into absence, that is, dying, and c) moving from one limit to the other, that is, living. Heidegger says that these three different "crossings" are held together, established and maintained by being, thus securing the realm for the entities to be for a while; all three are parts of the same movement of being.

Here in *Beaver Swamp*, we see immediately the dying and disintegration of the trees, that is, their transitioning from presence into absence, returning back to where they came from, as the fragment of Anaximander would suggest. However, while that transition is imminent, and it is coming about, it is not complete yet. And so the

struggling of the trees, their still living and holding on to life, gives us quite a sense of them not just dying and leaving, but also of their still being present, still being on the way between birth and death. This could be seen as the second transition in this artwork, and the way it speaks phenomenologically to the viewer. There is also a third less obvious transition in the painting, which manifests as the brightening of the painting, the gradual increase of intensity and the wider spreading of light from the middle of the horizon. This light, as opposed to the trees, is just coming to presence; in this painting it is still not as expressive as it could be and remains as that which is only beginning to unfold, without coming into its full strength.

The transition in the phenomenological perception of the artwork is the shift from the sphere of the trees towards and into the sphere of light, and as such, it brings together in one “movement,” in one “line,” all three other transitions, integrating them into one happening. The trees are disappearing, though still struggling; they are losing their grasp over the viewer, retreating sideways and being left behind, while the light is brightening, coming over the viewer, nearing, approaching, filling out the sphere of the viewer. We have already looked at the dying of the trees in the previous two sections. In the following sections, we will focus more on the aspects of the painting that bring to light the living of the trees. The first section addresses the space of the painting, and how it highlights the trees as well as prepares for the approaching of light. In the next two sections, we will turn to the notion of borders and limits, thanks to which, it seems,

the entities are actually “living,” staying present as opposed to not appearing anymore. In that regard, earth and sky, which are very clearly present in the painting, and also are the key notions of later Heidegger and his understanding of the world as a fourfold, will come into the phenomenological descriptions of the painting and into the discussion of how entities presence as entities. These sections will prepare us for discussing the final “transition” that happens in the experience of this painting, both the approach of light and the “arrival” of the viewer from the “place of the trees” towards and into the light.

3.1. The sky and the dynamics of change

Let us start with the sky. This painting is not a typical painting of Harris in that it is much too detailed and chunky, defined by small and rough patches of color rather than major color fields and clear lines. Similarly, the sky in this painting is not a typical sky. It is patchy, rugged, and rough, much more chaotic and dramatic than usual. As mentioned in an earlier discussion about the trees, Harris seems to be somewhat under the influence of Tom Thomson; it is the “expression,” the outwardness that matters here, not so much the hermetic shine of the later Harris. The sky is intense and dynamic. Even though it is not very colorful, nor has much contrast, still, the shades of gray, bluish and lilac and the way in which the paint is applied in layers and layers, make this sky look like a stormy sea, with the waves of differently shaded clouds rolling over

each other, going under, and then surfacing again. The turbulent and stormy look of the sky, on one hand, supports the emotional drama of the dying trees, making the whole painting more expressive. And yet, on the other hand, the movement of the clouds brings in a possibility of a radical shift of the mood, change of scenery, and a fast pace of that change. This dynamic and stormy quality of the sky in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* becomes very obvious when compared with *Above Lake Superior*. In *Above Lake Superior*, the clouds also cover the whole sky, but they remain far in the distance, in the background proper, and do not invade the sphere of the trees. In *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the clouds are coming right next to the trees, surrounding them and even beginning to cover them up.

The tilt of the lines of clouds, flowing down from the top left corner to about the middle of the canvas on the right side, makes the sky even more dramatic. It works together with another compositional line present here, though not expressly, rather in a subtle way, connecting the bright spot on the horizon with the top of trees on the right. This direction brings the perspective of distance to the sky, for it highlights that the sky is stretching from farthest bright area on the horizon all the way to the dark clouds almost above the viewer's head. The tilt of the sky shifts the viewer slightly to the left by opening up and brightening the group of trees on the left while somewhat obscuring the trees on the right. It also supports a clear pathway that opens out between the bright spot on the horizon and the viewer, going right through the screen of trees in the

foreground. The pathway itself, and the bright spot on the horizon from which it opens out, seem to be framed by the darker grey muffled clouds that are coming over the trees and are beginning to cover the trees up. This covering up of the trees by the clouds happens in several places in the painting, most visibly on the right side, where the brushstrokes of the clouds loop and as if move over the edges of the thickest tree on the right in the top third part of the trunk. The clouds seem to be swelling out of the background of the painting and coming in between the viewer and the tree.

It is interesting to note here that the sky as one fold of the fourfold in Heidegger's later texts is related to seasonality, the change of seasons, the change of day and night, the change of weather and the moods of weather, the clemency and inclemency, as Heidegger puts it. (BDT 147, BWD 151) The mortals that is us, dwell, that is live properly, when they receive the sky as the sky (BDT 148, BWD 152). Here in the painting, the turbulence of the sky indeed feels like it has the potential to bring about change, the change of weather, the change of mood, the change of the whole situation. However, even more so, the power of the sky seems to manifest as a capacity to harbor, cover up, and conceal that which goes out of existence in a manner very different from how the earth does it. We will talk more in the next sections about this role of the sky, and how Harris is preparing us, together with the trees, to receive the sky and the changes it brings.

There are several aspects of the dynamic tension manifesting in the way the trees stand by themselves, but also against and into the sky. The presence of the trees is dramatically bright because of the red but at the same time fading because of the falling apart of their trunks and branches. The trees stand in the open created by the tilt of the sky, but at the same time, it seems that at any moment, they will be taken over and covered up by the clouds that are invading their space from the sides. They stand against the sky, looming with their dark trunks and branches, sturdy to the point of feeling awkward and almost breaking off, in contrast with the puffy grey clouds. And yet, at the same time, the trees as if submit themselves into the clouds, into the sky. The clouds that surround the trees while threatening to take them over and cover them up completely, thus making them disappear, at the same time seem to hold them up and together and so to support their integrity and their standing. While the trees, in turn, seem to respond to the wavy lines of the clouds with curves of their branches, resting the strained and tired branches on the pillows of the clouds. There is a tension between the inevitability of the death of the trees, their struggle in transition into the sphere of non-being on the one hand, and on the other the gentleness, support, respect and even in some sense "justice," with which the sky both supports the living of the trees yet also facilitates their dying. It brings about the tension between, and the shift from the "personal," somewhat social and perhaps even political concern with the issues of life and death, to the attitude which takes attention away from the personal, concrete and

particular towards some wider sphere, the deeper issues of being in tune with the “nature” or being, instead of standing-over-against it.

It is not only a shift between the two opposite spheres in this painting. The painting itself, in the development of Harris’s art, is placed in the shift from the decorative, “aesthetic” interests Harris is developing in his landscapes, as well as social issues he is working out in the urban scenes, towards a kind of natural spirituality, which, while remaining deeply personal, leaves these personal concerns behind and instead is interested in much higher or deeper levels of our involvement with being. This is one of the first signs of the theme of acceptance and “letting be.” It also begins to shift from what would be closer to the themes of early Heidegger, that is, angst, death, but also a type of concern and care, towards much more peaceful and “detached” ways of dealing with the world that we might come across in Heidegger’s later texts.

To conclude this section, the sky in *Beaver Swamp* supports all aspects of the transition in the painting, by not only creating a generally dynamic and changing mood, but in three other distinct ways. Firstly, the sky works directly with the trees, gently but firmly covering them up and taking them away from the center of viewer’s attention. Secondly, the sky gradually brightens the whole painting with the light coming from the white spot on the horizon. Thirdly, the sky opens up a clear passage between the viewer and the bright spot on the horizon, to complete the transition from the sphere of the trees and their dying to the sphere of light on the horizon.

We will now take a closer look at the trees again, the role of their outlines in keeping them present, and that will bring us towards the discussion of Heidegger's notions of *πέρας* (boundaries) and *Riß* (the rift), in turn, to talking briefly about the earth and once more about the sky. All these notions are already beginning to anchor us in the themes of late Heidegger, which is appropriate; for this is where we want to gradually make our way. We will conclude this second set of sections of body hermeneutics of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* by working a bit more on the space of the painting. At that point, we will be ready to move on to the final part, dealing with the "place of light," the "destination" for which the artwork prepares us and to which it gradually brings us in the end.

3.2. Shape and outline in the presencing of the trees

Let us now look at the trees and their transition. The dying of these trees has been described in several ways, and through several aspects, most clearly through the way in which the very bodies of the trees are losing their integrity, their "holding together," and are literally falling apart. And yet, their transition between being present still and not being present anymore cannot be described solely in terms of the "matter" of their bodies disintegrating. The trees are still looming and somehow hanging together, not even by a thread, even though their thinning-out red branches are already fragmented, and their continuance is only faintly outlined by the flow of the red. There

is an impression from the way Harris has painted these trees, and it is by no means a “theoretical” claim, instead, it is a phenomenological observation that it is not just the “physicality,” or the “materiality” that defines and sustains the presence of these trees and their still being present and appearing among other present entities. It is more like their looming silhouettes, their shapes, have been carved into the sky and are still hanging on, with or without the integrity of the “matter,” until the clouds cover them up, and it is only then that their transition will be complete and they will appear no more. However, it is not a dualism of “matter” and “form,”⁴⁰ not dominance or priority of one over the other that becomes manifest here in the dying of the trees.

Our “natural attitude,” which we tend to take on whenever we “theorize” about death, seems to be torn in a dualist manner. We define death and dying scientifically, physiologically, through the presence or absence of “signs of life” in the “matter” of our bodies. We are fascinated with forensic science that tells us of countless ways to determine how long the body has been dead, based on the superb knowledge of the decomposition processes. At the same time, now more than ever, we talk about ghosts, dead spirits, the entities from the realm of the invisible, which have, through death, been devoid of their “physical” presence in this world. It has to be said that this kind of

⁴⁰ Perhaps it is useful in this context to think about the change in the meaning of the word “form”, that seems to have lost its initial meaning of tangible and visible “shape” or “figure”, which was essentially grounded in materiality itself, and instead, at least in the philosophical context, has become removed into the ideal or abstract realm, and thus divorced from and juxtaposed with “matter”.

common language, which we are used to in the context of death and dying, is not helpful to describe the dying of these trees. Their presence looks ghostly, they are looming in the contrast of light and darkness, but their manner of borderline presencing has very little to do with ghosts and spirits, just as the falling apart of their trunks and branches has nothing to do with the physiology of death. The dying of these trees is not a fact nor a “belief,” it is a phenomenon, and it shows itself as a transition. Perhaps we can try to talk about the death of these trees with the help of different understanding and language, hoping that the other language will help us understand in a different way death and life not only of trees but also of human beings, that is, our own as well as, perhaps, of others.

Let us try to learn from the pre-Platonic Greek way of thinking, which Heidegger brings to us in his interpretations of the Greeks, in the texts on art, things, technology and the fourfold. Beings, especially natural things, for the early Greeks, at least the way Heidegger interprets them, are not “constructed” by putting together a bunch of cells. They do not disappear by merely falling apart into a different bunch of cells. They unfold from themselves and arrive into full bloom, even though their arrival might be gradual, and they retreat after a while. They come already whole and just open themselves more and more, and they leave whole, even though their retreat might be gradual, just as their arrival. How is it with trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, how are they

coming to presence, how does their falling apart and hanging together, their being present and their transition into the absence show itself in the painting?

The manner in which Harris has painted the shapes of these trees on the background is quite special, though not unusual for Harris. They are not placed like cut-out figures over the top of the pre-given background; they are not created like objects that stand over-against and stand out from the background. These trees (as well as the trees in Northern Lake and several other paintings) are as if carved into the background. They look like inverted reliefs, or carvings for prints, in the way that their “surface” lies deeper than the “background” itself. They do not just look like that; they actually are painted in a way that the background, in this case mainly the sky, has thicker layers of paint than the brown trunks and branches of the trees. This makes the trees look as though they are sinking into depth, retreating back instead of shining forth as, we assume, would be the trees in the fullness of their bloom or even in the heaviness of their being laden with fruit. Their outlines seem to be shrinking and eventually failing, collapsing and closing off that gap of the opening, through which each of them individually comes out of the depth. Yet, the trees are still present in the painting; they still come out of themselves, still maintain, though barely, the gap of the opening between their edges. Perhaps this is why there is a feeling in this painting that the presence of the trees, their still being here, depends more on their looming silhouettes, on their shapes, outlined by their edges, rather than the “matter” that is already failing

to “fill out” these outlines in several places. The presence of the trees, even though shaky and receding, is still there, as long as the limits through which the trees come out of their depths are still maintaining the opening, until they collapse, and then trees will cease to come to presence.

The phenomenon of the edge, the line that delimits things in Harris’s painting in general, and in particular in these trees in *Beaver Swamp*, provides an entrance into a dialogue with Heidegger’s take on the Greek notion of the limit, *πέρας*. While it might not be generally recognized as one of the central notions of Heidegger’s phenomenology, it is connected to one of the key notions of Heidegger’s later philosophy, the rift (*Riß*). Whereas in the earlier texts the rift (*Riß*) was related to the ontological difference between the entities and being, in the later texts it has shifted to the questions of relationship between things and the world, the fourfold, and *Ereignis*. Learning to see the limits “according to Harris”, discovering the way limits show themselves, the way they hold and separate, the way they shift and dissolve, will constantly give us a chance to ponder on, study and better understand Heidegger’s phenomenology of things and the world. Even though the notion of the holy in Heidegger’s texts does not seem to come up side by side with that of the limit, we will see, especially in the next chapters, that the connection between these two notions is indeed an essential one. Let me thus give a brief account of several places where

Heidegger talks about the limits and then bring that notion back to the experience of limits in the trees in this artwork.⁴¹

3.3. Heidegger on πέρας

The 1932 lecture course *Der Anfang der Abendländischen Philosophie. Auslegung des Anaximander und Parmenides* is perhaps one of the earlier texts where Heidegger mentions the Greek notion of πέρας⁴², he does it carefully, perhaps even hesitantly:

πέρας – limit, but not so much in the merely negative sense as that by which and at which something stops and can go no further but, on the contrary, that which outlines something, its contours and inner delineation, that which in each case gives to all that appears, all beings, their closed peculiarity and security, their composure and their stance.

(BWP 23)⁴³

⁴¹ For a phenomenology of edges, limits and borders that in detail and insight far exceeds my discussion of edges and limits here, see Casey, *The World on Edge*.

⁴² Heidegger is very consistent in translating the Greek word πέρας as *die Grenze*. This in turn gets translated into English sometimes as “limit” and other times as “boundary”. We will stick to the original English translations when quoting them, but keeping in mind that both “limit” and “boundary” for Heidegger refer to the same word and the same phenomenon.

⁴³ “πέρας – Grenze, aber nicht so sehr in dem nur negativen Sinne das, womit und wobei etwas aufhört und nicht weiter kann, versagt, sondern was etwas umreißt, Umriß und innerer Aufriß von etwas, was jeweils jedem Erscheinenden, d.h. Seienden, seine geschlossene *Eigenheit* und *Sicherheit*, *Gefäßtheit* und *Haltung* gibt.” (AAP 28)

In *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), what he says about πέρας sounds already much firmer and has to do with a relationship between an entity and its being:

But this standing-there, this taking and maintaining a *stand* that stands erected high in itself, is what the Greeks understood as Being. Whatever takes such a stand becomes *constant* in itself and thereby freely and on its own runs up against the necessity of its limit, *peras*. This *peras* is not something that first accrues to a being from outside. Much less is it some deficiency in the sense of a detrimental restriction. Instead, the self-restraining hold that comes from a limit, the having-of-itself wherein the constant holds itself, is the Being of beings; it is what first makes a being be a being as opposed to a nonbeing. For something to take such a stand therefore means for it to attain its limit, to de-limit itself. (IM 63)⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "Dieses aber, das in sich hoch gerichtete Da-stehen, zum Stand kommen und im *Stand* bleiben, verstehen die Griechen als Sein. Was dergestalt zum Stand kommt, in sich *ständig* wird, schlägt sich dabei von sich her frei in die Notwendigkeit seiner Grenze, πέρας. Diese ist nichts, was zum Seienden erst von außen hinzukommt. Noch weniger ist sie ein Mangel im Sinne einer abträglichen Beschränkung. Der von der Grenze her sich bändigende Halt, das Sich-Haben, worin das Ständige sich hält, ist das Sein des Seienden, macht vielmehr erst das Seiende zu einem solchen im Unterschied zum Unseienden. Zum Stand kommen heißt darnach: sich Grenze erringen, er-grenzen." (EM 64)

We have already seen when describing the trees and their holding together in the previous section, that it is their limits, their outlines that hold the trees together and enable their still being there, still coming to presence. We observed that the trees would continue to be and to appear as long as the limits that outline them hold the opening and do not collapse. In the passage above, Heidegger also stresses the necessity of a limit and that “the self-restraining hold that comes from a limit ... is what first makes a being be a being as opposed to a nonbeing.” Other aspects of $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\sigma$ in this passage are the following: a) the limit has to do with the free presencing of the entities, b) it does not come to the entity from the outside, and c) it is not to be understood as a deficiency or a detrimental restriction. All three of these aspects are connected to each other, as well as to the first aspect of the limit having to do with presencing and the being of an entity. Let us look at some of Heidegger’s later texts where he talks about $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\sigma$, to clarify it further, and also to confirm that already in 1935, this notion of limits is quite in tune with Heidegger’s later thought.

In “Building Dwelling Thinking” (1951), Heidegger mentions $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\sigma$ when describing how a thing like a bridge can gather a fourfold because it is already a location and as such allows for a space and makes room for the gathering of the fourfold.

A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary. Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds. (BDT152)⁴⁵

Here again, as in the previously quoted passage, we see the mentioning of *πέρας* as relating to something free (a more appropriate translation, in this case, would be “freely-given”), and the aspect of limit not having a character of detrimental restriction is perhaps echoed here in different words when saying that limit is not something at which the entity stops, but, on the contrary, something from which it begins coming to presence.

Both of these aspects of *πέρας*, as well as the gathering quality mentioned in the context of the bridge, are also repeated by Heidegger in *Der Satz vom Grund* (1955-6):

⁴⁵ “Ein Raum ist etwas Eingeräumtes, Freigegebenes, nämlich in eine Grenze, griechisch *πέρας*. Die Grenze ist nicht das, wobei etwas aufhört, sondern, wie die Griechen es erkannten, die Grenze ist jenes, von woher etwas *sein Wesen beginnt*. Darum ist der Begriff: *ὁρισμός*, d. h. Grenze. Raum ist wesentlich das Eingeräumte, in seine Grenze Eingelassene.” (BWD 156)

Bounds and limits⁴⁶ are not equivalent. Usually we mean a limit as that where something stops. But, according to the ancient Greek sense, a limit always has a character of an assembling, not of a cutting-off. A limit is that from whence and wherein something commences, emerges as that which it is. ... A limit does not ward off something, it brings the shape of presencing to light and supports this presencing. (PR 72)⁴⁷

So let us talk a bit more about this free presencing within a limit. It sounds like a paradox to us Westerners, for being free is associated with precisely not being limited. This is the most bold and radical way of interpreting freedom, human freedom, of course, and even among the French existentialists, there is a tension between Sartre's radical take on freedom and Merleau-Ponty's and Beauvoir's much milder take and greater awareness of the factors that limit and influence human freedom. The freedom of human choice, the freedom to act in a certain way, however, is not what Heidegger is talking about, though he is likely aware of the immediate negative association of

⁴⁶ Note, that here the limits (*Grenze*) are juxtaposed with "bounds" (*Schranke*), these are not the same "bounds" that are occasionally used in other texts to translate πέρας, *Grenze*.

⁴⁷ "Schranke und Grenze sind nicht das gleiche. Gewöhnlich meinen wir, die Grenze sei jenes, wobei etwas aufhört. Aber die Grenze hat – nach dem alten griechischen Sinn – durchaus den Charakter des Versammelns, nicht des Abscheidens. Grenze ist jenes, von woher und worin etwas anfängt, aufgeht als das, was es ist. ... Die Grenze wehrt nicht ab, sie hebt die Gestalt ans Licht des Anwesens heraus und trägt dieses." (SG 106-7)

“infringement and violation of our freedom” we jump to when we hear the word “limit.” Perhaps this is why Heidegger stresses that the limit is not to be understood as “deficiency and detrimental restriction.” How then are we to understand this notion of a limit?

Perhaps something like an old Eastern proverb would be helpful to illustrate in a simple way the paradoxical truth Heidegger is bringing to us. It is said that if the grain is just dumped on a pile in a shed, and if it is left lying there “freely,” it will be flattered away, eventually wasted. And yet, if it is put in sacks (that is, provided a limit), then it will be raised high, it will come to presence much more powerfully, will show itself more, and, in the end, will be preserved, will last. Of course, Heidegger is not talking about some limit as external as sacks to grain, but instead about something essential to entities themselves, their being, but this proverb illustrates quite well how boundaries or limits have a gathering quality that enables entities to shine forth, rather than being dominated. A similar notion is at work in North Indian Classical music, which requires extreme creativity and improvisation on the spot during the performance, and yet, it must be done within stringent rules of a particular raga. It is exactly those rules, which limit so precisely what cannot be done, what does not belong to that raga, and what could and should be done, that make the artist's creativity spring forth to a much higher level than otherwise. Yet, we have still not figured out what this has to do with being free.

For Heidegger, human freedom is never about arbitrary voluntarism; on the contrary, it is defined through relating to greater meaning, taking on one's being or one's destiny, living it out. Here is what Heidegger says in 1955 in "The Question Concerning Technology":

Always the destining of revealing holds complete sway over man. But that destining is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens and hears [*Hörender*], and not one who is simply constrained to obey [*Höriger*]. (QT 25)⁴⁸

Here, as well as in other places, Heidegger plays with the origin of the German word "to belong" (*gehören*), which is directly related to hearing (*hören*). Hearing requires listening and awaiting, being quiet rather than running around and doing things, preparing oneself to be able to discern and to take it on, so that destiny then becomes revealed. Such hearing grows into belonging. Perhaps, it is about hearing Hölderlin's "voices of destiny," earth, sky, god and human, that are, in the intimacy of their

⁴⁸ "Immer durchwaltet den Menschen das Geschick der Entbergung. Aber es ist nie das Verhängnis eines Zwanges. Denn der Mensch wird gerade erst frei, insofern er in den Bereich des Geschickes gehört und so ein Hörender wird, nicht aber ein Höriger." (FT 25-26)

belonging to each other, held together and mediated by destiny, which is their middle.

(HEHE 188, HEHD 163)

Freeing, when it is directed towards other entities as well, not just to human beings, is an important aspect of dwelling within the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities and mortals. It has the character of sparing, taking care of other entities, helping them rest within their own being, shine forth as what they really are. Here is what Heidegger says in “Building Dwelling Thinking”:

To free really means to spare. The sparing itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm the one whom we spare. Real sparing is something *positive* and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, when we “free” it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace. (BDT 147)⁴⁹

Here “nature” translates *Wesen*, the essence, which, as Heidegger’s marginal note from 1967 suggests, has to do with *Eigenes*, one’s own, and *Ereignis*. So, coming back to the

⁴⁹ “Freien bedeutet eigentlich schonen. Das Schonen selbst besteht nicht nur darin, daß wir dem Geschonten nichts antun. Das eigentliche Schonen ist etwas *Positives* und geschieht dann, wenn wir etwas zum voraus in seinem Wesen belassen, wenn wir etwas eigens in sein Wesens zurückbergen, es entsprechend dem Wort freien: einfrieden.” (BWD 151)

limits, they are not constricting and violating because they are not artificial, but, on the contrary, integral and organic limits of what and how things are or can grow to be.

After this brief overview of the notion of limits in Heidegger's texts that are firmly established in the later period of his thought, let us also take a look at some of the texts that are slightly earlier, starting with Heidegger's 1946 interpretation of Anaximander in "Anaximander's Saying." This text, as we will see, is important for the phenomena in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* because it captures the shift in the relationship between entities and being that is developing as one feels out and gets to know this painting. Anaximander's τὸ χρεών also seems to have inspired Heidegger's notion of *Brauch*, usage, which is appearing next to *Ereignis* in some of Heidegger's latest marginal notes, and so we can assume that it was meaningful to Heidegger till the very end.

Anaximander fragment is about how entities that are present relate to each other as well as to that which defines them, that is, τὸ χρεών, the usage. The entities arrive into the realm of presence, stay for a while, and then depart away into absence, according to the usage, τὸ χρεών:

Usage hands over what is present to its presencing; to, that is, its while.

Usage imparts to it the portion of its while. The while, apportioned in each case to what stays, rests in the jointure which disposes what presences in

the passage between the two absences (arrival and departure). The jointure of the while confines and bounds what presences as such a thing. That which presences awhile, τὰ ἐόντα, presences within its boundary (πέρας). (AS 277)⁵⁰

The presencing of entities here is defined as a while throughout which they remain, or as Heidegger puts it, “rest” in the realm of present entities. The while of their rest is limited on both sides with their transitions to and from that realm. The transition of the entities within the while apportioned to them by τὸ χρεών, is seen as “rest,” perhaps because it is not a movement as a change of location but a growth, maturing, and then decay, through which an entity remains present. The drastic transition is the crossing of the borderline or the limit between being present still and not being present anymore. It is that transition of the trees that is one of the key aspects of Harris’s Beaver Swamp. Perhaps it is interesting to note on the side that in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger mentions death as the limit of limits when talking about Sophocles’ choral ode in *Antigone*:

⁵⁰ “Der Brauch händigt das Anwesende in sein Anwesen aus, d.h. in das Weilen. Der Brauch erteilt dem Anwesenden den Anteil seiner Weile. Die je erteilte Weile des Weiligen beruht in der Fuge, die Anwesendes zwischen das zweifache Abwesen (Herkunft und Hingang) übergänglich verfügt. Die Fuge der Weile be-endet und be-grenzt das Anwesende als ein solches. Das je-weilig Anwesende, τὰ ἐόντα, west in der Grenze (πέρας).” (SA 368)

There is only *one* thing against which all violence-doing directly shatters.
That is death. It is an end beyond all completion, a limit beyond all limits.
(IM 168)⁵¹

Back to Anaximander, usage, τὸ χρεών is one of the early names for being, Heidegger says. It is that which rules over both domains, that of the present and that of the absent, as well as over the borderlines that divide one from the other and the boundaries which allow the present entities to appear from “out of absence” for a while.

Usage, however, disposing order and so containing that which presences, hands out boundaries. As τὸ χρεών, therefore, it is at the same time τὸ ἄπειρον, that which is without boundaries since its essence consists in sending the boundary of the while to that which presences awhile. (AS 277)⁵²

⁵¹ “Nur an *einem* scheitert alle Gewalt-tätigkeit unmittelbar. Das ist der Tod. Er überendet alle Vollendung, er über-grenzt alle Grenzen.” (EM 167)

⁵² “Der Brauch aber, der, den Fug verfügend, das Anwesende be-endet, händigt Grenze aus und ist so als τὸ χρεών zugleich τὸ ἄπειρον, das, was ohne Grenze ist, insofern es darin west, die Grenze der Weile dem je-weilig Anwesenden zu schicken.” (SA 368)

We will come back to Anaximander's τὸ χρεών still in this chapter. For now, it has to be noted that the limits in Heidegger's interpretation of Anaximander are "temporal," they define the while of the presencing of entities. We will see soon how the passing of time is also manifesting in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* through the departure of trees and the approach of light. The gradual dissolution of trees themselves, and their disappearance underneath the clouds that are covering them up, their strained halfway presence, also shows the temporal quality and the borderline between still being present and appearing no more. But the sense of boundaries and limits brought about by the outlines of the trees has more of a "spatial" rather than temporal sense, and seems much closer to the understanding of outline and figure in "The Origin of the Work of Art."

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," the "figure" (*Gestalt*) brought forth in an artwork appears as a rift (*Riß*) between the world as that which opens and unconceals, and the earth which is the sheltering and the self-concealing within everything unconcealed and which gives a solid ground for the unconcealed to rest on:

As a world opens itself up, however, the earth rises up. It shows itself as that which bears all, as that which is secure in its law and which constantly closes itself up. World demands its decisiveness and measure and allows beings to attain to the openness of its paths. Earth, bearing and

rising up, strives to preserve its closedness and to entrust everything to its law. (OWA 38)⁵³

In the “strife” between the world and the earth, the truth shines forth through the artwork, which is “fixed” within the boundaries of its “figure.”

This strife which is brought into the rift-design, and so set back into the earth and fixed in place, is the figure [Gestalt]. The createdness of the work means: the fixing in place of truth in the figure. Figure is the structure of the rift in its self-establishment. The structured rift is the jointure [Fuge] of the shining of truth. (OWA 38)⁵⁴

Heidegger does not refer to the Greek understanding of boundary or limit in the main text of the original lecture. However, in the 1956 Addendum to “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger clarifies:

⁵³ “Indem aber eine Welt sich öffnet, kommt die Erde zum Ragen. Sie zeigt sich als das alles Tragende, als das in sein Gesetz Geborgene und ständig Sichverschließende. Welt verlangt ihre Entschiedenheit und ihr Maß und läßt das Seiende in das Offene ihrer Bahnen gelangen. Erde trachtet, tragend-aufragend sich verschlossen zu halten und alles ihrem Gesetz anzuvertrauen.” (UK 50-1)

⁵⁴ “Der in den Riß gebrachte und so in die Erde zurückgestellte und damit festgestellte Streit ist die Gestalt. Geschaffensein des Werkes heißt: Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt. Sie ist das Gefüge, als welches der Riß sich fügt. Der gefugte Riß ist die Fuge des Scheinens der Wahrheit.” (UK 51)

“Fixed” means: outlined, admitted into the boundary (πέρας), brought into the outline The boundary, in the Greek sense, does not block off but, rather, as itself something brought forth, first brings what is present to radiance. The boundary sets free into unconcealment: by means of its outline, the mountain stands in the Greek light in its towering and repose. (OWA 53)⁵⁵

The visuality and spatial sense of the towering and repose of the mountain, which is secured by the outline of its figure, by the πέρας, as said here by Heidegger, is very relevant to the trees of Harris. As noted earlier, the trees in many of Heidegger’s later paintings, for example, in the *Northern Lake*, have a very relaxed, but at the same time, collected and healthy composure. Their posturality will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, the trees of the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* lack both the towering and the repose mentioned by Heidegger. They are strained and shaky, and their failing composure contributes to a clear perceptual understanding of their dying, their imminent incapacity of continuing to come to presence for much longer. It makes sense

⁵⁵ “ ‘Fest’ besagt: umrissen, in die Grenze eingelassen (πέρας), in den Umriß gebracht (S. 51f.). Die Grenze im griechischen Sinne riegelt nicht ab, sondern bringt als hervorgebrachte selber das Anwesende erst zum Scheinen. Grenze gibt frei ins Unverborgene; durch seinen Umriß im griechischen Licht steht der Berg in seinem Ragen und Ruhen.” (UK 71)

that the failing of their “spatial” πέρας would be happening simultaneously with their temporal πέρας coming due and to an end. It also makes sense that both of these would be manifesting the crossing of limits between the word, that which comes to presence, that which exists and which is revealed, and the sphere of non-existence, of complete concealedness. It really takes an artist of Harris’s caliber to be able to show such heavy and difficult “metaphysical” phenomena visually. It is also amazing to see that while the literal visual and “bodily” outlines of particular trees are gradually failing, the trees also lose their inner structure or inner composure, as well as that live and shifting πέρας between the coming to presence of an entity on one end and the concealedness from which it appears on the other. It is unbelievable that in the trees of this painting, one can see the togetherness of the three: a) the rift as the outline and a sketch, and the limit that holds an entity together and lets it shine forth in its essence, b) the temporal rift, the stretching and breaking off of time and presencing within and through time, c) the rift of presencing itself as the relation between an entity that comes to presence and the concealed realm or source from which the presencing unfolds, with which it is continuously though mysteriously connected, and to which it ultimately returns into concealedness.

Let us now make a few remarks about how in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” which is still relatively early, Heidegger brings out several key notions of his later thought. Even though they are still seen slightly differently, with their help we will be

able also to make a few important comments about earth and sky, and their relationship with each other and with the trees in *Beaver Swamp*.

First of all, let us consider earth and world in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Even though in later texts earth is paired with the sky, and the world is the whole fourfold of the mirroring play of earth, sky, divinities and mortals, yet the descriptions of earth as rising up and sheltering back into itself, the mentioning of its laws and measure, and of the way it comes up and recedes back, sheltering everything that arises and providing a ground to human dwelling in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” are very much in tune with the later notion of the earth of the fourfold.

The relationship between the “opposites” earth and world is called strife (*Streit*) here, possibly still under the influence of Nietzsche or perhaps the Greeks. However, Heidegger insists that it should not be understood as mere discord or destruction and refers to the intimacy of their belonging together, through which each helps the other to manifest fully in its essence. One can see how this earlier notion of strife between earth and world could develop later into the marriage of earth and sky, the echoing of the voices of destiny, and the round dance of the four folds of the fourfold.

The notion of the rift (*Riß*) is not yet the rift of the difference, of *Ereignis*, but it already holds some of the subtleties on how rift is understood in the later works. It also relates to several other important keywords of the later period. Already in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” rift works in two different ways. Firstly, it is the rift between the

“equal” grand opposites earth and world, similar to the middle between the folds of the fourfold in “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven,” or the rift of difference between poetry and thinking in “The Nature of Language.” Secondly, the rift also “rifts” between the earth as coming-forth sheltering ground and the concrete artwork bound by its “outline” similarly to the rift of difference between thing and world in “Language.” Both of these ways that the rift separates while at the same time bringing together can be seen in the way Harris works on edges and limits in *Beaver Swamp*. Through the outlines of the trees, one can see both the relationship between earth and a particular tree and also the way earth and sky come together and bring each other out, support and “respect” each other. Let us see in more detail how these relationships between the earth and the tree, as well as the earth and the sky, work in the painting and how they are brought out by the phenomenon of a limit or a rift.

As has been said before, the edges and limits of the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* are cut out very clearly, and that is one of the signatures of Harris’s style, even though in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, they are still much messier than in the later paintings. The shape created by these edges of the trees maintains, though barely, the opening, through which the trees are still coming to presence, even though their coming to presence is strained, shaky, and receding. The tree trunks with their sharply cut edges look like grooves, like channels, through which the earth itself comes into a particular shape of the tree, takes on its inner structure, its density and flexibility, a way in that the

tree remains, Heidegger would say “whiles” (*weilt*) as a tree, not as a mountain, or a boulder, or a lake. It is amazing to see in this painting how the brown of the earth literally goes into the brownness of the tree trunks. If seen from close-up, the very grain of the canvas, its most earthy quality, can be clearly seen in all “things of the earth,” most of all in the tree trunks. The earth grows into the trees, and the trees turn back into the earth, both in their living mode with their roots growing into the earth, and eventually also quite literally after they die. At the same time, the tree takes on the density, the fleshiness of the earth, letting it come forth and manifest itself through the shape of the tree, through solidity and sturdiness of the dry ground, or through the rotting and vulnerability of the wood flooded by a swamp as is the case here. Habitually we want to ask, which one is primary, the earth or the tree, which one takes the other on. However, it seems that this type of question is still a question of ‘metaphysics’ in Heidegger’s bad sense. Here it seems rather that both the earth and a thing take on each other for some time. The painting shows in a surprisingly simple and clear manner how the relationship between a particular entity, a thing and a sort of generality, a sort of “element,” a fold of the world (of the fourfold for later Heidegger) is not a relationship of domination or one-way founding, but rather that of a two-way give and take; a chiasm⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ We will be discussing Merleau-Ponty’s *chiasm* in more detail in Part 2 of the dissertation.

It is no less remarkable to see in this painting the togetherness of earth and sky. The earth can only take on that entity, become a tree, provided that the sky also opens up, separates and creates an opening within itself, into which the earth can come forth in the form of an entity, a thing. It is the sky in this painting that opens out, creating a space for the trees to appear into. It is also the sky that eventually will cover up the trees and will make them disappear “under the clouds.” It is the sky that holds and gently supports the trees with the clouds, and it is also the sky that determines the time, the while of the trees’ staying present, and the limits of that presence. It is the sky that closes up, gradually covers the trees with its clouds, and calls the end of their day. It is unbelievable to see how strongly the sky comes out from under Harris’s brush. That which for us is nothing, or at most just air, which conceals itself from us so much more than even the earth does, the sky that has become invisible and empty to us, for Harris is thick and full. From the close-up, one can see that underneath the clouds in Harris’s painting, there are lines and shapes, barely covered up by the surface of the clouds. They seem to look like scars in the sky, like the traces of past things or past happenings which the sky holds and hides within itself.

There is a phrase of Hölderlin which Heidegger quotes both in “...Poetically Man Dwells...” and in “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven” and which is otherwise quite puzzling. It is translated in two slightly different ways, saying: “The earth moves, and

the heaven holds.”(PMD 221) or “The earth goes, and heaven stays.”(HEHE 191)⁵⁷ In the first case, Heidegger refers to the relationship between the earth and the sky in the context of the measure that defines the dwelling of a human, who dwells on earth and under the sky. The measure which defines the essence of a human has to do with the “interplay” (*Ineinander*), literally speaking, in-each-other-ness of earth and sky. In the second case, it is about the sounding of the voices of destiny, how the sky rings out, and the earth responds to the sky and moves, pursuing “great laws,” here referring to the laws by which Sophocles’ *Antigone* abides.

This phrase is puzzling because we can perhaps see how the sky moves, changes all the time, while it is the earth that stays, and holds, harbors and supports, but Hölderlin, and following him Heidegger, are pointing out the opposite. However, in doing a phenomenological hermeneutic reading of Harris’s *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, one can begin to see both how the earth moves, how it rises up and becomes manifest as a tree, a boulder, a patch of color, while the sky holds these earthy entities together, keeps them whole, provides them with limits that define their presencing and allow them to appear. One can see how at other times, or perhaps also at the same time, it is the sky that moves and changes, while the earth provides thickness and stability, grounding and support for the sky’s moving and changing forms and manifestations. It is indeed a dance between earth and sky, in which mortals and, hopefully divinities as well, also

⁵⁷ “gehet die Erd und der Himmel hält.”(DWM 202, HEHD 166)

take part and inter-play, and in which particular entities, like these trees in *Beaver Swamp*, become the place of gathering of the folds of the fourfold.

3.4. The crack in the sky as an entrance into the depth

One more thing needs to be mentioned with regard to what happens with the trees with their sharply cut-out edges or boundaries, before we move on to the next set of phenomena. The edges of the trees outline the contrast between the thick layers of paint in the sky around the trees and the dark flesh of the trees themselves. The flesh of the trees is painted such that the thin layer of brown paint barely covers the canvas, and the grainy texture of the canvas is visible through the paint, as if the trees are showing the very materiality of the wood, the very structure of matter under the surface. This contrast between the thick layers of paint of the clouds on one side of the limit of the trees, and the grainy and rough texture of the trunks on the other side, makes the eyes travel along the boundaries, eventually sinking into the dark depths, right into the flesh of the trees. Harris repeats this technique in other paintings, most noticeably with the tree trunks but also with hills and lakes. It has something to do with the clear cut edges and the contrast in the thickness of paint, but also depends on the contrast of color, in this case, the darkness of the wood on the background of light grey clouds.

The difference made by the color of the tree trunks can be clearly seen in *Above Lake Superior* (1924), where the dark patches on the light-colored trunks create stunning

visual effects. The light parts of tree trunks in *Above Lake Superior* look like they are protruding from their background towards the viewer, filling out the volume of the trees to the point that these trees have been called “sculptural.” Larisey comments about the sculpturality of the trees in *Above Lake Superior*:

What prompted Bakst to dub the work ‘sculpture’ is probably the way that the solidity of the smooth foreground trees is exaggerated by the light coming from the left. One becomes immediately aware of the illusion of their three-dimensionality, as though they were smoothly carved and polished figures. (Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land*, 92)

In contrast, the dark parts of the same tree trunks, instead of standing out towards the viewer, are rather protruding in the opposite direction. The shadiness brought on by the darker brown pigment seems to open up the depth within these dark patches making the eyes sink right into that depth instead of gliding on the surface like they do with the white parts of the trunks. The dark patches do not look sculptural; they do not have a well filled-out volume, nor the quality of solid smooth surface. Rather they remind one of the inverted spatial cavities and negative volume of Archipenko’s sculptures.

Similarly, in *North Shore, Lake Superior* (1926), while the sight glides upwards along the lit part of the tree stump, the shaded part pulls the sight down right towards the ground

and eventually into the darkness of the earth. The dark side of the trunk merges with the blackness of the crack, which separates the lit side from the shaded one. Even though the stump looks very solid and sculptural, Larisey notes: "Its hollowness is also clearly felt." (Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land*, 92-93) So here too, as in *Above Lake Superior*, Harris contrasts the positive volume in sculptural qualities of brightly lit trunks with the negative volume of hollowness and depth exposed by the dark parts. In all three paintings, the darkness of the tree trunks pulls the sight of the viewer right through what should be the surface into the depth, though the intensity of the pull and the depth which it reaches is different in each painting. In *North Shore, Lake Superior* and in several places in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the pull into the depth is strengthened by black lines that go along the some trunks and make the visual experience very different from that of the regular brown-colored trunks. The depth that is opening out through the contours of the tree trunks strengthens the impression of their organic, natural connection with the earth; it also supports the trees' gradual departure from the sphere of presence into darkness and concealment of the earth. However, the most stunning play of surface and depth in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* shows itself through the "black crack" in the sky, so we will discuss.

Besides the trees with their dying yet still alive presence in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, there are also a few thinner trunks that look completely dead. One of them stands out. It is not crowded by other trunks or branches, and it sticks into the sky

almost in the middle of the painting, cutting right through the bright spot on the horizon where the sky has the thickest, most solid-looking coat of white and yellowish paint. This one dead trunk looks even more shabby and uneven than others. It thins out towards the top, but then quite unnaturally thickens up at the very tip, and the more one looks at it, the more it does not look like a tree, nor even a dried-up stick, but rather seems like the surface of paint has cracked, or the canvas has been ripped open. As opposed to the trees whose trunks are still mostly brown, the “crack” is covered by a thin coat of black paint, which gives it a particular sharpness and an eerie quality of mysteriousness and uneasiness.

Even though there is a lot of movement and unsteadiness in this painting, still everything seems to maintain and hold its “look,” its surface quality, which is in some way a measure of its presence, at least for our eyes. Even the brown tree trunks, while receding into the depth, still maintain the thickness and fullness of the earth that is showing itself through them. Unlike the trees, that still have the volume and the body that is outlined by their edges, the crack is so thin that it seems that it is just the “rift” itself. There is nothing being outlined by it, there is no “substance” showing itself in that rift. Especially when seen from some distance, the “crack” seems to open into the vastness of vacuous darkness, of the nothingness far more strange and intangible than the full and thick darkness of the earth. It is no accident that the “crack” that opens into this realm is made by a trunk that is completely dead, not by the dying trees that still

have some juice of life flowing through them. The blackness of it also, as mentioned earlier, is very different from the brown color of the other trunks. The way that the blackness of the crack cuts into the eye makes it feel hard while at the same time empty. The crack really stands out in this painting like a kiss of death, which seems hermetically closed into itself, and yet at the same time, opening out into the immeasurable and the unknown on “the other side” of it. Heidegger says about death in “The Thing” (1950):

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. (TH 176)⁵⁸

What the crack holds and lends us a peak into is not a thing, it is not an entity, something actual or existent. Rather, it seems to provide an entrance and give a glimpse into that, which in some mysterious way lies underneath the “canvas of appearance” of

⁵⁸ “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.” (D 180)

that which is presenting itself to us, perhaps even further than the depths of earth and sky.

Here in this painting, the crack does not really open up, it remains only a peek into the mysterious darkness of being itself, but we see how it can be developed later when working on Harris's *Northern Lake*. We will see again in *Northern Lake* how much Harris works on the contrast of surface and depth, how he just loves putting them side by side, fascinated by the way that contrast shows itself in concrete entities, things like trees, boulders, hills and mountains, as well as in field-like phenomena of water and sky. We will see how Harris explores different qualities of light and shadow that can make our sight glide on surfaces but also penetrate through surfaces into depth, shadows and darkness. In *Norther Lake* we will see the next iteration of the "crack in the sky" which is present there as a hill that contains within itself the thickness of depth and the vastness of the abyss, full and empty at the same time.

3.5. The space of the painting and the screening quality of the trees

Several spatial aspects of Beaver Swamp were already mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, in particular, the differences between "the space of the trees" and "the space of light" and the perceptions created by the tilt of the sky and the clouds' framing of the trees. In this section, we will take a more detailed look at the screen of trees and how it supports the shift from the foreground "space of the trees" towards

and into the light coming from the bright spot on the horizon. This will conclude the theme of transitions, which has been perhaps the most laborious part of the work on this painting, and which will allow us to move on to the final, most interesting part of the discussion of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*.

The “screen of trees” in the foreground is a technique of spatial composition Harris uses in many of his paintings, starting with the early urban landscapes, according to Larisey, under the influence of the Secession painters Liebermann, Leistikow, Munch, but also Manet, whose work he encountered during his studies in Berlin in 1904-1908 (Larisey, 10-13). In the early Algoma period, Harris seems to change his preference to portraying “the wall of wilderness,” where nothing but the wall of trees and bush is visible. Towards the middle of the Algoma period, one starts seeing the sky and some depth of space in Harris’s paintings, and eventually back to using the screen of trees, through which the viewer sees far into the distance, experiencing the vastness of open space. *Beaver Swamp* is one of the first paintings in the Algoma period where Harris is using the screen of trees again:

Beaver Swamp, Algoma, its foreground plain of spruce notwithstanding, indicates a new interest in deep space. The glow of light from behind a low horizon pulls our eye to the distant shore, while the scale of the small rounded volumes of forest trees is emphasized by the repoussoir effect of

the screen of dead trees. (Adamson, *Urban Scenes and Wilderness Landscapes*, 94)

The “screen of trees” not only adds the perspective of depth to the painting; it also, along with the light mentioned by Adamson, pulls the sight of the viewer through the open gaps between the trees into the background plane. The screen plays a double role here. On one hand, it divides the foreground of the painting from the background, the “here” from the “there.” The web of trunks and branches is thick on the sides of the painting, and manages to cover quite a lot in those areas. Especially during the initial look at the painting, before it starts brightening and clearing up, one feels rather limited in the “here” of the trees, unable to reach through the screen into the sphere of light. On the other hand, though, the screen is not solid, it is transparent, and there is a clear gap in the middle of the painting between the two main groups of trees.

After some time with the painting, the viewer is pulled through this gap into a widening sphere of the light that comes from the bright spot in the middle of the horizon, while the bright spot itself seems to be moving further and further away. So the screen also, besides dividing the painting into the “here” and the “there” is the very thing that brings the “here” and the “there” together. The viewer is pulled through the screen from “here” to “there”, and the continuance between the “here” and “there” is created and maintained by that movement. The screen of trees in this painting is itself a

rift, a borderline which both separates and gathers together, similarly to the threshold in Trakl's poem, and the pain which "has turned the threshold to stone," which separates and at the same time gathers together the difference between the things and the world in Heidegger's 1950 lecture "Language":

But what is pain? Pain rends. It is the rift. But it does not tear apart into dispersive fragments. Pain indeed tears asunder, it separates, yet so that at the same time it draws everything to itself, gathers it to itself. Its rending, as a separating that gathers, is at the same time that drawing which, like the pen-drawing of a plan or sketch, draws and joins together what is held apart in separation. (L 201-2)⁵⁹

In this painting, the screen of trees becomes that separating-gathering phenomenon, which works both spatially, separating while at the same time merging together the place of the trees and the place of light. It also works in temporal ways, as we will see in the next section, first separating the "here" of the trees from the "there" of light, then enabling and supporting the transition from the first to the second, and then again,

⁵⁹ "Doch was ist Schmerz? Der Schmerz reißt. Er ist der Riß. Allein, er zerreißt nicht in auseinanderfahrende Splitter. Der Schmerz reißt zwar auseinander, er scheidet, jedoch so, daß er zugleich alles auf sich zieht, in sich versammelt. Sein Reißen ist als das versammelnde Scheiden zugleich jenes Ziehen, das wie der Vorriß und Aufriß das im Schied Auseinandergehaltene zeichnet und fügt." (S 24)

when the viewer shifts into the sphere of light and into the bodily attitude attuned by the light, the screen of trees seem to be left behind, and again to separate the present “here” of the light from the past of the place of trees, without annihilating it, but clearly closing it off and keeping it away.

It will be useful to compare the space of trees and different quality of the screen in *Beaver Swamp* and *Above Lake Superior* to see the other aspects that strengthen or weaken the pull through the screen. Larisey describes the space of trees in *Above Lake Superior* in the following way:

Dark branches on the ground on the lower left resemble the converging straight lines in a perspective diagram. Their function is to ensure that the viewer experiences the foreground of the painting as three-dimensional. The smooth trees, lit strongly from the side, reiterate the three-dimensionality of the foreground, although they still serve as a screen through which one sees farther into the distance. (Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land*, 91)

The trees in *Above Lake Superior* are growing in a way that they surround and outline the round space between them changing it from an abstract geometrical space into a “real” place. The horizontal dimension of this place of the trees is indeed defined by the logs

lying on the ground, as Larisey suggests. But more than that, the logs that lie on the ground stretch towards the viewer and invite the viewer to be a part of this “circle” of trees. It is the most lit part of the whole painting. The snow on the ground collects and reflects the sunshine like nothing else. The tree trunks also face the sunshine and hold it on their surfaces. The hills, the sky and parts of the lake visible on the horizon are dull compared to this “place of the trees,” which is undoubtedly the most attractive part of the painting, not only visually but also emotionally. It invites and includes the viewer, creating a pleasant, comfortable and friendly atmosphere. Once one enters the space of the trees in *Above Lake Superior*, one feels so comfortable and at home that one would not want to go anywhere else, neither down into the valley nor towards the hill in the background. It feels best to stay right there with the trees.

In the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the situation around the trees is very different, to the point that it feels the opposite of *Above Lake Superior*. Firstly, the viewer is separated from the trees by what seems like dark muddy water. It is unclear what is happening down there from where the trees grow. The water seems to reflect some of the tree trunks and branches and even some light, but these reflections are vague and inaccurate. It is difficult to figure out how the light is picked up and from where and why it would look the way it looks. It is hard to tell whether there is some ground still left where the trees are growing, or the trees have been flooded by the swamp and are now standing in the water. The darkness and muddiness of this part of the painting is

contrasted by the light blue water in the distance, so much so, it feels the the trees are separated from the viewer and seem unapproachable. Secondly, the trees among themselves are not facing each other like the trees in *Above Lake Superior*. They are looming in a row, facing the blue water on the other side, or the light on the horizon, and there is nothing pleasant or inviting in their strained and awkward standing. There is no togetherness, no community, no place where the viewer could feel welcome and comfortable.

The darkness of the “place of trees” in this painting, the confusion it creates in the viewer, its general unpleasant feel, and the inability to be truly a part of it in the first place, all increase the pull of the viewer through the screen from the “here” towards the “there”, in clear contrast with *Above Lake Superior*, where the tendency is to stay with the trees, and to not move through their screen into the background. Perhaps this separation of the viewer from the trees also helps the transition from the sphere of the trees towards the sphere of light on the emotional or affective level, facilitating the shift from the heavy and hopeless sense of the dying trees or the rapture of the red towards a more distanced and accepting attitude and feeling of the light. We will begin the next chapter with a discussion of the shift in the affective perception of the artwork and the temporal aspects of this shift, for through this shift, the presence of light becomes finally fully apparent.

We started this chapter by looking at the space of the painting. We discussed the interplay between the sky and the trees and the compositional lines of the painting, created by the sky, that open out a clear passage between the foreground place of the trees, where the viewer is grounded in the initial stages of experiencing the artwork, and the bright spot in the sky far away on the horizon, whereto the viewer is eventually brought. We then came back to work on the trees and their dying while still living. Unlike in the previous chapter, where we focused on their falling apart and dying; in this chapter we were looking at what is holding them together and how. While seeing that the trees are receding, gradually slipping away, sinking into the depth of concealment, we could see better how it is that they are still appearing, still coming to presence. Here the Greek notion of *πέρας*, the way Heidegger writes about it was of great help. The phenomenology of the dying trees in the painting was equally helpful for understanding this notion as a phenomenon, rather than an abstract concept. It laid a good foundation for continuing to work with this phenomenon as one of the keys to understanding the difference between entities as limited, and being (and holy) as unlimited in the second part of this dissertation where we will work with Harris's *Northern Lake*.

We have concluded this chapter on transitions by coming back again to the space of the painting and seeing how the screen of the trees, as another "limit" or separation line within the painting, divides the sphere of the trees in the foreground from the

sphere of light in the background, while at the same time facilitating the transition of the viewer from the first to the second. In the next chapter, we will look at the sphere of the light, starting with the shifts in the affective attitude and temporary perception of the viewer, which completes the transitions discussed in this chapter and establishes the viewer in the sphere of light. We will then talk about the quality of the light itself and how it changes not only the affective but also the perceptual, cognitive, and motor-practical attitudes of the viewer, shifts the whole bodily attitude. We will then be able to conclude our work on *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, leaving behind the heavy and serious mood of this painting and moving on to a completely different, elevated mood of *Northern Lake*, where we will feel the touch of the holy, and the healing quality of that touch.

Chapter 4: The brightening of light

This last chapter on Lawren S. Harris's *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* is, perhaps, the most interesting, for here we can finally discuss in detail the change or shift in the bodily attitude. This shift will enable us to start feeling out and relating to the phenomena of being and the holy, instead of being locked into attitudes that predispose us to relating only to entities and to forgetting being or not noticing it. The painting here is very helpful, for it already contains within itself both polarities, which we have designated as "the place of the trees" and "the place of light." Both work really well attuning our bodily attitude in two distinct ways, teaching us what each of them feels like, and also eventually, how to shift from one to the other. Once we have felt this difference in attitude enough, once we know different aspects of it, we can try to emulate it even without the presence of the painting, in a manner similar to how Merleau-Ponty describes the "actions" we take to help ourselves fall asleep: "... I call up the visitation of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper." (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 163) Sometimes we manage to achieve the shift of attitude quite successfully, other times not so much, and yet, it is a possibility that opens up as opposed to a state when that possibility seems baffling and unusual, and as such remains closed.

We will start the chapter with a section on the change of the emotional or affective attitude, from the hopeless and desperate feeling created by the dying of the

trees to the accepting and even slightly hopeful feeling to which the light on the horizon attunes us. The feeling created by the white light in the painting is not quite joyful like it is in *Northern Lake*, but it is serene and content, and it opens the possibility for joy to enter and eventually settle in. In the first section of the chapter, we will again revisit Heidegger's interpretation of Anaximander's fragment, for there also there is the shift in the attitude towards being, and it is quite similar to the shift we experience in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, so it is helpful to discuss.

The last section of this chapter and our work on *Beaver Swamp* is looking at the shift of attitude in the aspects of our phenomenological body other than the social-affective. We start with sense perception, mainly with vision, for it seems to be responding most clearly to this particular artwork. Of course, vision is central in perceiving any painting. Yet, in the fabric of *chiasms* and folds of the multitude of our bodily experiences, in some artworks, like Harris's *Lake and Mountains*, the spatial perception seems to be coming out more, while in others, like *Northern Lake*, the sense of tactility and viscosity is felt more than in others. Here, in *Beaver Swamp*, vision seems to have a leading role in engaging the viewer with the artwork and bringing out changes in other bodily faculties. This will conclude our work on the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, and on the part of this project that is mainly working on how we can develop a bodily sense of Heidegger's being. We will then be ready to move on to the next part, working on the notions of holy and hale with the help of Harris's *Northern Lake*.

4.1. Affectivity and temporality

One of the most subtle and yet definitely felt ways that the shift from the sphere of the trees towards the sphere of light takes place in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, is through the change in the general mood and the affective attitude of the viewer. It is attuned most clearly by light and perception of space, which go hand in hand in gradually brightening and opening out the space of the painting and changing its feel for the viewer. In the previous sections, we looked at how the transition manifests itself in the condition of trees and their relationship with earth and sky. Here we will look at the transition in the general mood from a sense of hopelessness or a sort of depressed indifference when dealing with the predicament of the trees, towards acceptance of their death and even a sense of hopefulness, as the painting gradually brightens and the viewer shifts from the sphere of the trees towards the sphere of the light. Again we will draw parallels between the phenomena in the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* and Heidegger's interpretation of Anaximander's fragment. Besides looking at the change of the mood or emotional attitude in a narrow sense, we will also look at the temporal dimension and how it works within the shift of attitude, and the a general shift from dealing with entities and their situation toward relating to being, which will also be continued in the next section.

As we have seen earlier, the sphere of the trees can create two rather different attitudes in the viewer, depending on where one “stands” while approaching the artwork. When the viewer is relating to the trees from a personally close distance, the mood and attitude is attuned most clearly by the red of the branches, which pulls the viewer into strong affects and creates a passionate involvement with the fate of the dying trees. A more distanced look at the artwork, attuned by the trees looming against the cloudy sky, growing from the earth yet on the verge of falling back into the earth, bring about a less expressive, almost indifferent but at the same time heavy and grim feeling. In both of these attitudes, however, the viewer is limited within the space of the trees, which screen off from the viewer the horizon and the possibilities that are hidden in the vicinity of that horizon. When one is still with the trees before the transition into the sphere of light begins, the “here” and the “there” seem to be very clearly divided. The two places are divided not only by the screen of trees themselves, or by the distance between the trees and the light on the horizon, but also by a sense of incompatibility between the two realms. The “here” feels real and ordinary, clearly revealed and in that sense familiar, while what is firmly concealed by the thickness of white paint on the horizon seems to hold layers and layers of the hidden and the mysterious. One feels that there is no way of reaching from here to there while still being here. The trees that are dying and slowly falling apart are sinking into the sky, gradually departing from the “here”. They are ceasing to be present and to show

themselves here. The viewer is left to mourn their death in the place of the trees, which is gradually but inevitably becoming the place of the past, while the future seems to be closed off as long as one is holding on to the dying trees.

The transition of mood, as well as more general bodily attitude, begins very subtly and gradually as the painting itself brightens with time. After just a half an hour with the artwork the painting begins to brighten up with the light coming from the white spot on the horizon; the mood brightens up as well. The mood into which the viewer is attuned to by the white light in *Beaver Swamp* is quite subtle, as if muted. It never reaches the expressiveness of the affects and feelings of the red of the trees, or of the yellow in *Northern Lake*, or of the blue in *Lake and Mountains*. The mood still remains grayish-white, if one can say that about a mood. Yet, the atmosphere of the painting gradually becomes lighter and clearer both in terms of color, in terms of “weight” and also in terms of openness and “airiness” of space. The grayness that fills the whole painting with a sense of misty stuffiness at the initial encounter gives way to a kind of translucency, a “clarity” of space that begins to form in the middle of the painting. Perhaps it is this clarity and airy opening in the atmosphere of the painting that gradually reduces and eventually removes the heaviness of the mood, the feeling of the doomed situation of the trees, as well as the dramatic struggles brought out by the red of the branches, and instead creates at first a sense of acceptance and later even hopefulness. This feeling of acceptance is quite unique, for it is not hinged on the drama

of the trees anymore, and yet neither is it avoidance or denial, when one blocks out what one does not want to see. Quite to the contrary, one is fully aware of the trees and their fate, but their dying becomes somehow natural. One is ready to surrender them to the laws of time. The attitude of acceptance is neither active, not reactive. It is not something one does willfully or is forced to give in to, rather it comes from an internal shift into a different mode, a shift from the preoccupation with the singular trees, and a personal relationship the viewer has developed with them, towards a wider awareness which is somehow brought about by the light.

This shift between the two “places” in the painting, the place of the trees and the place of light, and the simultaneous shift in the viewer’s “mode” or attitude, is similar to Heidegger’s shift in the interpretations of Anaximander’s fragment mentioned earlier. The traditional translations of the fragment interpret it in the way, that the present entities must pay penalty for their injustice, making the whole fragment centered around the notion of “injustice.” Heidegger re-translates ἀδικία as dis-jointure, *Un-Fuge*:

The dis-jointure consists in the fact that what stays awhile tries to have its while understood only as continuation. Thought from out of the jointure of the while, staying as persistence is insurrection on behalf of sheer endurance. In presencing as such – presencing which lets everything that

presences stay in the region of unconcealment – continuance asserts itself.

In this rebellious whiling, that which stays awhile insists on sheer continuation. It presences, therefore, without and against the jointure of the while. (AS 268)⁶⁰

When staying in the place of the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the viewer identifies with the trees, feels for them and with them. They are the only “friends” the viewer has in this painting, at least in a familiarly-personal way. Whether their dying is felt as dramatic and violent when one is attuned by the red of the branches, or desperate and hopeless when one is relating to their looming postures, the viewer is holding on to them with all strength and resists their departure, as one would resist the departure or death of a close friend or a loved one. You wish their while lasted longer, and as their departure is unfolding, you are stretched and strained in the pull between the realm of presence and the realm of absence, concealment, into which they are departing.

⁶⁰ “Die Un-Fuge besteht darin, daß das Je-Weilige sich auf die Weile im Sinne des nur Beständigen zu versteifen sucht. Das Weilen als Beharren ist, von der Fuge der Weile her gedacht, der Aufstand in das bloße Andauern. Im Anwesen selbst, das je das Anwesende in die Gegend der Unverborgenheit ver-weilt, steht die Beständigung auf. Durch dieses Aufständische der Weile besteht das Je-Weilige auf der bloßen Beständigkeit. Das Anwesende west dann ohne und gegen die Fuge der Weile.” (SA 356)

Similarly, the present entities in Anaximander's saying seem to struggle with the boundaries, the limits that define the while between the times of their arrival and departure, perhaps even trying to "stay longer," to remain present beyond their while:

As they while they tarry. They hang on. For in the transition from arrival to departure they pass, hesitantly, through their while. They hang on: they cling to themselves. (AS 270)⁶¹

This mode or attitude of presencing seems quite natural when one is concerned primarily with oneself, one's own presencing, enduring, living, and maintaining the presencing of that which one holds dear. When Heidegger challenges traditional interpretations of Anaximander's fragment, he does that not by denying this tendency of entities. Rather, he shifts the stress from dis-jointure, which perhaps would be inevitable if all we had was the realm of beings, entities, towards the "jointure," *Fuge*. Heidegger says:

The saying does not say that everything that presences loses itself in the dis-jointure. It says, rather, that that which stays awhile with a view to

⁶¹ "Indem sie weilen, verweilen sie. Sie ver-harren. Denn im Übergang von Herkunft zu Hingang durch- gehen sie zögernd die Weile. Sie verharren: sie halten an sich." (SA 359)

dis-jointure, δίδοναι δίκην, gives jointure. (AS 268)⁶²

The entities do struggle. They might try to overstay their time and insist on their own presencing, and yet, with all of that, they do in the end surrender to that “jointure” that defines the limit of each and every entity, that manages the timing and the limits of individual presencing. The shift of attitude is also reflected in a way that Heidegger re-interprets “giving” that is going on here. The giving is no more seen from the perspective of an entity that might have something and give it away. The importance it rather shifted towards that to which the entities give their due:

Giving is not only giving away. More primordial, is giving in the sense of conceding. Giving of this kind lets belong to another what properly belongs to him. (AS269)⁶³

⁶² “Der Spruch sagt nicht, das jeweilig Anwesende verliere sich in die Un-Fuge. Der Spruch sagt, daß das Je-Weilige im Hinblick auf die Un-Fuge δίδοναι δίκην, Fuge gibt.“ (SA 356)

⁶³ “Geben ist nicht nur Weggeben. Ursprünglicher ist das Geben im Sinne des Zugebens. Solches Geben läßt einem anderen das gehören, was als Gehöriges ihm eignet.” (SA556-7)

The giving here is less of an action and more of an attitude, and so it resonates in more than one way with the experience of the change of attitude brought about by the white light in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. Heidegger says that the entities are “giving jointure” by letting jointure (*Fuge*) and order (*Fug*) belong among them and define the limits of their presencing. When they let order belong, by surmounting their tendencies of reckless self-assertion, they also reckon with each other, consider each other, and in a way, care about each other. What used to be a “penalty” that entities had to pay for their injustice in the traditional interpretation of the fragment, is re-translated by Heidegger as “reck” (*Ruch*), a sort of respect that the entities pay to each other, a consideration they give, when they surmount the tendencies of reckless insistence upon their own presencing:

When the things that presence give order they do it by, as things that stay awhile, according each other reck. The surmounting of dis-order properly occurs through the letting-belong of reck. (AS272)⁶⁴

It is in that sense that the trees in the painting seem to accept their own dying and departure. In that way, they relate to the other entities that are coming to presence in

⁶⁴ “Wenn die Anwesenden Fug geben, dann geschieht das in der Weise, daß sie als die Je-Weiligen Ruch geben einander. Die Verwindung des Un-Fugs geschieht eigentlich durch das Gehörenlassen des Ruchs.”(SA361)

the painting, the beavers, the rains and the swamp itself, the moss and humidity, the forest on the horizon, and the air, the clouds, and the sunshine that is subtly oozing through the clouds.

While being attuned by the brightening of the sky and by the clearing out of the space and atmosphere of the painting, the viewer too develops the attitude of acceptance of the situation, and recognizes how limited and closed-off was the previous attitude of suffering together with the trees. It is not a mental recognition; rather, it is felt in emotional, spatial, and temporal sense. After a while of feeling out the light, the painting loses its initial gloomy and ominous feel. Suddenly the swamp does not look deserted and deathly anymore; in fact, the place begins to feel normal and livable. And yet, something more profound is happening. Rather than just shifting from one group of entities to a different one, from one mood to the other, the shift here brings about a deeper change of attitude and capacity, so much so that it is cleared out, brightened and expanded by the light in a way that seemed impossible while one was still anchored in the situation of the dying trees.

With the change of lighting and shift of attention, one gradually shifts into the space beyond the trees, and the trees are left aside, even behind. Of course, the trees are still there, in the painting, right in front, and yet they lose their size and importance. The gap between two groups of trees on the right and the left seems to widen. The viewer enters the realm of light, moves out from the place in-between the trees into the

openness behind the trees. On one hand, the shift between one place and the other seems gradual and smooth, in that these two places are not separate geometrical spaces, and there is no clear border or threshold between the two. Rather, the two places flow and merge into each other. The place of the trees is an almost but not quite yet the place of the light. The place of the light still has the place of the trees as its entrance.

And yet, the change of bodily attitude is so profound and so much grounded in temporality that the passage from the place of the trees to the place of the light is not really a two-way street. Once the light has been met and felt, there is no turning back to the trees and their drama. Once the light of the bright spot on the horizon brightens the whole painting, the trees do not look the same. In fact, once the viewer shifts into the “mode” of the light, the trees do not appear anymore. Of course, they are there, and they are visible, but they do not come together, they do not grab the viewer, instead they recede sideways and into the past, and if they are still present, then only as already sinking into the past. Once the eye has adjusted to the light and has felt the light, it does not want to see anything else in the painting; it keeps coming back to the light, keeps seeking it and sinking into it.

In the re-interpretation of Anaximander’s saying, one shift occurs from a) the attitude of self-centered persistence and disregard of other present entities, towards b) the recognition and respect for the others, the acceptance of the order that limits the presencing of each entity. However, a more important shift brings the reader’s attention

from a) the level on which entities “engage” with each other and come-to-presence alongside each other, towards b) the origin and the source of the order that “regulates” the mutual co-presencing of all entities, to the being of beings. Anaximander names it τὸ χρεών, and it has been traditionally translated as “necessity.” However Heidegger reinterprets and re-translates, drawing on the origin of the Greek word:

χρεών is derived from χράω, χράομαι. This suggests ἡ χεὶρ, the hand.

χράω means: I handle something, reach for it, extend my hand to it. ... Τὸ

χρεών is thus the handing over of presencing, a handing over which

hands out presencing to what is present, and therefore keeps it in hand, in

other words, preserves in presencing, what is present as such. (AS 276)⁶⁵

When Heidegger brings Anaximander’s being, τὸ χρεών, back to its origin from the word hand, it changes very much the way that the relationship between being and entities is thought, and, consequently, the attitude or approach we, as entities, might have to being. Being is not seen anymore as an abstract law of necessity that sweeps

⁶⁵ “In χρεών liegt χράω, χράομαι. Daraus spricht ἡ χεὶρ, die Hand; χράω sagt: ich be-handle etwas, lange danach, gehe es an und gehe ihm an die Hand. ... Τὸ χρεών ist dann das Einhängen des Anwesens, welches Einhängen das Anwesen dem Anwesenden aushändigt und so das Anwesende als ein solches gerade in der Hand behält, d. h. im Anwesen wahr.” (SA 366)

over everything, overpowering and non-considerate. Neither is it a dry universal intelligence that calculates and defines the due time of everything and everyone according to some sort of divine computation. Τὸ χρεών is being that holds each and every entity in its (being's) hand and delivers them into presencing while continuously holding them. To be touched by being in this manner, or, better to say, to be continuously held or embraced by being, implies some sort of care and, if one could say so, direct and "personal" involvement of being with entities. It, in turn, calls for a completely different response from us to being. If we, the entities, are held and protected instead of being judged and sentenced, which was implied in the traditional interpretations of Anaximander's fragment, then our response to such being is not so much fear, rebellion or desperation, but rather trust, respect, and maybe even gratitude.

The shift of the viewer's attitude in *Beaver Swamp* that occurs while moving from the place of the trees into the place of light feels very similar to what would be the shift in attitude to being from the traditional interpretation of Anaximander's fragment to Heidegger's re-interpretation. It is not only the shift from a) relating to present entities towards b) relating to being (the presencing). It is also the shift in attitude towards being itself as that which defines our destiny and our limits, and takes care of us along with all other entities. While the viewer is locked within the sphere of the trees, one is dealing with their death and with a whole range of feelings, mostly reacting against the limits that are cutting short the presencing of the trees. The shift into the sphere of light

washes away these reactive attitudes and allows one to feel out something else. Instead of strain and suffering and the feeling of approaching dull emptiness as the trees are disappearing, one begins to feel a surrendered quietness and an emptiness of a different kind.

The light fills one with an extremely slow and quiet attitude. This stillness is rather emptiness than fullness or solidity; it is a quiet awaiting. It does not yet have the joy of the yellow light of the *Northern Lake*, neither the awe of the blue light of *Lake and Mountains*; it is still quite “neutral,” not yet toned. And yet, there is a clear awareness that this new sense, this ability to feel silence and stillness, is extremely important. It opens up the possibility, creates a place for something to appear, that would have been impossible in the place and the mode of the trees. While in the place of the trees, the “compassion,” the recognition of what would be a common human tragedy in their dying, their “bleeding” and their disintegration, locks us into an entities-oriented and particularized attitude to life and its dramas. The white takes us into a different mode, where the I (he, she, or it) with its particular connections, attachments, projects, becomes less important than the openness and emptiness, the void created by the light.

This section has taken us directly into the light and has given us, hopefully, a good first glimpse of what the light feels like in terms of affective attitudes. While trying to stay within the atmosphere of this white light, let us now retrace a bit from these somewhat ephemeral descriptions of feelings, moods and attitudes, temporal as well as

“social” aspects of the way that the light attunes us, to the perceptual, namely, visual qualities of the white light. We will start in the next section by switching from the noetic descriptions of how the white makes us feel, to the noematic aspect, looking at how it has been painted and what in the painting contributes to this particular atmosphere and feeling. This will inevitably keep bringing us back into the noetic descriptions of sense perception. Phenomenology of the body is about the *chiasm* of the seer and the seen through the seeing, of the one who touches and who is touched through the touching. It is one of the most inspiring and insightful aspects of a bodily phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty’s style, to ponder about and try to understand what it means to say that there is no subject-object divide, what it means that we actually see and touch the things themselves, that we see them with our eyes and touch them with our hands, and not have some abstract impressions of abstract qualities somewhere in our brain or mind of something that might or might not actually exist out there, and might or might not actually be the way it appears to us. This is why, while describing noematically what it is that we see, we will keep shifting to how we see it, and how the painting requires us to see it, and then back again, to what it is we see and how it looks. The next section will provide the core insights about attuning to the white in spheres other than emotional, temporal and partially social that have been already introduced in this section.

4.2. The white light and the shift of attitude

When staying for a while with *Beaver Swamp*, you suddenly find yourself (Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit* indeed) in a strange state of not moving, not thinking, not feeling, just staring at the bright light coming out of the white spot on the horizon. The eyes stop roaming around but instead become suspended. Indeed the whole body with all of its faculties becomes suspended somewhere between the outward projection of oneself or one's capacities and the opposite movement of turning inwards.

The bright-white spot on the horizon is the place where the light is contained before it starts oozing from there and brightens the whole painting as well as the mood of the viewer. It is located right in the middle of the painting and is covered by the thickest layers of paint, which in itself draws the attention of the viewer. This might not be very clear in the reproductions but is obvious in the original artwork. Also, everything else in the painting seems to be bringing the viewer to this bright spot. The waves of the clouds in the sky are leading the eye downwards, the line of the top of the forest on the horizon descends from both sides towards the center, and there, with the additional help of a couple of emerald pines sticking out with their tops, creates a niche for that bright spot. Even the earth and the blue water of the lake seem to be slightly "swelling up" upwards, towards the bright spot on the horizon. Most importantly, though, and most manifestly, the red branches of the trees in the foreground, go out of their way to point directly to that bright whiteness and bring the viewer to it.

The bright spot, however, does not seem approachable, accessible or pierceable. Unlike everything else in the painting that appears to be shifting and in flux, especially the rest of the sky, the bright spot on the horizon looks and feels thick and hard to the point of seeming solid; at least, that is the impression one gets in the initial stages of working with the artwork before it begins to brighten and change. So, there is a puzzling tension experienced by the viewer with this place in the artwork. One is brought there, practically by hand, and yet one cannot get through, one cannot penetrate it. This paradox is quite useful, for it brings us to something new and unexpected. The painting requires us to change our habitual way of approaching and seeing things. Our habitual way while having worked rather well when seeing, feeling out, and understanding the trees and their environment, does not work with the bright spot on the horizon. The tension that the white spot on the horizon holds for the viewer, of being brought to it, and yet not being able to enter into it directly and right away, brings our attention to and teaches us, among other things, also about the dynamic and temporal “stages” or “layers” of perceiving the artwork. The artwork is something that unfolds with time, it is not something that can be captured in a snapshot, and this is one of many reasons why the reproductions are not suitable for really getting to know the painting, and especially for doing a kind of phenomenological work with the art that is done here. The reproductions are static, flat and one-dimensional, and while they are quite helpful for being able to discuss the artwork that one knows “in person,” they are

only a vague shadow of the real thing and cannot give one the in-person experience of the painting. It is quite possible that Harris is using this capacity of the painting to unfold with time more than other artists, for it seems to be one of the key experiences in several of his artworks. In the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, this capacity of the artwork to unfold with time is manifested as the aspects of the artwork change with time if the viewer stays with the artwork for a while. However, the artwork also changes the viewer's attitude, gradually attuning the viewer to what is to be seen and felt. Let us see how this attuning takes place and what is the new attitude that the white spot on the horizon in *Beaver Swamp* attunes the viewer into.

I have already started describing the different modes of vision this artwork teaches us about in the section on the red. The "focused vision," what seems to be our regular vision mode, perhaps enhanced by the red color of the branches that brings it out so clearly, is the one that moves and dances around the details of things. It feels them out incessantly and is really geared into the entities, the particular beings, the concrete shapes, and figures. We looked in detail at how it feels out the entities in the painting. This visual attitude does not work when looking at the white spot on the horizon. If one attempts to reach out and grasp or hold on to the white, it fails. There is nothing for the sight to hold on to in the white spot on the horizon. The white feels thick and heavy. It slows down and eventually incapacitates the usual "interrogative attitude" of the eyes, the vision becomes confused and tries to escape elsewhere. If one

persists, the light floods the eyes with a thick white mist, and the whiteness feels so strong and sharp that it almost hurts the eyes.

In terms of general posture, one feels grounded, somewhat heavy and immobilized, and yet wide-open, stretching out down to the sides, relaxed rather than tensed, under the gaze of the light. Indeed, the feeling is such that the light of the bright spot is looking at you, not vice versa⁶⁶. It is the light that locates the viewer and defines the limits not only of how close one can come towards the light, but also of how one functions when one is in the sphere of that light.

Similarly to sight and motility, the cognitive capacity of the viewer is affected rather dramatically by the white light, which can be quite disturbing, taking into account that one is trying to articulate and describe cognitively what one is feeling. The thought refuses to go; it fades and disappears. One might try to ask oneself some guiding questions, but there is no response. At the same time, the body does not cease to feel out the light of the bright spot, to sink into it, to be affected by it. And yet the body refuses to talk about it, to think about it, to reflect about the experience. This state is similar to the thoughtlessness of Eastern meditation; one stays there, staring at the light, listening to the silence, awaiting, lost in that whiteness, enchanted by it. Yet at the same time, one is fully present, fully aware, fully sensitive, but not to the particulars

⁶⁶ We will see a very similar phenomenon in the *Northern Lake*, and will talk about it in more detail there.

directly present within reach, but, rather to some wider, more general presence, to that, which reaches out beyond the present horizon, both spatial and temporal. This is a state of “just being” as opposed to “doing”; a state of being removed, and yet at the same time strangely grounded; awaiting the future, that still has not approached, while at the same time feeling it as one with past and present. This state, however, is not some state of mental abstraction, some “pure thought”. Rather, this is a bodily experience through and through. What we usually take to be the “mental activity”, that is, producing concrete thoughts, creating images, bringing up memories, projecting future possibilities, making judgements, drawing comparisons, articulating in language, not only does not define this state but, on the contrary, fails to even sustain itself in this mode of bodily consciousness. It is about staying, not about moving. It is about waiting, not about doing. It is about listening, not about saying.

It should be stressed that the change of the attitude when working with this painting cannot be forced. The brightening of the sky, the approach of light, and with it the change of the attitude of the viewer does not happen until it happens, and if one tries to assume the attitude, which seemed to have been created by the light in the previous sessions, it does not help to bring about the brightening of the painting “faster.” In fact, the opposite is the case, the less one tries to stare at the bright spot, and the more one occupies oneself with other aspects of the painting, the trees, the forest on the horizon, the grey clouds in the upper section of the sky, the swamp and the blue

water in the distance, the easier the brightening of the painting comes about on its own and attunes the viewer. Perhaps this is why the white light and the attitude brought about by it have been introduced in the previous section in terms of the subtle change of the general emotional-affective attitudes and the basic ways one relates to the world. It is the key to this whole project of looking for the experience of the holy and divine that this experience cannot be demanded or conquered by us. Instead, it can be granted to us and, in turn, received. However, this simple truth is something that is extremely difficult for us to accept and to learn.⁶⁷

It takes a while, and it might be quite frustrating at the beginning, to learn to surrender to the lasting of this while, to enjoy it, and to let it be what it is, to accept what it offers, instead of projecting expectations, needs and demands, including those academic demands of producing work and achieving results, even if in the beginning it might seem that it offers nothing. It seems easier to formulate these messages of “letting-be” (*Gelassenheit*) cognitively. They are so much in tune with late Heidegger, especially in his work on Hölderlin, and we are gradually getting used to them. However, it is more difficult to actually acquire these different emotional and affective

⁶⁷ In this context, it might be useful to point out Steinbock’s “evocation” as a mode of vertical givenness which he juxtaposes with presentation, as a common among phenomenologists way of seeing givenness. (Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*.) We will see even more in the body hermeneutics of *Northern Lake* a clear sense of postural verticality, into which the artwork attunes the viewer, and which is much less apparent here in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*.

attitudes. It is even more difficult to adjust and change the perceptual and motor attitudes. This is why this artwork is so amazing. If we just give it time, it does the job for us. It attunes our vision and our motility in ways that seem counter-intuitive to the point of sounding impossible. Let us see what happens with the field of vision once we become gradually attuned to the white light.

The “background vision,” as I called it, is attuned by the light coming from the bright spot. It is the opposite to the focused vision, in that it does not look at shapes and lines, at details and particularities, but instead, it is attuned to color fields, light fields, backgrounds, and atmospheric colors. The light gradually changes the perceptual capacity so that instead of reaching outwards, projecting one’s perceptual capacity, the viewer opens out to the light, absorbs it and meets it as if on the inside of one’s perception. The shift is gradual. The light first fills the viewer’s visual field with thick whiteness, changing both the movement of the eyes and the mental-cognitive capacity. Then, eventually, the light itself changes its quality from the thick and damp white mist into a translucent and subtle shine. The sky in the painting opens out and allows the sight to reach far into the distance, and yet this is not where the eyes want to go at this point. This is when the change of attitude has taken place, and one is enjoying this painting in a different way than before. The eyes, instead of following the lines and dancing around the details of the painting, as they normally do most of the time, stop their run and their dance and stay instead in one spot. Yet they do not become

“focused” in that spot, neither do they freeze. Instead, the eyes zoom out, relax, and hover over the area. Instead of gliding on surfaces, the eyes sink right through them and float amid color and light, without holding on to anything in particular. It can be clearly felt that they are open wide without, however, the eye-lids being stretched or strained in any way. Rather, the very inside of the eye is in that tricky balance of being wide open and relaxed at the same time.

The eyes do not stop seeing what is there in the painting, and yet, what is there becomes so unimportant to the eyes that the things in the painting are not seen anymore. Instead, the light itself becomes visible, yet in a way different from the regular visibility of things. The seeing itself does not take place outside, in the painting, instead it shifts into the inside, somewhere within the eyes and even further, somewhere on the edges of the “interior” as opposed to the “exterior” horizon of vision⁶⁸, if that can be said. In other words, the transparent, airy glow, which flows from the painting into the eyes and through them, is felt the most within the eyes after it has crossed the surface of the eyes. The light changes the visual attitude so that instead of seeing the painting, the viewer sees and feels out one’s seeing. Yet this seeing does not become an object, or even a thing. It is not captured or grasped, rather it happens; it runs through the viewer’s vision. It is not filled with things, yet it is also not empty like abstract

⁶⁸ These are Husserl’s terms, Merleau-ponty is using them several times in the chapter on the chiasm in Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 131-132, 148, 152, 271.

nothingness. It is free and void; it brings our senses to sense out the cavitous nature of the inside of our vision, and perhaps also our perception and our body in general.⁶⁹

Similarly to the vision, in the mental-cognitive sphere, the white mist which initially floods the viewer, that feels thick and heavy and seemingly incapacitates the usual thinking, gradually clears out. At the same time, it takes out with itself both the desire to figure everything out mentally and also the struggle at the inability to do so. While the mental capacity returns, once the whiteness turns into the airy translucency, it does not over-power the viewer with the chatter of constant mental commentary. It is as if the “the mind,” just like the rest of the body, becomes slow and quiet and watches what is happening without being restless or over-active.

Another aspect of the change in the general bodily attitude, is a change in the “inner posturality” from the “outward projection” into an innerly-receptive mode. In *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, it is not yet as magnificent as in *Northern Lake*, where the light is showering onto the viewer from the upper left corner of the painting and attunes the viewer into opening out and soaking in that light. Here the horizon is relatively low,

⁶⁹ This is the first step to feeling out something that will be discussed more while talking about the *Northern Lake*, for that painting gives us a much more articulate, but also a deeper feel of the void within our body, not only in terms of vision, but in a broader and more general sense of bodily self-feeling. The *Northern Lake* with its yellow light also gives a very different tonality, a different emotional quality to the feeling of emptiness or void within, what is common though in both paintings, is the quality of dispersed and non-concrete color field or light field, as opposed to the surface color, that attunes the viewer to sense the vacuous or porous quality in one’s own body, in its perceptuality, posturality, motility, and also other bodily capacities.

and the bright spot is sitting right above the horizon, so the direction of light coming from the bright spot towards the viewer remains horizontal and quite “tempered.” The color of the light, as we will see later in the chapters on *Northern Lake*, also makes a big difference. And yet, this shift of attitude provides a beginning, a possibility of what is further developed in the work with *Northern Lake*. Once the viewer becomes used to this attitude, what seemed like a disability and incapacitation at the beginning, transforms into a different capacity, when listening and watching become more important than what is listened to or watched. Whereas this reversal of attitude shifts the awareness inward and away from the entities “outside,” it does not replace “outside” entities by some “inner entities” to be occupied with, be it one’s thoughts or projects, worries, hopes, etc. Rather, the awareness becomes free, in-between the inner and the outer, self-sustained without being flooded. It is a sense of quietness in all aspects of bodily awareness, including cognitive, a sense of thoughtlessness, without drifting into unawareness, a sense of calmness and stillness, and of balance, without the feeling of rigidity and limitation. Indeed, being able to watch without thinking is one of the signs of a meditative state, so perhaps this painting can teach us to meditate. Perhaps it can teach us to become attuned and feel out in direct and perceptual ways first the generalities of color and light fields, which are much less “condensed” and reified than concrete things, and eventually also the fabric of being itself.

It is rather amazing, even though it makes perfect phenomenological sense, to find that the less-thingly, less tangible, less concrete, though still visible phenomena, like color or light fields, would attune us to shift our general attitudes from being geared towards or locked into relating to entities, and would open us up for feeling what usually we do not think we feel, perhaps the being itself. It is amazing to start sensing out in a perceptual, not a cognitive way, the being, which is not an entity, and at the same time not an empty nothing. When we read Heidegger, we take Heidegger's "being" to be a concept, an abstract one, that has to be thought, understood mentally, rather than felt. It is a difficult and puzzling concept, to say the least, and Heidegger keeps correcting our misunderstandings and misconceptions about it. So one is inspired and even stunned to start feeling out sensually and perceptually the phenomenon that seems to be akin to Heidegger's being. Yet at the same time one is extremely cautious and apprehensive that this phenomenon might not be what Heidegger meant, that it might instead be one of the numerous misunderstandings, which Heidegger has warned us about. This might be a reason why the language of these descriptions is on the cautious side when it comes to saying what it is that we are attuned to when we find that our attitude has been changed by the white light in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*.

Let us mention again Heidegger's passage that we already quoted in the introduction. In poetry as measure-taking in Hölderlin's poem, we humans, measure

ourselves and our own nature with or against the manner in which God manifests through the sky while remaining concealed:

A strange measure for ordinary and in particular also for all merely scientific ideas, certainly not a palpable stick or rod but in truth simpler to handle than they, provided our hands do not abruptly grasp but are guided by the gestures befitting the measure here to be taken. (PMD 221)⁷⁰

Here Heidegger gives the key to what is important in order to begin to understand ourselves and the divine in a bodily way, that is, in the way in which this thesis approaches the theme of the holy with the help of body hermeneutics. Heidegger is referring to the gestures, first of all, of course, our human gestures. The attitude that makes it possible for us to begin to relate to the divine is the one when our “hands” do not try to grab what it is that we are trying to “handle”, but approach it in a different way. The experience of the phenomenology of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* shows us what this different way could be, how we could relate to something without projecting ourselves onto it and trying to grab it, for example, with our perceptive capacities. But

⁷⁰ “Ein seltsames Maß für das übliche und im besonderen auch für alles nur wissenschaftliche Vorstellen, in keinem Fall ein handgreiflicher Stecken und Stab; aber in Wahrheit einfacher zu handhaben als diese, wenn nur unsere Hände nicht greifen, sondern durch Gebärden geleitet sind, die dem Maß entsprechen, das hier zu nehmen ist.” (DWM 192)

there is something more in this passage. The “measure here to be taken” is the difference between our nature and the nature of the divine that manifests while remaining concealed. So our gestures have to correspond, that is, to respond back to what they are directed towards, and that sense of responding back is very much present in “*entsprechen*”, the word Heidegger is using, which, unfortunately, is lost in translation. So it is not only about not grabbing, but also about listening, being attentive to, being guided by what one is trying to sense out. If we wanted to push the envelope further, we could perhaps even say that our “gestures” have to correspond and respond to the “gestures of the divine”. Then we could further ask, what might be the “gestures of the divine” like. But we will not dare to go quite that far yet, perhaps we could remember again, Anaximander’s being, the “hand” which is concealed in τὸ χροεῶν, and the “gestures” of that “hand” that we have discussed earlier.

To conclude, let us just acknowledge again that the white light in *Beaver Swamp*, *Algoma* requires from the viewer a shift in a bodily attitude, which has a lot in common with the shift of attitude mentioned by Heidegger. We will continue working on similar but at the same time different phenomena in the following chapters on *Northern Lake*. While we could perhaps say that *Beaver Swamp*, *Algoma* attunes us and teaches us how we could become sensitive to being rather than entities, the *Northern Lake* shows us how we could start feeling out the holy.

Part 2. Body Hermeneutics of *Northern Lake*

Chapter 5. Thematic introductions to Part 2

The first part of this project, centered around the body hermeneutics of Lawren Harris's *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920), has done the preparatory work for the real purpose of this project, which is to feel out in bodily ways the possibilities of experiencing the holy. Following Heidegger's hint that the holy can only begin to be experienced after being has been experienced in its truth, the body hermeneutics of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920) has helped us to feel out and describe the conditions of experiencing that which is not an entity but being itself. It is already an amazing achievement, for even within the practice of phenomenology, we still tend to believe that we only experience entities, only see that which is visible and touch that which has a surface. When it comes to being itself, it is difficult to find ways of perceiving it through the body. At most, we think of it as a concept to be conceptualized, or, perhaps, a mystical or poetic notion to feel through language or insight. However, we have seen in the previous chapter of this dissertation that it is quite possible to experience being in a bodily way, but that experience requires a definite shift in bodily attitude. We need to develop a bodily attitude that allows for that which is not an entity to come out on its own and to meet us on its terms, without us trying to dominate it or master it in any way. How this shift comes about and how it is experienced in different bodily regions

is something that *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, can show to us in a direct and clear way, provided that we take the time to spend with this painting and to learn from it. More than that, however, the same body attitude that opens our body to become sensitive to being itself can also help us very much in doing body hermeneutics of Harris's *Northern Lake* (1923), to experience and describe other phenomena, among them something akin to what Heidegger calls "the holy."

We will start by bringing together in a conceptual way Heidegger's notions of being and the holy, by setting up the question of whether and how these two notions might be the same, and whether and how they might be different. We will then proceed with the body hermeneutics of the artwork while constantly bringing it into a dialogue with Heidegger's theme of the holy.

After the introduction of the conceptual background, we will look again at how in the artwork the entities show themselves within and from the limits or outlines that hold them together. We have started learning about the limits when working with *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. In *Northern Lake*, we will see how Harris continues to work on limits, entities, and fields, and we will be able to learn more about fields that seem to lack limits, about light and shade, surface and depth. These contrasts, which are very much present in the sky, the water and the hill in the background of *Northern Lake*, will give us a much better sense of the "ontological foundation" of our bodily perception of the phenomena which are not entities.

We will then turn to the trees in *Northern Lake*, from the impersonal to the personal. We will be able to see how in the relationship of the trees with the light the viewer can come to experience through the perceptual, emotional and postural regions of the body first the hale (das *Heile*), which, according to Heidegger, brings us a step closer to the holy, and then also the holy itself. This will conclude the quest of this dissertation.

5.1. Being and the holy

It is not an easy task to talk about how Heidegger's notions "being" and "the holy" relate to each other. Besides the difficulty of relating anything to Heidegger's notion of being, since that notion itself seems to shift meaning with time, there is also a problem that Heidegger almost never uses these two words side by side. The two notions are not necessarily separated in a chronological way; it is not that Heidegger stops using the word "being" once he starts using "the holy," even though, indeed, there is a tendency to talk much less about being and much more about the holy in Heidegger's later texts. Rather, being and the holy are usually separated thematically; Heidegger tends to talk about being in his texts on "thinking," that is, on the Greeks, on metaphysics, and on reaching beyond metaphysics, while he talks about the holy in his texts on "poetry," mainly on Hölderlin and Trakl.

Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister" (1942) is one of the few texts where Heidegger places being and the holy into one sentence and seems to equate them with each other. Here is what he says about Hölderlin's "gods":

So that the gods "feel themselves warm by one another" ("The Ister," l. 56), they must be able to feel something in general. "Of themselves," however, they "feel nothing." The gods are "without feeling," "of themselves," that is, remaining within their own essence, they are never able to comport themselves toward beings. For this, a relation to being is required (i.e., to the "holy" that is "beyond" them), being as shown to them through the Other who is the sign.⁷¹ (HIE 156)

Heidegger here is referring to the role of the poet as the one who is the "mediator" between mortals and gods. It is rather stunning to see here that Heidegger seems to be equating the holy with being. Even in this lecture course, Heidegger keeps the two notions separate; being is dealt with at the beginning of the lecture course, which is

⁷¹ "Damit die Götter "warm sich fühlen aneinander" („Der Ister“, V.56), müssen sie überhaupt etwas fühlen können. "Von selbst aber" "fühlen sie nichts". Die Götter sind "gefühllos", "von selbst", d. h. in ihrem eigenen Wesen beharrend, vermögen sie nie zum Seienden sich zu verhalten. Dazu bedarf es eines Bezugs zum Sein (d. h. zum "Heiligen", das "über" ihnen ist), das ihnen gezeigt wird durch den Anderen, der das Zeichen ist." (HID 194)

about Sophocles' *Antigone*, while the holy it talked about when discussing Hölderlin's hymn *Ister*. So even in the passage that has just been quoted here, Heidegger places both terms into the same sentence as an exception, rather than a rule. However, this is enough of an indication for us that being and the holy are in some way "on the same level," that they are the *same* in some way⁷². If being is not an entity, the holy is not an entity either, and yet the question remains: what does this 'being, i.e. the "holy"' uttered by Heidegger actually mean? What is the relationship between being and the holy?

Another rare place where being and the holy appear in the same sentence in Heidegger's text is in *Letter on "Humanism"* (1946), where he says the following about nearness to being:

But the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for God, comes to radiate only when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been cleared and is experienced in its truth.⁷³ (LH 258)

⁷² Some Heidegger scholar equate being and the holy (see, for example, Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology*, 167), however, as we will see, this way of interpreting the holy is not quite as easily justifiable as one would like.

⁷³ "Das Heilige aber, das nur erst der Wesensraum der Gottheit ist, die selbst wiederum nur die Dimension für die Götter und den Gott gewährt, kommt dann allein ins Scheinen, wenn zuvor und in langer Vorbereitung das Sein selbst sich gelichtet hat und in seiner Wahrheit erfahren ist." (BH 338-339)

It seems from this passage that being and the holy are not the same, at least not from the point of view of human experience. If the clearing of being is a condition for the radiation of the holy, and if the clearing of being has to be experienced in its truth, before or while the holy only begins to radiate, then one would assume, that at least from the point of view of human experience, or, perhaps, from the point of view of our current human experience, the holy is “further removed” than being, and as such is not the same as being. Heidegger confirms a few pages later: “Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought”⁷⁴ (LH 267).

Yet another place in Heidegger’s texts, where being and the holy are mentioned in the same sentence is one of the unpublished during Heidegger’s lifetime books of late thirties – early forties, *Über den Anfang* (1941). It will also not give us a clear answer to the question about the relationship between being and the holy. If anything, it will confirm the difficulty of thinking through this question, but at the same time in it will encourage us to keep trying. Heidegger writes:

138. The holy and beyng

Both name the same and yet not the same.

The names are alike, in that they declare what sways (heals) and presences
before the gods and the humans; before them and far over them, without

⁷⁴ “Erst aus der Wahrheit des Seins läßt sich das Wesen des Heiligen denken.” (BH 351)

however being their “cause” and “ground” in any sense of productive conditioning. ... Still, we call them the origin; but the origin of the decision in a way, that the origin holds itself in suspense as the lit in-between of the de-cision, as the carrying-out of every giving over of the gods into the divinity, of the people into the humanity, of the earth and world to their essencing. (my translation)⁷⁵

While this passage does not answer for us the question about the relationship between being and the holy, it gives us an indication to how both being and the holy seem to ground and define in a non-metaphysical way the presencing of what in Heidegger's later texts becomes the fourfold of gods and humans, earth and sky.

There are other passages where Heidegger talks about that which is “above gods and humans.” In “As When On a Holiday...” (1939), Heidegger speaks of the holy as the essence of nature and says several times that the holy is above gods and humans (AWH 82, 95). He also says there: “The holy primordially decides in advance

⁷⁵ “138. *Das Heilige und das Seyn*. Beide nennen das Selbe und doch nicht das Selbe. Einige sind die Namen darin, daß sie kundtun, was *vor* den Göttern und den Menschen waltet (heilt) und west; vor ihnen und über sie hinweg, ohne doch je ihre „Ursache“ zu sein und der „Grund“ in irgend einem Sinne des herstellenden Bedingens. ... Dennoch nennen wir sie den Anfang; aber den Anfang der Ent-scheidung nach dergestalt, daß der Anfang sich als lichtende Inzwischen der Ent-scheidung, als der Austrag jeglicher Übereignung der Götter in die Gottschaft, der Menschen in das Menschentum, der Erde und der Welt zu ihrer Wesung in der Schwebe hält.” (UA 157)

concerning men and gods, whether they are, and who they are, and how they are, and when they are.”⁷⁶(AWH 97-8). Earlier in this text, Heidegger mentions that when Hölderlin calls nature “the holy,” it stands in a concealed relation to what was once called by the Greek word φύσις (AWH 80). In the text that was written in the same year, “On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle’s Physics B, I,” Heidegger refers to the same poem of Hölderlin and there says that “nature” is the word for “being”, which is above all entities, and above the gods also. (ECF 184) Similarly, twenty years later, in “Hölderlin’s Earth and Heaven” (1959), Heidegger again mentions Hölderlin’s notion of nature: “This poem names men in their relatedness to nature, which we must think in Hölderlin’s sense as That which is *above* gods and men, whose rule, however, men are sometimes able to endure.”⁷⁷(HEHE 204)

We are then justified to think that Heidegger’s being and the holy name that which in some sense is the same, and yet at the same time might be different, or might show itself and might be felt differently, perhaps, in different epochs or in different circumstances. What is that difference for us in our time is still something worth questioning and pondering. However, instead of trying to figure this out through the

⁷⁶ “Das Heilige entscheidet anfänglich zuvor über die Menschen und über die Götter, ob sie sind und wer sie sind und wie sie sind und wann sie sind.”(WWF 76)

⁷⁷ “Das jetzt gemeinte Gedicht nennt die Menschen in ihrem Bezug zur Natur, die wir im Sinne Hölderlins als Jenes denken müssen, was über die Götter und Menschen ist, dessen Walten jedoch die Menschen bisweilen doch auszustehen vermögen.”(HEHD 181)

texts alone, we will attempt to work through these issues and elucidate them to some extent by doing body hermeneutics with Harris's painting *Northern Lake* (1923). Our phenomenological work will help us begin to feel out what it could mean that being and the holy are the same and not the same in a direct and human way through our phenomenological body, through the mood and the feeling, the senses, the posture, and movement. Of course, the phenomenology will bring us back to Heidegger's texts, as it did when working with *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, and, of course, it will not give us "objective" truth. And yet, if we are humble and patient enough, we will perhaps be gifted with a phenomenological *Evidenz*, the truth which shows itself one moment, and hides itself the next moment, and becomes even more precious because of its own nature that cannot be controlled or forced by us.

5.2. From Beaver Swamp, Algoma to Northern Lake

Beaver Swamp, Algoma (1920) and *Northern Lake* (1923) are only three years apart, and even though they are very different in terms of mood, as well as the style of texture, they have striking similarities in composition, treatment of space and of things in space. These similarities and differences are very helpful, as the hermeneutic interpretations of each painting are much easier to develop and deepen through the confirmations or

contrast between them⁷⁸. There is a temptation to draw a conclusion about the temporal progression of style between the two paintings since *Beaver Swamp* fits much better with other earlier paintings, while *Northern Lake* is much more in tune with the later ones. And yet, in *Algoma Sketch XXXI* (1920) and *Algoma County* (1920) from the same year as *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, Harris already has the rounded shapes of yellow leaves that we see in *Northern Lake*, a similar color scheme and texture. In fact, since *Northern Lake* does not seem to have ties to any particular place, it could well be the experiment of taking the colors and textures of real landscapes in Algoma and working with them on a composition inspired by other Algoma paintings, including *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*.

Both *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* and *Northern Lake* have two main compositional “poles.” The trees in the forefront in both paintings powerfully capture the viewer by appealing to emotional and personal aspects of our being. Besides evoking feelings and relating to the social aspect of the body, they also attune the viewer’s posture. Harris’s amazing capacity as an artist works in bringing the experience of the “trees” to be felt right in and with the body of the viewer. Even though the “content” of what is felt in each painting is strikingly different, almost opposite, yet the aspects of the phenomenological body of the viewer that respond to the trees are the same.

⁷⁸ The ability to compare the two paintings is even more precious, since unlike *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* that has been discussed from art-critical or art-historical perspective in several books, I was not able to find *Northern Lake* mentioned anywhere and thus had to rely solely on my own body hermeneutics of the painting.

The other “pole” of the composition in both paintings is located in the center of the painting, in or towards the background. In *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, it is the bright white spot in the middle of the sky just above the horizon, while in *Northern Lake*, it is the brown hill that looks like an island in the lake close to the far shore. Similarly to *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the hill in *Northern Lake*, and the whole background of the painting, opens out for the viewer the less personal and more general aspects of the world and gives access to phenomena that are not particular entities, but rather fields, starting with color or light fields, and moving to even more subtle phenomena of depth, ground, and being.

While in the chapters on *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, we worked our way from the trees towards the light, from the personal towards the general, when working with *Northern Lake*, we will do the opposite. We will start with the hill in the background. Building on what we learned in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, we will explore further the notions of limit, of surface and depth, of entities and being, of the possibility of the holy. We will then come back to the trees, and there in a direct and personal way we will explore what it feels like to be touched and healed by the light, what it feels like to be “embraced by the holy.”

Chapter 6. Being, ground and flesh

This part of the dissertation is focused around the brown hill in the middle of the painting but towards the background, across the water from the trees in the forefront. The hill is almost right in the middle of the painting, and yet it is inconspicuous. It is humble, with its browns, beiges and turquoises. It does not shine forth and does not attract the sight of the viewer. Instead, it stays in the background, especially at the beginning of the encounter with the artwork. In this way, it is quite similar to the white spot on the horizon of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, which initially seems concealed behind the clouds and withdraws from the viewer. Similarly to *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, where the branches of the trees capture the attention of the viewer and bring it to the white spot in the background, here in *Northern Lake*, the hand-like clusters of yellow leaves also attract the attention and seem to be pointing towards the middle of the hill. Like in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the “place” itself to where the branches are “pointing” remains closed off from the viewer, until the attitude of the viewer is changed from actively-interrogating, focused and projecting attitude of our usual encounters with art, to the receptive and laid-back “background” attitude that one learns to be gradually attuned to in *Beaver Swam, Algoma*. It has to be noted, though, that the white light in the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* is much more resistant, much more consistent in prolonging its refusal to come out and give itself. Perhaps that is because it has to establish the new attitude, to teach it to the viewer. The brown hill in *Northern Lake* initially seems less alien; it

much more readily allows the viewer to linger on its surface, but when it opens out in response to the viewer's "background" attitude, this happening is much more stunning and dynamic, much bolder than the subtle shine of the white light in *Beaver Swamp*, *Algoma*. Perhaps it is counterintuitive to start with the aspect of the painting that is not immediately striking, yet it brings us to the very heart of the painting both literally and symbolically. We start with a deep dive into that which is furthest removed, most alien to our human nature, and it becomes a shortcut of sorts.

We will begin the encounter with the hill in *Northern Lake* by describing the contrasts between light and shade, between surface and depth in the entities as we move from left to right in the painting. Harris teaches us to see these contrasts in the sky, water, and the surface of the hill, and as we work on them, we are gradually being prepared to start seeing the primordial depth. In the next section, from the meditations on surface and depth in the hill itself and the dynamic interplay between the figure and background, we move towards the experience of dispersed generality, of ground and abyss of Heidegger's *Der Satz vom Grund*, the gray shine of being itself that comes out of the opening in the middle of the hill. Then we explore, how the experience of that generality of the hill in *Northern Lake* relates to Heidegger's notion of the rift (*Riß*) and Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh. We will conclude with a section revisiting the change of attitude that Harris's paintings require from the viewer, and this will bring us to the "light embrace" of the holy. We will then be ready for the final chapter, where we

explore how the yellow light in *Northern Lake* brings out for us the hale, and how that, in turn, gives us a human experience of the holy.

6.1. Light and shade, surface and depth in water, sky and the hill

One of the aspects in which *Northern Lake* is quite different from *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* is how the painting is lit and the relationship between light and shade that is thus created in the painting. In *Beaver Swamp*, the foreground of the painting, the sphere of the trees, is dark in contrast with the whitish-gray background. With time, as the painting becomes more and more lit up with the white light coming from the middle of the horizon, the light, though subtle, is coming directly towards the viewer and the trees. Perhaps that is why there is a temporary feeling of being almost blinded by the light in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. Here in *Northern Lake*, the yellow light, which we will talk about in detail in the following sections, is present from the very outset as it shines from above the top left corner of the painting and towards the bottom right corner. A similar direction of the light can be clearly seen in the iconic *North Shore Lake Superior*, which Harris painted in 1926, three years after *Northern Lake*. While in *Northern Lake*, the light itself is not directly visible, as it is in *North Shore Lake Superior*, still the direction of the light can be clearly seen, since it polarizes the whole painting, making the left side of the painting itself, as well as of everything in the painting, more lit and with clear surfaces, while the right side more shaded with surfaces gradually losing

composure and opening out the aspect of depth. This becomes a very important entry in the body hermeneutics of the painting because it allows us to describe and to ponder on the relationships between surface and depth, and to revisit the notion of contours and limits (πέρας), which we started talking about with *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. Eventually, it allows us to learn to see and to describe much more clearly than before the quality of depth devoid of surface, the quality of color or light field devoid of a contour, taking us towards a possibility of “generality” that is not an entity, that is, something akin to being and the holy.

Let us then begin by looking at the water, the sky, and then the hill itself. We will start with the water, which is a peculiar kind of “substance” or “matter”. Unless it is frozen, water has a very unsteady surface and allows easy penetration through the surface into the depth. In itself, it is probably quite a challenge to paint while preserving the look and its shifty nature. Harris takes this peculiar substance and, as if trying to hint to us what is important for him in this painting and what he is studying here, breaks down the look of water into two extremes, neither of which actually looks like water. The water on the left side of the painting seems flat and hard like a plastered wall, and in several places, it seems to be bulging up, almost like old plaster or dried paint would bulge before cracking. This can be seen quite clearly even in the reproductions across the bottom third of the tree on the left. Perhaps that is why the surface of the water here seems hard and flat but also visibly thin. This surface-like

quality of the water on the left is even more accentuated by its border where it meets the reflection of the hill and from close-up looks as if it “hangs over” the hill like an edge. By contrast, the water in the right corner looks thick but at the same time not “solid,” it does not seem to have a surface at all. Instead, it looks and feels like a very thick mist. The texture is rich and soft, almost velvety, a complete opposite to the hard flatness on the left side. The color of it is also visibly different, a more intense and warmer blue. The water on the right side of the painting looks unrealistic, almost eerie, strong and soft at the same time. It even seems to bring out for the viewer something like a smell, warm and humid, tropical, as opposed to the neutral and chalky dryness of the water on the left side of the painting. To summarize, the water on both sides of the painting looks unreal, but while on the left side Harris accentuates the hard surface quality that the water cannot have unless it is frozen, on the right side the water is lacking surface completely and sucks the gaze of the viewer directly into the depth through and under that non-existent surface.

Similarly to the water, the sky on the left side has the quality of “shielding” or covering up. It is not as heavy as in *Beaver Swamp*, the clouds are flatter, less imposing, more distant. Still, the sky in the left corner looks like a solid surface covering up that which is underneath, while the sky in the right corner, just like the water on the right side of the painting, has a strange quality of depth showing itself. It does not look solid; it seems somehow dispersed, thick and not thick at the same time, not concrete, full of

nothing, and yet at the same time full of something. It has the same color and texture as the water, as if Harris was looking for a substance in-between water and air and came up with this extremely humid air on the verge of turning into water, or, the other way around, the water on the verge of evaporating. Perhaps it is this sense of intense humidity that Harris manages to achieve by diffusing water into the air on the right side of this painting, that creates the impression of a tropical feel (texture and even smell) in this otherwise cool painting.

Let us now look at the hill itself. We have already seen that water and sky on the left side of the painting are much more articulated. They seem firm and definite and have a surface-like quality, while on the right, they are the opposite, inarticulate and undefined, lacking surface and instead showing the quality of depth. In the same way, the hill itself on the left side, which is facing the light, is quite well articulated; we can see the shapes of the trees, and the left sides of the trees themselves seem to give off almost a gloss, a grayish shine, which can be seen clearly from close up. Alternatively, the whole right side of the hill is muffled; with just a few vague shapes of the trees, it is generally dark. Not only that, but also in the individual trees, the right sides of the trees are obscured by the gloss of the left sides of the trees next to them, and where there are no trees to the right to obscure them, they seem to just melt or fuse into the darkness of the hill's depth. We can see in the hill in general, and especially in the shapes of the trees on the hill, the fusion of surface and depth, the melting of the articulate into the

dark when moving from left to right, and the clearing out of the dark into the articulate from right to left.

Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* says that

we have to rediscover beneath depth as a relation between things or even between planes, which is objectified depth detached from experience and transformed into breadth, a primordial depth, which confers upon the other its significance, and which is the thickness of a medium devoid of anything. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 266)

Whereas reading this passage in Merleau-Ponty leaves a puzzled feeling, makes one wonder what could the “thickness of medium devoid of anything” possibly mean, and how it can be experienced, Harris in his painting gives us a perfect illustration of and the entry into just that, the depth without a surface, the thickness without an entity, without measure, without distance.

This exercise of describing the more obvious aspects of surface and depth in the water, the sky and the trees on the hill in *Northern Lake* is a great introduction to a much more subtle and also much more important aspect of the painting, the “depth” of the hill itself that opens up through the center of the hill and gives us an experience of the “primordial depth”, “the medium devoid of anything” that Merleau-Ponty seems to be

talking about. It is amazing to see how Harris starts us off by laying out the depth as “breadth,” by letting us see the movement from surface to depth as we move from the left side of the painting towards the right, following the direction of the light from its source towards the shade. And yet, this “demonstration” by the artist is preparing us to see the depth itself, starting with the strange quality of water and sky on the right side of the painting, and then even more in the darkness, from which the trees on the hill come out towards the light that shines onto them, and into which they also recede back through their shaded sides.

Before we move on to the next section, let us briefly look at the colors of the hill; we will find in them a confirmation of the previous insights about the play of surface and depth in this painting. While from a distance, the hill seems dominated by the general indefiniteness of the color, especially when compared with the bright yellow of the leaves, from close up one can see the hints of dark blue not only in the triangular evergreens but also in the very middle of the hill. It is the area that seems to be most clearly pointed to by the bright yellow leaves, and from which, as we will see in the next section, the hill spills out its dark flesh when it opens up its depth. Indeed, that spot right in the middle of the hill, which from a distance and in reproductions looks just dark, is visibly blue when seen from the close-up. There is also quite a bit of that dark blue all over the right side of the painting along the “shore” of the hill, while the left side has a lot of light blue on the lit “surface” sides of the pine trees and also

highlighting the contours of the other greenish-beige trees. Some dark blue, though in its greened-out or browned-out form, is even visible in the reflection of the hill right in that middle spot. Heidegger calls blue the color of depth, and we can see in another painting of Harris, *Sand Lake, Algoma* (1922), that same shade of dark blue opening up the depth of generality, and at the same time having the tint of the unusual, almost “unnatural,” look. With the presence of the dark blue in the aspects of *Northern Lake* that relate to depth and of the shiny light blue on the lit surfaces, Harris gives us another hint as to how this painting works in polarizing surface and depth while at the same time maintaining the continuity between these opposites.

Now that we have looked at the overview of how surface and depth are brought to play by Harris in contrast between the right and left side on the painting, in water, sky, and generally the hill, we will move on and look at the hill itself. We are now ready to see how the hill comes to presence within its outline and how it ultimately opens up and transcends its outlines. We have seen already in the previous chapters that in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* and *Above Lake Superior*, Harris’s trees come to presence in a dynamic manner of coming out from their outlines and shrinking back into them. We have seen how the outline, what Heidegger calls by the Greek word *πέρας* holds together and brings forth the presencing of an entity, or an individual thing. In the following sections, however, we will go a step further, since in the hill of *Northern Lake*, we will see how these outlines that otherwise hold together the presencing on an entity,

dissolve completely and show to us “something” that is not a thing, not an entity, but a dispersed generality, the depth itself, the presencing itself.

6.2. From the play between figure and background to being as ground and abyss

We will begin the discussion of the very center of the painting with another point of comparison between *Northern Lake* and *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. In both paintings, the center is one of the poles of the painting, while the trees in the forefront are the other pole. These two poles create the main force field of the painting, the dynamic tension that pulls the viewer into the painting or pushes the viewer away. In both paintings, the branches of the trees are framing the center of the painting, and the trees seem to be pointing to that center with the branches that look very much like hands, especially so in the *Northern Lake*. In both paintings, the presence initially concealed behind the center of the painting with time gradually comes out. The difference between the two paintings lies in what comes out of the center of the painting, how it comes out, and how deeply it touches the viewer.

In the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the center of the painting is the spot in the sky, from which the light comes out and brightens the whole painting, as well as the mood and the feelings of the viewer. The light comes out very gradually and cautiously and teaches the viewer to take on the laid-back attitude, the attitude of not projecting oneself

outwards, and not aggressing, not objectifying what one is facing, not grasping the things outside, but rather staying in the receptive equilibrium, accepting, taking on, and adjusting to feeling out not an entity or a thing, but a generality, a field, in this case, the field of light.

In *Northern Lake*, the center of the painting is the brown hill itself, and with time, especially if the viewer takes on the laid-back and receptive attitude one learned from the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, it is the hill itself that opens up. From the center of the hill, the brown generality of what seems like earth, or perhaps like being itself, floods into the rest of the painting and into the viewer, revealing itself in a way that is much more sudden, much more substantial and powerful than that of the subtle light in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. Let us see how Harris manages to have it happen in the painting by continuing our meditations on surface and depth through the detailed descriptions of the hill itself.

We will begin by looking at the hill and its reflection in the lake and how they work together as one single entity. It is very interesting to see in this aspect of the painting how Harris challenges our assumptions and our habitual ways of perceiving and understanding surface and depth. The reflection of the hill is supposed to be just a flat image reflected onto the water from the surface of the hill. There is supposed to be no depth to it, no thickness, no substance. And yet Harris makes it look much more like the “bottom,” the root, the deep foundation of the hill, as if it were the underwater part

of the hill that would normally not be visible from above. Painted by Harris, the reflection of the hill is darker; it looks heavy, “bulges down,” seems to be thicker than the hill itself. The reflection of the hill looks strange, and this creates a clash between the “habitual perception” backed by cognition telling the viewer that it is “just a reflection,” and the “momentary perception” seeing this reflection instead as the “real thing”. The terms the painting is asking for here are coming from Merleau-Ponty. In the section of *Phenomenology of Perception* on the phantom limb, Merleau-Ponty says: “our body comprises as it were two distinct layers, that of the habit-body and that of the body at this moment.” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 71) Later, in the section on face recognition, Merleau-Ponty says about the “momentary body” that it is “the instrument of my personal choices” and “fastens upon this or that world”. He relates the habitual body to “another subject beneath me, for whom the world exists before I am here”, “the system of anonymous ‘functions’”, saying that “my personal existence must be the resumption of a prepersonal tradition”. (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 228) The fascinating interplay between the habitual and the momentary body is the field of all perception, all creativity, all new learning, of acquisition and transformation of a newly learned ability into a sedimented capacity of the body, eventually a habit. A new and truly creative way of seeing something happens when instead of reusing the previously acquired and comfortable capacities of the habitual body, our “momentary body” at this very moment catches and holds on to

something different, something foreign and new to it, something strange and unusual.

When Harris subverts the way that we want to see the reflection of the hill as just a reflection and instead makes it look like the actual bottom under-water half of the hill, he pushes us out of our perceptual comfort zone. He prepares us to see something striking, what he has managed to bring out in the center of that hill, provided that we remain open, patient and a little bold to leave our comfort zone of the habitual.

The depth-like quality of the “bottom” of the hill, as opposed to the much more surface-like quality of the top is created not only by the contrast in the articulation of the contours of trees on the top, which is completely or almost completely missing in the “bottom” but also by the muddy quality of color in that reflection, so suitable for suggesting the ground, the earth, the bare physicality of that hill. It is striking to see how Harris manages to make the hill and its reflection look so different and yet belong so much together. They act on a viewer as a single body, widening and shrinking synchronically, appearing as one whole figure against the background of sky and water, or as the same generality of dark flesh, the opening of depth in the middle of that single body of the hill and its supposed reflection. If we were to spend more time with the hill and its reflection, perhaps we could learn to see how “the other side” of the surface is depth quite literally, as well as how the other side of depth might be a surface of sorts. Perhaps this experience with the hill could help us better understand Merleau-Ponty’s

notion of chiasm as reversibility of flesh⁷⁹, however, that would take us in a direction different from what we are after here.

Let us now look at the hill together with its reflections and what it is they do when they “act” like one whole. First, let us examine the contours of the hill, note how “clean” they are, how clear and definite is the shape of the hill, how different it is from the “shabby” outlines of the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. The hill looks as if it has been carved out of the sheet of sky and water which surrounds it and as if covers it all around with the bluish-grayish-whitish blanket. Despite its solid look, however, the hill is not a static figure. In fact, the “borderline,” the contour of the hill is constantly shifting. One moment the sky and water seem to cover the hill more and more, so it shrinks, and then the hill starts to swell again, the gap between the sky and the water widens, the borderline of the hill shifts outwards. The eye is very much attracted to that line; one can spend hours just hanging around it and watching its movement, which seems to depend on the direction from which the sight approaches the line. If you look at the line between the hill and its background from the side of the sky or water, the hill seems to be shrinking; the sky and water is expanding. Vice versa, if you approach the line from inside the hill, then the hill is expanding, while the field of water/sky is shrinking. Contrary to what we would assume, it is the clarity of the line, the strong border outlining the limits of the hill, that seems to contribute to the shifting dynamics

⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 263.

of figure and background, whereby the hill at times looks surrounded by the background of water and sky, limited and pushed into its borders, almost constrained by that line, almost forced to shrink, while at other times it seems to do the opposite, to swell and come out of its “perimeter”, to grow and come forward.

The hill, together with its reflection, looks and acts like an eye, and if you look at it with the eyes that are completely relaxed and completely surrendered to what they see, with the attitude learned from *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, ready to follow and adjust instead of projecting outwards or focusing, then the hill seems to float slightly to the right and the left, shrinking a bit, expanding a bit, just like an eye would. When the grey flesh of the hill overflows its limits completely and floods the whole painting, it is just like the seeing that floods out of the eye, that sees and merges completely with the world that is being seen⁸⁰. It is not quite clear whether these shifting, shrinking and expanding movements of the hill, as they are perceived by the eyes, are actually “caused” by the natural movements of the viewer’s eyes, but it does not really matter from a phenomenological point of view since we are not looking for a scientific explanation of why the hill looks the way it does. Rather, we trust the artist who has

⁸⁰ The way that the hill looks like an eye and the way it merges with everything around it actually reminds of the eyes in the archaic sculptures, especially those of Peploforos. (Mallin, *Art Line Thought*, 22) Also, the way that Peploforos’ outward merging with the world and the viewer is counterbalanced by her inner reclining into the deepening depth of *phusis* is very similar to how the hill opens out the deepest depth while at the same time merging with the world in the painting, and merging with and through the viewer.

made this hill for our eyes to see, for our body to perceive⁸¹, and he made it in such a way that challenges our perceptual habits and allows us to see and understand something new that we have not quite seen before.

Merleau-Ponty, in his discussion of the line in “Eye and Mind,” says about contour lines that outline things:

They are always between or behind whatever we fix our eyes upon; they are indicated, implicated, and even very imperiously demanded by the things, but they themselves are not things. They were supposed to circumscribe the apple or the meadow, but the apple and the meadow “form themselves” from themselves, and come into the visible as if they had come from a pre-spatial world behind the scenes. (Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”, 183)

Merleau-Ponty here is drawing our attention to the difference between the outlines of things, which are in a way necessary for us to see things as things, and the “pre-spatial world behind the scenes,” that background that recedes into depth, and from which the things come to presence, “come into the visible.” We can see this background that turns

⁸¹ Mallin in *Body on my Mind* says that all artworks are “made by bodies to be understood by bodies” (Mallin, *Body on my Mind*, 190), and this is essential for the body hermeneutics of artworks to be possible at all, as well as for it to be understood.

into depth in the hill in *Northern Lake*. If one's vision ceases to hold on to the line which encloses the hill and rests instead right in the middle of the body of the hill, then after a while of shrinking and swelling, receding and then coming out again, the hill opens up and overflows its borders completely. It ceases to be a "figure" outlined on background and instead becomes the background itself. Even more importantly, what starts as a surface, in this case, an uneventful surface of the hill, does not remain limited within the flat surface of the canvas but opens up a different dimension, that of depth.

Of course, there is "depth" to the composition of this painting even before the hill opens up. Here, as well as in *Beaver Swamp*, the screen of the trees at the forefront creates a see-through effect, stressing a sense of distance and reaching out into it when looking at the background. The sky (more so in *Beaver Swamp*) and the surface of the water (in *Northern Lake*), which take up so much of the surface of the canvas, and which we habitually see as horizontal, strengthen the perceptual sense of horizontality, of space stretching into and beyond the canvas, in contrast with the verticality of the canvas itself, the trees at the forefront, and the viewer too. The hill, however, shows us a different kind of depth. When the grayish-beige-ish-brown flesh of the hill swells so much that it pours out of its limits and fills up the water area and part of the sky with its brownish grayness, it does not just cover the surface of the painting but comes out towards the viewer while simultaneously gaping open and showing that the abyss it is coming from is sinking far beyond the painting itself. When the "flesh" of the hill comes

out through its surface, it is as if it shows what is underneath the surface, the matter itself of that hill, the ground, the underground, the depth beyond the background. It is difficult and confusing to describe the texture and “consistency” of this “flesh,” for it is not even color. Rather, it is more like a dark glow or a veil of dark mist. Similarly to water and sky on the right side of the painting, it is at the same time powder-like, liquid-like and vapor-like, but it is even more difficult to articulate because it lacks the clarity of the blue color. The undefined grayish glow instead of a clear color removes it even further from being a particular thing, an entity. The “flesh” of the hill seems strangely both particularized and generalized, it feels like sand in its dispersed raw materiality, and yet at the same time, it is just like a shade, like a dark shining glow, which does not seem to be tangible at all.

The dark flesh of the hill comes out of its depth, spills over the borders of the hill, and makes those borders disappear. As the borders of the hill disappear, so does its surface, with the trees, the line of the shore, and with everything else that is “particular” and definite in the painting. All of it becomes flooded, covered up by the brownish-grayness of the hill’s flesh, which calls for a name “ground” from Heidegger’s 1955-56 lecture course and address *Der Satz vom Grund*. It seems to be the right word, not only in a way in which it is akin to earth and soil, but also in a way in which it seems to manifest what is “underneath,” what supports, sustains, and gives substance to things, in this case, to the hill with its trees and the shore. In that lecture course, Heidegger

develops a dual understanding of “the principle or reason” and of the being itself. Being grounds and sustains entities, it is the ground, while itself it remains without any ground, it is an abyss. (PR 51, 113; SG 77, 169). In the pouring out of the depth of the hill in *Northern Lake*, we can see how depth/“ground” is both underlying and “sustaining” the particular things on the surface of the hill, but yet at the same time, when it becomes visible, it takes over and covers up things in their particularity and instead opens out the hollow “area” stretching into the depth, which feels thick and full and yet at the same time not filled with anything particular. When the ground becomes visible, the things, the concrete beings, disappear. And vice versa, when the entities appear, the ground disappears. What is the most beautiful about this disappearing and reappearing is in fact, the dynamics of this de-focusing and re-focusing back, losing shape and acquiring “ground,” or, again, losing ground and acquiring shape. The shape covers up the ground, the particular covers up the general. But then the general, the ground, comes out again and subsumes the particular. This play between the shape and the ground is amazing, one gives in to the other, then comes back and overcomes the other, then recedes again, letting the other be.

Looking at this movement in *Northern Lake*, one becomes astonished and humbled to actually see the relationship between being and entities, not only to conceive it conceptually but to see it with one’s own eyes, perceptually. Heidegger

makes a point in *Der Satz vom Grund*, paraphrasing and elaborating on Aristotle, about the difference between entities and being:

Now, it is always easy to show that particular beings, for example, the earth, the sea, the mountains, the flora and fauna at all times lie overtly over against us. That is why they are familiar and immediately accessible to us. But contrary to this, that wherethrough all this – that is, all that which comes to presence on its own – emerges and comes to presence never lies over against us as do particular beings that are present here and there. Being is in no way as immediately familiar and overt to us as are particular beings. It is not as though being keeps itself completely concealed. If this happened, then even beings could never lie over against and be familiar to us. Indeed being must of itself and already beforehand shine, so that particular being can appear. (PR 63)⁸²

⁸² "Nun zeigt sich überall leicht, daß uns das jeweilig Seiende, z. B. die Erde, das Meer, die Gebirge, die Gewächse und die Tiere, jederzeit offenkundig gegenüberliegt. Darum ist es uns vertraut und unmittelbar zugänglich. Dagegen liegt das, wohindurch all dieses von-sich-her-Anwesende auf seine Weise anwest und aufgeht, uns niemals gegenüber wie das hier und dort jeweils Anwesende. Das Sein ist uns keineswegs so unmittelbar vertraut und offenkundig wie das jeweilig Seiende. Nicht als ob das Sein sich gänzlich verborgen hielte. Geschähe dies, dann könnte uns auch niemals Seiendes gegenüberliegen und vertraut sein. Sein muß sogar von sich her und schon zuvor scheinen, damit jeweilig Seiendes erscheinen kann. Würde Sein nicht scheinen, dann gäbe es keine Gegend, innerhalb deren allein ein Gegenüber sich ansiedeln kann." (SG 95)

Heidegger's point is that for Aristotle, being (of entities) is not as accessible to us as the entities themselves, however, what is important in our context is the second part of the quoted passage. Namely, that even though being is less accessible than entities or almost inaccessible, it still cannot be completely concealed. Even being itself has to be at least somewhat accessible to us, otherwise, the entities would not be able to show themselves either. In *Northern Lake*, if the viewer is able to let oneself be attuned by the artwork and respond to it with the bodily attitude required by the artwork, one can see the "shine" of being itself, the play between being and entities that happens towards the "surface" of being, as well as the abyss that stretches out far into the depth of being.

In the next section, we will look at the "crack" in *Northern Lake*, which seems to be the same "crack" that we already talked about in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. While in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, the crack seems to give just a small glimpse of what it holds, here in *Northern Lake*, it opens out more and takes us further into understanding first Heidegger's notion of the rift, and then also Merleau-Ponty's flesh.

6.3. Heidegger's rift and Merleau-Ponty's écart

The "crack" is one of several already mentioned similarities between *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* and *Northern Lake*. In *Northern Lake*, we can see a branch of the tree on the left that cuts right into the hill from the sky and looks like a crack in the surface, exposing the darkness underneath the covering-up blanket of the whiteness of the

clouds and the surface of the hill. It looks so astonishingly similar to the “crack” in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* that it almost seems like a sign or a “signature” carried over from one painting into another. While in the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, it is right in the center of the painting, cutting into the thickening whiteness of the sky, here in *Northern Lake*, it is a bit off from the center towards the top left. It cuts right into the hill as if indicating that the hill here is the most important part of the painting, not the sky above the horizon as in the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. The “crack” is like a carved groove, like a rift, it looks like an open wound, and one almost wants to follow that groove with the finger. Even through its thin and hard-edged appearance, one can sense the depth and darkness within it, and there is a clear sense that the dark line of that fissure is just a glimpse of the vastness of darkness leaking through that crack.

It is fitting and appropriate that the word “rift” comes up in the description of the “crack” in the paintings. The rift (*Riß*) is one of Heidegger’s terms that carry through the “middle” well into the “late” Heidegger and is related to the central notions of being, dif-ference and *Ereignis* (appropriation). When talking about the “design” (*Aufriß*) as the unity of the essence of language in “The Way to Language” (1959), Heidegger makes an interesting remark about the rift (*Riß*) being used in everyday language to refer to a crack in the wall, but also about the derivative verbs meaning to plough, to cut furrows in the soil. (WZS 240, WL121)⁸³ This remark is interesting, for it

⁸³ Unfortunately, the English translation of this passage is not very close to the original.

suggests that a connection between what we see visually in Harris's paintings and what has become one of Heidegger's terms can indeed bring about some fruitful engagement between the phenomenological engagement and body hermeneutics experience of the phenomena in the artwork, and the conceptual-linguistic understanding of the philosophical concepts. In the discussion of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*⁸⁴ we already discussed in detail Heidegger's rift (*Riß*) in "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), and how the key notions of this text are similar and different from Heidegger's later writings, how this text already holds the many aspects that appear in the later texts, though still in a somewhat different form. Here, let us look at the notion of the rift in perhaps the key text for understanding the rift in Heidegger's later texts, that is "Language" (1950).

In "Language," what Trakl poetically calls "pain," Heidegger translates into the "philosophical" language as the "rift of the difference":

Pain rends. It is the rift. But it does not tear apart into dispersive fragments. Pain indeed tears asunder, it separates, yet so that at the same time it draws everything to itself, gathers it to itself. ... Pain is the joining agent in the rendering that divides and gathers. Pain is the joining of the

⁸⁴ Section 3.3. Heidegger on *πέρας*

rift. ... Pain joins the rift of the dif-ference. Pain is the dif-ference itself. (L 201-201)⁸⁵

Here is where Heidegger seems to introduce the hyphenated dif-ference (*Unter-Schied*) for the first time in his writings, and the hyphenation is an indication for us that Heidegger is trying to create a different meaning for an otherwise common word. Indeed, the dif-ference here is no mere variability, rather, it is the one and only dif-ference there is, the dif-ference that defines the relationship between things and the world:

The rift of the dif-ference makes the limpid brightness shine. Its luminous joining decided the brightening of the world into its own. The rift of the dif-ference expropriates the world into its worlding, which grants things. (L 202-203)⁸⁶

⁸⁵ "Der Schmerz reißt. Er ist der Riß. Allein, er zerreißt nicht in auseinanderfahrende Splitter. Der Schmerz reißt zwar auseinander, er scheidet, jedoch so, daß er zugleich alles auf sich zieht, in sich versammelt. ... Der Schmerz ist das Fühende im scheidend-sammelnden Reißen. Der Schmerz ist die Fuge des Risses. ... Der Schmerz fugt den Riß des Unter-Schiedes. Der Schmerz ist der Unter-Schied selber." (S 24)

⁸⁶ "Der Riß des Unter-Schiedes läßt die reine Helle glänzen. Sein lichtendes Fügen entscheidet die Auf-Heiterung von Welt in ihr Eigenes. Der Riß des Unter-Schiedes enteignet Welt in ihr Welten, das die Dinge gönnt." (S 25)

Heidegger himself confirms that this new way of writing “dif-ference” points to something special, something beyond the common use, as well as beyond his own earlier use of the word difference. In “Anaximander’s Saying” (1946), he talks about the difference between being and entities, however in the marginal note after 1950 he comments:

The dif-ference [*Unter-Schied*] is infinitely different from all being, which remains being of the being. It is therefore inappropriate any longer to designate the difference with “Sein [being]” whether it is written with an “i” or with a “y.” (AS 275f)⁸⁷

This note suggests that neither the notion of *Sein* in 1946 nor the notion of *Seyn*⁸⁸ reaches as far as the notion of *Unter-Schied* (dif-ference) after 1950 in Heidegger’s stretching of his thinking beyond metaphysics. *Unter-Schied* that is introduced in *Language* in 1950, names the middle which separates and at the same time brings together the between of things and world. The dif-ference *ereignet*, appropriates things and world into a mutual

⁸⁷ “Der Unter-Schied ist unendlich verschieden von allem Sein, das Sein *des* Seienden bleibt. Daher bleibt es ungemäß, den Unterschied noch mit ‘Sein’ – sei es *mit*, sei es ohne *y* – zu benennen.” (SA364f)

⁸⁸ Heidegger tried out this older spelling of *Sein* mostly in the private monographs written between 1936 and 1948 and unpublished during his lifetime (*Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, *Besinnung*, *Über den Anfang*, and other works published in the third division of *Gesamtausgabe*).

belonging together, and each into its *Wesen*. It is the dimension, which measures out the measure of their *Wesen*. (S22, L200) *Ereignis* (appropriation) is named in this lecture as *Ereignis* of the dif-ference. (S27, L205) The rift (*Riß*) is the “structure”, if one can say so, of the *Ereignis* of the dif-ference that separates and at the same time gathers together, and maintains the tension of separating and gathering of things and the world, or entities and that which is not an entity.

What does it mean that “being” is not appropriate anymore to designate the dif-ference, is not quite clear. What are the implications of this for the earlier statement that being and the holy are the same and yet not the same, is also to be meditated upon. Is “the holy” more appropriate to name the dif-ference, or would it still be not appropriate? What is the relationship between *Ereignis* and being, between *Ereignis* and the holy? Perhaps these questions could be worked on phenomenologically using body hermeneutics as the method, however, the current engagement with Harris’s paintings is not pushing the envelope quite far enough in that particular direction. Let us see, however, how the language of the rift works alongside the phenomenon of the “crack” in Harris’s paintings, and how far we can take it.

In both paintings, the crack shows the deepest depth that lies underneath sky and earth. However, in the *Beaver Swamp*, the crack is hardly possible to figure out. It remains mysterious and impenetrable, hardly possible to understand and interpret in any way beyond just a glimpse of the importance of the depth it harbors. Here in

Northern Lake, the “crack” works together with the hill. If the eyes do not run up and down that crack’s groove and do not focus on its linearity, but instead rest unfocused around it, then the dark flesh of the hill spills over its borders, flows through that crack, and *through that crack* completely merges with the leaves, branches and the trunk of the tree on the left. This movement happens initially from left to right, within the two-dimensionality of the canvas. But in the same way, in which the “flat” spilling of the hill over its borders opens up the third dimension of depth, the movement of the flesh “traveling” through the crack from the hill to the left towards the tree at the same time becomes the movement of the deep darkness coming out from its depth through the crack outwards into the open⁸⁹. The flesh of the hill and the tree fuse so easily, so naturally, that it becomes obvious that they are from the same kind of “matter,” or rather that they belong to the same kind of “generality,” same kind of ground, same kind of “flesh.” In *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, we saw a similar continuity between the trees and the earth they are growing from, but here Harris reaches deeper and shows us continuity between the tree, the earth, and the depth beyond earth, the ultimate ground and abyss. It is not only that the deepest depth of the hill and the darkness from underneath the crack is the ultimate ground of that particular tree, as well as every tree for that matter. It is indeed so, but what the crack shows much more clearly and much

⁸⁹ It is quite surprising and quite amazing to see in Harris these almost Picasso-like flips of dimensions.

more dramatically is the overflowing and the clear continuity between that deepest depth, which is deeper than even earth and sky on the one hand, and a tree, the most particular and most limited, most visible and most usual tree on the other.

Only through the work with *Northern Lake* we can begin to understand that the hill itself, with its carved-out borders and the depth that spills out of those borders, is a larger, more opened-up and worked-out version of that crack in the sky that Harris created a few years before in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. While the “crack” is just an “entrance,” a zoomed-out look of the rift, the hill in *Northern Lake* is an unfolded and further unfolding rift through which the connection, as well as the separation of things, particular entities to and from the depth and dispersed generality can be visually perceived by the viewer. We can also start seeing that the crack as a reduced or condensed version of the opening of the hill in its brilliant simplicity already holds all there is to know about the whole relation between an entity and being (or the difference of *Ereignis*, the in-between of things and word), between the most inconspicuous surface and the deepest depth.

The crack holds the continuity and thickness of flesh itself, while it is Heidegger’s rift (*Riß*), it is also, as we will now see, Merleau-Ponty’s *écart*, about which he says in one of the last notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*:

But this divergence (*écart*) is not a *void*, it is filled precisely by the flesh as the place of emergence of vision, a passivity that bears an activity – and so also the divergence between the exterior visible and the body which forms the upholstering (*capitonnage*) of the world. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 272)

Let us now take some time to look at Merleau-Ponty's notions of flesh and see why it seems to work well to name the dark shine that spills out from the depth of the hill in *Northern Lake*.

The concept of flesh (*la chair*) in Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* is as interesting as it is difficult. In fact, it might be so interesting precisely because of how difficult and unusual it is. It is difficult because it is extremely puzzling, and it is no wonder, since Merleau-Ponty is trying to go beyond the metaphysics of both empiricism and idealism. Even though this was already happening in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, it was still easy to overlook, while here in *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty makes it clear, that this is indeed the point. Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of flesh in the last completed chapter of the book, and so it becomes like a legacy to ponder about, to try to understand the limits of the term, though in itself this term refers rather to what is unlimited. The notion of the flesh is difficult, because it

seems to shift and change as Merleau-Ponty goes through the chapter, and yet this is why it is fecund and flexible in a way in which only alive and real phenomena can be.

We would assume that flesh refers first of all to our own human body or to another living body, and indeed Merleau-Ponty talks about it as “flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch.” (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 137) But he also talks about a flesh of things themselves when describing the perception of colors:

Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 132-3)

The flesh is no mere dead lining under the surface of things, rather it has to be in some way living, though perhaps not necessarily in a biological sense, or else how could it possibly sustain and nourish things? However, it is also not just something that is limited within bodies, be it our own bodies, other living bodies, or the bodies of things. Rather, it is also the “thickness” *between* us and things, and it constitutes our own bodiliness as well as the visibility of things:

It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is
constitutive for the thing of its visibility and for the seer of his corporeity;
it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.
(Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 135)

In one of the notes, Merleau-Ponty says that “my body is made of the same flesh as the world”(Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 248). It seems, it is this sharing of the common flesh that makes it possible for us to be in touch with, to perceive, to recognize and to understand the world. The world itself is “universal flesh”(Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 137), and, ultimately, the flesh is an “element” of being:

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings the style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh in this sense is an “element” of Being. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139)

It is amazing to see how this concept of flesh that Merleau-Ponty is working on in *The Visible and the Invisible* in the 1950s and 1960s responds so well to what we see in Harris's *Northern Lake*. The concept of flesh is helpful in holding together the seeming contradictions, or rather "impossibilities," which are so difficult to name otherwise. It is the continuation between what is hidden in the depth under the surface, but what also is not limited by the surface, not limited within a particular entity, but rather what flows through the entities, as well as through us. It is a common ground, which is a ground, and yet it is not hard and concrete, but somehow the opposite of concrete. It is dispersed, elusive and subtle, and yet still visible and feelable, though not in a conventional way of perceiving particular things. We see this so clearly in the brownish shine that spills from the middle of the hill in *Northern Lake*, and every time we see it, we are amazed by it.

Before we move on to the last section of this chapter, let us also take an opportunity to discuss Merleau-Ponty's notion of chiasm in its relation to flesh, since this word comes up repeatedly in doing body hermeneutics of both paintings. The completed chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* is called "The Intertwining – The chiasm," however, Merleau-Ponty does not mention chiasm itself in the body of the chapter; rather, he seems to assume it. It is mentioned mainly in the working notes, and in a similar way that Heidegger's "rift" seems to name the structure of difference as mentioned earlier, perhaps we can say that chiasm paired with *écart* names for Merleau-

Ponty the structure flesh. The chiasm seems to refer to a kind of a relationship (between me and the world, the seer and the seen, between seeing and hearing, etc.) where the two parts are intertwined and continuously in touch, and yet at the same time, they do not collapse into sameness, but instead always remain separated.

We can see the in the chiasmic relationship, for example, between us and things in the world, that we are so closely in-touch, almost to the point of becoming the other:

Like the natural man, we situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where, by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others and we become world. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 160)

And yet, Merleau-Ponty says, the two parts of the chiasmic relationship do not coincide with each other:

There is no coinciding of the seer with the visible. But each borrows from the other, takes from or encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 261)

This paradoxical intertwining to the point that one almost becomes infused with the other, and yet, their difference remains maintained through a thin gap that can never be completely closed over, is what we will see in the next chapter in the body hermeneutics of yellow light and the leaves in Harris's *Northern Lake*.

6.4. The shift from being to the "light embrace" of the holy

In this last section working on the hill in *Northern Lake*, we want to shift the attention from the noematic description of what is happening in the painting to the noetic aspect of how the painting attunes, challenges and changes the way that the viewer's phenomenological body is in the world. Let us look again at the shift in attitude required by this artwork, as well as by the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. We have talked about it several times already, and will talk about it again in the next chapter; however, each time we deal with it, we go deeper and further, learn more about it. Let us see how the hill in *Northern Lake*, its flesh, its depth, its ground and its abyss attunes our body.

It has been noted before that the attitude created by Harris's artworks is far from our usual attitude. Merleau-Ponty says that we can begin to perceive atmospheric colors, that is, fields, generalities, "when we allow ourselves simply to be in the world without assuming it, or in cases of illness favouring this passive attitude." (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 266) Indeed, both artworks require a laid-back and

relaxed but at the same time alert attitude, when we do not project ourselves outwards, neither, however shut ourselves away from the world and lose ourselves within our “inner world.” To be able to experience the phenomena this artwork holds for us, we have to acquire and maintain the equilibrium between ourselves and the world in which we are open and receptive while at the same time carefully non-aggressive. This “passive attitude”, as Merleau-Ponty calls it, is indeed a completely different approach to perception, different even from the common phenomenological notion of perception, according to which perception is always a process of articulation of that which is given to us inarticulately, and as such is always a projection of categories, or capacities, or habitual structures, or previously acquired inarticulate or false perceptions. This artwork teaches us that our perception does not need to have everything articulated. In fact, we can perceive the inarticulate, a field, a generality, depth, and we perceive it not by “articulating” it, not by following it out, mapping, sketching, trying to grasp, as we grasp things. We perceive generalities by sinking into them, absorbing them, and letting them fuse into us and through us, as we do with the white light of *Beaver Swamp*, *Algoma* and much more clearly so with the dark flesh of the hill in *Northern Lake*. Merleau-Ponty uses similar language in *The Visible and the Invisible* when talking about how the focusing and de-focusing of the eyes when perceiving the red color shifts the perception from atmospheric to “concrete” color and back:

It requires a focusing, however brief; it emerges from a less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before – as we put so aptly – *fixing* it. And, now that I have fixed it, if my eyes penetrate into it, into its fixed structure, or if they start to wander round about again, the *quale* resumes its atmospheric existence. (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 131-32)

Here in *Northern Lake*, the attitude that allows us to perceive generalities rather than concrete things does not come from helplessness, from mere inability to hold on to anything particular in the generality of the hill. Rather, the suspension of the “personal activity” comes from the surrender to the hill; it is a response that the hill calls for. The hill has its own power and its own measure, its own “pace,” according to which it opens up or closes down, pulls us in or pushes away. In terms of visibility and space, this power of the hill manifests in that it switches the direction of our “interaction” with the hill.

It has been mentioned already that the hill looks like an eye; it opens and closes like an eye, it sharpens and loosens its focus, it moves to the right or the left, but also, it so wonderfully merges with its surrounding. The “eye” of the hill, when it opens, swells, comes out of itself, merges with the sky and water that surrounds it, with the shore at the foreground and the trees that grow on that shore with their trunks,

branches and leaves, and with the viewer too. This seemingly insignificant observation challenges and changes the whole paradigm of the “aesthetic,” and more generally, metaphysical attitude. It is no more us looking at the artwork, but the hill of the artwork looking into us. The abyss of that hill is staring right into us, holding, gently pulling us into its depths and merging with us; and we are only giving in or resisting its pull, listening to the gentle whisper of that depth while it is breathing us in, or shutting the ears from that hardly felt humming of its belly.

This change of direction seems somewhat similar to the “inverse perspective”⁹⁰ technique that has been used in Eastern Orthodox iconography, as well as some European masterpieces from Renaissance on. The point of the technique is to change the geometric perspective in an artwork so that the “center” of perception is shifted from the “objective” view, according to which *the viewer* is in the center and perceives the space of the artwork as an extension of his “objective space.” Instead, the artist can create, for example, multiple perspectives within the same artwork, or, which is closer to our case, shift the center of perspective to “the other side.” The use of this particular technique in religious art has been often interpreted as the shift from an anthropocentric view, to the theocentric one, where God is in the center of the universe, angels and saints are next to him, and the viewer, instead of looking at God and his companions portrayed in an artwork, is being looked at by them.

⁹⁰ Urmă, “The Inverse Perspective in Byzantine Painting.”

There is, however, a striking difference between this traditional notion of inverse perspective and the shift in perception and attitude in the *Northern Lake*, for here, there is no “center” on the other side. Quite to the contrary, “the other side,” that is, the depth of the hill seems wide and dispersed in its generality, void and full at the same time, and that is how this new “paradigm” is not metaphysical, for it is not a “-centrism” anymore. It is not tied to the Euclidean notion of regular space, with a point, an abstract entity without dimension as the center, cause and definition of the uni-verse. This experience is also post-metaphysical, in that there is no more juxtaposition between “here” and “there,” between “subject” and “object.” Instead, there is a continuity, the split of the edges of the hill is full of flesh, and it merges the viewer with the dark depth itself.

There is a sense of immersion in and fusion into the flesh of generality that comes out from the depth of the hill. There is a sense of receptivity, openness and alertness, of the equilibrium and balance maintained by that generality. This sense of alertness and sensitivity is peripheral, concentrated closer to the “edges” of the body, even though the edges themselves seem to be melted away through the fusion with the “outside” generality. Through that movement into periphery, into the place of the fusion, into the middle between “me” and “it,” the center of the body becomes as if hollowed-out. There is a clear sense of “decentralization” of the body. The generality of flesh that comes out of the deepest depth and fuses into the body from all the sides, seems to be

pulling into that peripheral fusion all of one's sensitivity, all of one's flesh, thus creating an openness or a void in the middle of the body itself and leaving that void in the place where "the center" used to be. It is indeed about being completely relaxed, to the point of flowing into the limbs, not holding anything back, "opening up" from inside out, shifting one's sensitivity towards the surface, towards the meeting place with the generality of the outside.

This experience of generality makes one speechless, however, at the same time, it does not annihilate the self, the personhood. There is still integrity and identity of the self that holds together, observes and describes this experience, feels it out, enjoys it, and even manages to formulate it in cognitive terms. But the holding together does not happen from the inside, as the inside has become completely relaxed to the point of feeling hollow. One is being held from the outside. It is the generality, the flesh of the world that holds together one's flesh, one's identity, one's personhood, from the outside. Of course, it makes sense to remember here Anaximander's τὸ χρεών which we discussed when working on the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, as the name for being, that holds entities "in its hand." Here in *Northern Lake*, we move one step further, for not only do we describe how other entities, like trees, are held, nourished and supported by being. More than that, we experience ourselves being held from the outside by the being that is generality, flesh, depth and the abyss.

Here we can see a significant shift of a philosophical paradigm. Through this kind of relationship with the generality, we discover that we are not primarily thrown into the world. We do not have to struggle and overcome the outside forces that push and pull and throw us around. We do not have to fight them by holding ourselves together from the inside, from our center. We do not have to conquer ourselves and conquer the world through the firm grip, through the will. Instead, we are being held by that generality from the outside. We are not thrown but held into the world. Would this be the end of metaphysics?

To conclude the discussion of the hill in *Northern Lake*, and to transition into the discussion of the yellow light, it seems appropriate to ponder for a moment on “the light embrace” of the holy, which Heidegger, following Hölderlin, talks about in “As When on the Holiday...” (1940). Heidegger talks about Hölderlin’s “nature,” which is the holy, which is above gods and humans, and which mediates everything while itself remaining not mediated, the immediate:

What is always former is the holy. It is the primordial, and it remains in itself unbroken and “whole”. This originary “wholeness” gives a gift to everything that is real by virtue of its all-presence: it confers the grace of its own abiding presence. But the primordial wholeness, which thus grants holiness, still enshrouds all fullness in itself, as the immediate, and

it holds in itself the fabric of the essence of all – thus it is precisely
unapproachable by any individual, be that a god or a man. (AWH 95)⁹¹

We can recognize in Heidegger's description of the holy something quite similar to
what we experience in the depth of the hill in *Northern Lake*. We would want to ask the
following question: if it is unapproachable by any individual, how then can we have an
experience of it? Heidegger continues as follows:

The holy confronts all experience with something to which it is
unaccustomed, and so deprives it of its ground. Deranging in this way,
the holy is the awesome itself. But its awesomeness remains concealed in
the mildness of its light embrace. Because this light embrace educates the
future poets, they, as the initiated ones, know the holy. (AWH 95)⁹²

⁹¹ "Das stets Einstige ist das Heilige; denn als das Anfängliche bleibt es in sich unversehrt und »heil«. Das ursprünglich Heile aber verschenkt durch seine Allgegenwart jedem Wirklichen das Heil seiner Verweilung. Aber das Heile und Heilgewährende verschließt als das Unmittelbare in sich alle Fülle und jeglich Gefüge und ist so gerade unnahbar für jedes Vereinzelte, sei dies ein Gott oder ein Mensch." (WWF 61)

⁹² "Das Heilige setzt alles Erfahren aus seiner Gewöhnung heraus und entzieht ihm so den Standort. Also ent-setzend ist das Heilige das Entsetzliche selbst. Aber seine Entsetzlichkeit bleibt verborgen in der Milde des leichten Umfanges. Weil dieses jedoch die künftigen Dichter erzieht, wissen sie als die Einbezogenen das Heilige." (WWF 62)

Here, again, we can see the parallels between Hölderlin's and Heidegger's "light embrace" and the experience of being gently held from outside by the grayish shine of the flesh of the hill in *Northern Lake*. This flesh does indeed educate the artist, and by proxy also the viewer, by the "light embrace" with which it holds us and which requires a different from our usual attitude to be felt, experienced and described.

So, it seems we have finally made a leap from being to the holy, remembering that the two are the same and yet not the same. In the following sections on the yellow light in *Northern Lake*, we will go all out working on the human experience of the holy. The key difference, which might not be quite as prominent when describing the experience of being, but which shines fully when describing the experience of the holy, is the phenomenon of the hale (*das Heile*). The phenomenon of the hale will be central in our body hermeneutics of the yellow light in *Northern Lake* and will give us a different perspective on experiencing the holy in a personal and intimate way.

Chapter 7. Human experience of the holy

We have arrived at the last part of our present journey, looking at the human experience of the holy with the help of Harris's painting *Northern lake*. As mentioned before, the two main "poles" of *Northern lake*, and consequently, the two main intersections of phenomenological work with the painting, occur around trees in the forefront and the hill in the background. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the hill brings us to experience the thickness of depth, full and empty at the same time, the abyss underneath the surface of the world. It is the background and ground for the appearance of entities, and as such, it is not an entity itself. Both being itself and the holy can be experienced as such a grounding depth that is receding into nothingness, into the non-presence. In the dynamics of focusing and defocusing produced by the hill in *Northern Lake*, we can experience the play between the entities and being, a play in which they take each other over and give way to each other.

The other pole of this artwork is centered around the bright leaves right in the forefront of the painting. It gives us an entry into the personal and human experience of the holy, which is the main theme of this last chapter. We will start with the overview of the hale (*das Heile*) and the grace (*das Heil*) in several of Heidegger's texts, for these are not only steps on our path of looking for the holy, but also are the gifts of presence, even if concealed, of the holy and the divinities. Then we proceed into the hermeneutics of the artwork, starting with the chiasm between the leaves and the light in the painting.

In a section after that, the chiasm of leaves and light will be mirrored and expanded upon in the descriptions of the phenomenological experiences of the light. Then we will look at the parallels between the experience of this painting and Heidegger's lecture "Homecoming/To Kindred Ones." We will finish this chapter and the whole project by looking at friendliness as an experience of the holy presence in the most personal and comforting way through this particular artwork.

7.1. The hale and the weal in Heidegger's phenomenology of the holy

Given the importance Heidegger places on language and the relationships between words within language, it would be an oversight when dealing with Heidegger's holy to not also look into the other German words Heidegger uses that belong to the same root family. Heidegger himself plays with these relationships in at least four different texts, but the connections between the holy and its language-relatives are often obscured in English translations of Heidegger's texts partially due to them not being translated consistently. Related to "the holy" (*das Heilige*) are the verb "to heal" (*heilen*), an adjective/adverb "whole/sound/well" (*heil*) and, most importantly, two related but slightly different nouns, "the hale" (*das Heile*) and "the weal" or "grace" (*das Heil*).

When we try to talk about the phenomenological experience of the holy and to describe this experience hermeneutically, both in terms of language and in terms of the

body, all of these words and their German meanings serve as helpful guides. They point out for us the experiences and phenomena we need to pay attention to and reassure us when we are on the right track. And yet, there is very little about them in the Heidegger literature⁹³. As a group, these words are very important for trying to understand the experience of the holy from our human perspective. They bring the somewhat strange and lofty notions of the holy and gods very close to our skin. In many ways they speak directly to the body, both to its sensual and visceral as well as to its emotional aspect. This is why some introduction of these words, their meanings and what Heidegger does with them is important before continuing with the body hermeneutics of *Northern Lake*, which will take us to the experiences of these same aspects with the help of the painting.

Talking about the general usage in language, let us start with the adjective “*heil*,” which is sometimes also used in the adverb form. It means “whole and sound” both in the sense of “complete in itself, not diseased or injured,” as well as “recovered from injury.” It has a sense of a simple physical wholeness of being unbroken, undamaged or restored, as well as a vital sense of being healthy, being well, or having been healed. It does seem to correspond more or less to the English “hale,” though the connection to the verb “to heal” (“*heilen*”) is much more obvious in German. “*Das Heile*,” which we

⁹³ By far the most detailed and helpful section on the hale can be found in Andrew Mitchell, *The Fourfold*.

translate as “the hale,” is a nominalized version of this adjective. From the phenomenological perspective, this word is significant, as it can describe both how something is, its state, its way of being, as well as how something feels to us and how it makes us feel. So this word is helpful in that it can indicate both the state of something that is whole and undamaged, including a sense of original primordial haleness as we will see soon, as well as a “personal” feeling of being well and whole, being healthy and full of life. Finally, “*das Heil*” which seems closest to English “the weal” or “the grace,” usually denotes anything from a common sense of luck, good fortune and general wellbeing to the religious sense of grace and blessing. It is not quite clear whether the difference between “*das Heile*” and “*das Heil*” is very important to Heidegger. Andrew Mitchell in *The Fourfold* translates both of them as “hale,” however, German dictionaries provide somewhat different sets of meanings for each of these words, and there seems to be a slight difference in how Heidegger uses them, so here we have chosen to translate the first one as “the hale” and the second one as “the weal” or “grace,” depending on the context.

We will now take a look at each of the four texts of Heidegger, where we found the relationships between these terms. We will look at them in chronological order, from the earlier to the later ones.

In “*Wie wenn am Feiertage...*” (1940), Heidegger talks about the holy (*das Heilige*), “whole” (*heil*), the hale (*das Heile*) and the weal (*das Heil*) here translated once as “the

grace", and the once as "the greeting". This lecture is very important for us since here Heidegger establishes Hölderlin's holy as more original, more fundamental than the divine when he says:

Hölderlin names nature the holy because she is "older than the ages and above gods." Thus, "holiness" is in no way a property borrowed from a determinate god. The holy is not holy because it is divine; rather the divine is divine because in its way it is "holy"; for Hölderlin calls "chaos" "holy" in this stanza. The holy is the essence of nature. (AWH 82)⁹⁴

A few pages further, the nature is called the "always former". Heidegger says it is holy, and introduces the relationship between the holy (*das Heilige*), remaining hale (*heil*), the hale (*das Heile*) here translated as "wholeness," and the grace (*das Heil*):

What is always former is the holy [*das Heilige*]. It is the primordial, and it remains in itself unbroken and "whole" [*heil*]. This originary

⁹⁴ "Die Natur nennt Hölderlin das Heilige, weil sie »älter denn die Zeiten und über die Götter« ist. Also ist »Heiligkeit« keineswegs die einem feststehenden Gott entlehene Eigenschaft. Das Heilige ist nicht heilig, weil es göttlich, sondern das Göttliche ist göttlich, weil es in seiner Weise »heilig« ist; denn »heilig« nennt Hölderlin in dieser Strophe auch »das Chaos«. Das Heilige ist das Wesen der Natur. Diese enthüllt als das Tagende ihr Wesen im Erwachen." (WWF58)

“wholeness” [*das Heile*] gives a gift to everything that is real by virtue of its all-presence: it confers the grace [*das Heil*] of its own abiding presence. But the primordial wholeness [*das Heile*], which thus grants holiness [sic⁹⁵] [*das Heilgewährende*], still enshrouds all fullness in itself, as the immediate, and it holds in itself the fabric of the essence of all – thus it is precisely unapproachable by any individual, be that a god or a man. (AWH 95)⁹⁶

It is important to note that here Heidegger seems to talk about the hale (*das Heile*) as a “quality” of the holy, and the grace or weal (*das Heil*) as the gift that the entities receive from the holy through the presence of haleness. The holy itself remains hale (here translated as “whole”), and the primordial haleness of the holy is that which grants the grace or weal of its presence to everything that is.

Das Heil is mentioned again later in the lecture, this time perhaps somewhat misleadingly translated as “greeting,” when Heidegger interprets Hölderlin’s lines about how the divine powers used to support human livelihood:

⁹⁵ “Heilgewährende” would be more accurately translated as “grace-granting” instead of “which grants holiness”.

⁹⁶ “Das stets Einstige ist das Heilige; denn als das Anfängliche bleibt es in sich unversehrt und »heil«. Das ursprünglich Heile aber verschenkt durch seine Allgegenwart jedem Wirklichen das Heil seiner Verweilung. Aber das Heile und Heilgewährende verschließt als das Unmittelbare in sich alle Fülle und jeglich Gefüge und ist so gerade unnahbar für jedes Vereinzelte, sei dies ein Gott oder ein Mensch.” (WWF 61)

“Before,” nature, “smiling,” tended “the fields” for men. With a fleeting hint back to the first stanza, the word “fields” stands here for everything on which and from which men live. Formerly, the greeting [*das Heil*] of the holy was “smiling”, all-present, tireless, friendly, quite untroubled if the men “scarcely felt” what was then happening. (AWH 87)⁹⁷

These powerfully poetic and colorful images of the “grace” or weal of the holy as smiling and friendly will be very helpful and encouraging when talking about the phenomenology of the yellow light in Harris’s *Northern Lake*, for these precisely are also the descriptions that come from the body hermeneutics of the affective region when one is engaged with this aspect of the painting. Heidegger continues:

In their hurry toward the tangible, the men took what was granted by nature, divinely beautiful, only for their own use and service, and reduced the all-present to the form of a servant. But she permitted this, “smiling” in the tranquil resignation of the primordial, unconcerned with successes;

⁹⁷ “Die Natur hat »zuvor« »lächelnd« den Menschen »den Aker« gebauet. Das Wort »der Acker« steht hier, mit einem flüchtigen Zurückwinken in die erste Strophe, für alles, worauf und woraus die Menschen leben. »Lächelnd« war vordem das Heil des Heiligen in allem gegenwärtig, mühelos und freundlich und deshalb unberührt davon, daß die Menschen »kaum fühlten«, was da geschehen.” (WWF 63)

she left it to men to misconstrue the holy. When “nature” is misconstrued in that way, each thing “is” no more than what it accomplishes. The truth, however, is that each thing always accomplishes only that which it is. But everything, even every humanity, “is” only according to the “way” in which nature, coming to presence through itself, the holy, remains present within it. (AWH 87)⁹⁸

The contrast Heidegger makes between “how it was” when humans experienced the weal of the holy through the hale and how is it when everything is reduced to utility⁹⁹ is a very important indication for us. It helps us very much to see what the presence of the holy is and what it is not. Heidegger indicates that the presence of the hale is not experienced in the “hurry toward the tangible.” We have also seen in the previously described experience with both *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* and *Northern Lake* that the attitude demanded and well as produced by each artwork that takes us to the

⁹⁸ “Die Menschen haben dies von der göttlichschönen Natur Gewährte in der Übereilung auf das Greifbare nur zu ihrem Nutzen und in ihren Dienst genommen und so die Allgegenwärtige in die Knechtsgestalt hinabgestoßen. Aber sie hat dies »lächelnd« in der Gelassenheit des Anfänglichen und allen Erfolgen überlegen zugelassen und die Menschen der Verkennung des Heiligen überlassen. Bei solcher Verkennung »der Natur« »ist« dann ein Jegliches nur noch das, was es leistet, während es doch in Wahrheit je nur das leistet, was es ist. Aber Jegliches, auch jedes Menschentum, »ist« nur nach der »Art«, wie die aus sich wesende Natur, das Heilige, in ihm gegenwärtig bleibt.” (WWF 63-64)

⁹⁹ Here we already begin to see what will be further developed in *The Question Concerning Technology*.

experience of being and the holy requires us to slow down, both externally and internally. It requires defocusing, a shift of attention away from the “tangible,” away from concrete entities, and towards the more subtle generalities like dispersed color fields or light fields. This indication given here by Heidegger provides direction for our phenomenology of the human experience of the holy and gives a very welcome reassurance once we are on the right track, with an attitude that is appropriate and fruitful to actually experience the holy.

In “Homecoming / To Kindred Ones” (1943), Heidegger connects the adverb “*heil*” with gaiety and the “angels,” with home and with feeling at home, and the same gaiety again with the hale (“*das Heile*”), healing and the holy. The first passage that we will look at talks about the divine messengers that come out of the “gaiety,” wherein everything is preserved “hale” (*heil*) and at home.

Both, earth and light, the “angels of the house,” and “the angels of the year,” are called “preservers,” because as the greeting ones they bring to light the gaiety in whose clarity the “nature” of things and people is safely [*heil*] preserved. What remains preserved, safe and sound [*heil*], is “homelike” in its essence. The messengers’ greeting comes out of the gaiety

that allows everything to be at home. The granting of this feeling of being-at-home is the essence of the homeland. (HE 36)¹⁰⁰

The adverb “*heil*” is important for us here because it refers to the safe preservation of the “nature” of things and people, unlike in the previous text, where it was in reference to the haleness of the holy itself. When we feel at home, we feel “*heil*,” it is a rather special feeling, and to call it “safe” is not quite enough. To be “*heil*” has to do with being oneself, being who one really is. It is to be true to oneself and to be free to be true to oneself. This place in the text is interesting, for between this page and the next page, when Heidegger mentions “the hale,” he changes the way that he uses the word gaiety (*Heitere*), which is the central word of this text. From the neuter “*das Heitere*,” it becomes feminine “*die Heitere*” and becomes the holy itself.

¹⁰⁰ “Beide, Erde und Licht, die “Engel des Hauses” und die “Engel des Jahres”, heißen die “Erhaltenden”, weil sie als die Grüßenden das Heitere zum Scheinen bringen, in dessen Klarheit die “Natur” der Dinge und der Menschen heil bewahrt ist. Was heil bewahrt bleibt, ist “heimisch” in seinem Wesen. Die Boten grüßen aus dem Heiteren, das alles heimisch sein läßt. Das Heimische zu gewähren, ist das Wesen der Heimat.” (HD 17)

Gaiety preserves and holds everything within what is safe and sound [*im Unverstörten und Heilen*]. Gaiety heals [*heilt*] fundamentally. It is the holy [*das Heilige*]. (HE37)¹⁰¹

Here, the gaiety (*die Heitere*) is that which holds everything, that is, things and people in a safe “place,” or, perhaps, a “state,” or even better an “atmosphere” of the hale (*das Heile*). The reference to holding reminds us again of Anaximander’s τὸ χρεών, one of the early names for being, Heidegger says, which carefully holds entities in its “hand,” as well as of Hölderlin’s “light embrace” of the holy, with which it “educates” the poets who “know” the holy. It should not come as a surprise then that the gaiety is the holy itself, which primordially heals things and people.

We will come back to this text later in this chapter, what we want to take away at this point from the two passages in “Homecoming / To Kindred Ones” is the connection that Heidegger himself makes between the holy (*das Heilige*), being “safely preserved” (*heil*), the hale (*das Heile*), and healing (*heilen*), and that also in the context of home and feeling at home. Feeling at home, “being safely preserved,” and being healed refer to the “entities” side of the relationship, to things and humans and their wellbeing, while the hale and the holy, and the “active” healing has to do with the other side of the

¹⁰¹ “Die Heitere behält und hat alles im Unverstörten und Heilen. Die Heitere heilt ursprünglich. Sie ist das Heilige.” (HD 18)

relationship, with that power which actually sustains the “nature” of things and people and grants them the healing that they long for. Interestingly, Heidegger also connects the hale (*das Heile*) with homeland and the “unhale” (*das Unheile*) with homelessness in “*Die Kunst und der Raum*” (1969)¹⁰². The mentioning of the “unhale” in this late text serves as a good transition to the two post-war texts where Heidegger talks about the hale and the weal.

Mitchell in *The Fourfold* points out that Heidegger’s post-war interpretations of our human situation in relationship to the presence or absence of the holy and hale seem bleak and dire. “The sense of the hale in the 1946 essay ‘What Are Poets For?’ is that of an existence ever threatened with extinction.” (Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 197)

Whether it is because in this essay Heidegger is thinking along with Rilke, not with Hölderlin or Trakl, or perhaps this is how Heidegger feels at the time independent of which poet he is in dialogue with, in any case, the situation described seems rather gloomy. In the same way that the hale in the earlier texts was connected to safe preservation of the true essence of people and things, here, the lack of the hale leads to the danger of human beings losing their relationship to being.

¹⁰² “Räumen ist, in sein Eigenes gedacht, Freigabe von Orten, an denen die Schicksale des wohnenden Menschen sich ins Heile einer Heimat oder ins Unheile der Heimatlosigkeit oder gar in die Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber beiden kehren. Räumen ist Freigabe der Orte, an denen ein Gott erscheint, der Orte aus denen die Götter entflohen sind, Orte, an denen das Erscheinen des Göttlichen lange zögert.” (KR 206)

The wholesome and sound [*das Heile*] withdraws. The world becomes without healing, unholy [*heil-los*]. Not only does the holy, as the track to the godhead, thereby remain concealed; even the track to the holy, the hale and whole [*das Heile*], seems to be effaced. That is, unless there are still some mortals capable of seeing the threat of the unhealable, the unholy [*das Heillose*]¹⁰³, *as* such. They would have to discern the danger that is assailing man. The danger consists in the threat that assaults man's nature in his relation to Being itself, and not in accidental perils. This danger is *the* danger. (WPF115)¹⁰⁴

However, after this, Heidegger quotes Hölderlin about the "saving" that grows right in the midst of the danger and suggests that perhaps any salvation that comes not from *the* danger is still in the hale-less. At the very end of the essay Heidegger gives us a better

¹⁰³ Perhaps translating this literally as "hale-less" or even "grace-less" would have been less confusing.

¹⁰⁴ "Das Heile entzieht sich. Die Welt wird heil-los. Dadurch bleibt nicht nur das Heilige als die Spur zur Gottheit verborgen, sondern sogar die Spur zum Heiligen, das Heile, scheint ausgelöscht zu sein. Es sei denn, daß noch einige Sterbliche vermögen, das Heillose *als* Heillose drohen zu sehen. Sie müßten ersehen, welche Gefahr den Menschen anfällt. Die Gefahr besteht in der Bedrohung, die das Wesen des Menschen in seinem Verhältnis zum Sein selbst angeht, nicht aber in zufälligen Fährnissen. Diese Gefahr ist *die* Gefahr." (WD272-3)

indication that from the hale-less the poets can find the way back to the hale and then also to the holy:

Holiness can appear only within the widest orbit of the wholesome [*das Heile*]. Poets who are of the more venturesome kind are under way on the track of the holy because they experience the unholy [*das Heillose*] as such.
(WPF 138)¹⁰⁵

And then, the path from the unhale (*Unheil*)¹⁰⁶, through the hale (*das Heile*), towards the holy, and then, in turn, towards the divine and god, is sketched out by Heidegger:

The unholy, as unholy [*Unheil als Unheil*], traces the sound [*das Heile*] for us. What is sound [*Heiles*] beckons to the holy, calling it. The holy binds the divine. The divine draws the god near. (WPF 138)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ "Erst im weitesten Umkreis des Heilen vermag Heiliges zu erscheinen. Dichter vor der Art jener Wagenderen sind, weil sie das Heillose als ein solches erfahren, unterwegs auf der Spur des Heiligen." (WD 294)

¹⁰⁶ It is not immediately clear from Heidegger's text alone, what if any is the difference between the hale-less (*Heilloss*) and unhale (*Unheil*), though the first seems to be a mere lack, while the second a more decisive and substantial absence.

¹⁰⁷ "Unheil als Unheil spürt uns das Heile. Heiles erwinkt rufend das Heilige. Heilige bindet das Göttliche. Göttliches nähert den Gott." (WD294)

The way that this gradual falling into the oblivion of the holy, or perhaps of the experience of the holy, is counteracted by the equally gradual recovery of that experience or connection is very important from a phenomenological point of view. The “stages” of losing the holy, and then the hale, and then feeling hale-less, and un-hale, hence homeless, and similarly recovering the connection to the holy, the divine and even god(s) through the traces of traces that seemed to have been almost untraceable any more, indicates to us the possible phenomenological “states” or “attitudes.” Gradual shifts of these attitudes, moving step by step, or stage by stage further towards the holy or perhaps deeper into the holy, outline for us the possibility of becoming truer to ourselves, more at home with ourselves and within the holy. By exploring these stages or attitudes and describing them phenomenologically, especially through the body hermeneutics method, we restore them, give them back the thickness of phenomena that we really experience instead of them being the abstractions that we can only conceptualize. In the previous chapters, we have already described the beginning of the shift from dealing with only entities to experiencing being itself and then to feeling out the holy, however only through this chapter, where we describe the hale, does our experience of the holy become truly alive.

Now let us take a look at the last of the four texts where Heidegger mentions the weal (*das Heil*) as a link between the mortals and the divinities, the lecture “Building

Dwelling Thinking" (1951). Heidegger goes through the dwelling of mortals in relationship to each fold of the fourfold, and with regard to the divinities, he says:

Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities. In hope they hold up to the divinities what is un hoped for. They wait for intimations of their coming and do not mistake the sighs of their absence. ... In the very depth of misfortune [*Unheil*] they wait for the weal [*Heil*] that has been withdrawn. (BDT 148)¹⁰⁸

While the description of this situation is rather pessimistic, with *Unheil* here translated as "the very depth of misfortune" being the current reality of the mortals, there is also hope in the awaiting of the divinities, who, we would assume, if they arrive would bring with them the weal or grace (*das Heil*) that has been withdrawn with the divinities' departure. A few pages later, Heidegger shifts from *Unheil-Heil* to *Unheile-Heile*, still describing the relationship between the mortals and the divinities. Mortals

¹⁰⁸ "Die Sterblichen wohnen, insofern sie die Göttlichen als die Göttlichen erwarten. Hoffend halten sie ihnen das Unverhoffte entgegen. Sie warten der Winke ihrer Ankunft und verkennen nicht die Zeichen ihres Fehls. ... Im Unheil noch warten sie des entzogenes Heils." (BWD 145)

are actually striving to surmount all that is common and unsound
[*Unheile*] in them in order to bring themselves before the haleness [*das*
Heile] of the divinities. (BDT 151)¹⁰⁹

It is quite useful here to see *Unheile* placed alongside “common” (*Gewöhnliches*). In the next section, when looking at the leaves in Harris’s *Northern Lake, Algoma*, we will see that the common “everydayness” indeed seems opposite to the feeling that we get from the bright yellow leaves in the painting. When Heidegger phrases our mortal preoccupation as striving to overcome what is habitual and “unhale” in us, he makes it seem that the “unhoped for” mentioned just a few pages before is more possible than we would otherwise assume. This opens up a possibility, a hope that we, the mortals, can bring ourselves before the haleness of divinities, can experience that haleness as the sense of wellbeing, a sense of feeling at home and of being oneself.

In the next two sections, we are going back to the phenomenological descriptions of the artwork and of viewers’ experiences of the artwork. We will start with the chiasm of yellow light and leaves, and through this chiasm and through the contrast between the lit leaves and the ones that are not lit, we will see how the haleness can manifest itself perceptually in the fusion of light with the leaves.

¹⁰⁹ “im Grunde danach trachten, ihr Gewöhnliches und Unheiles zu übersteigen, um sich vor das Heile des Göttlichen zu bringen.” (BWD 147)

7.2. The chiasm of light and leaves in Harris's Northern Lake

Just as red in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* dominates the whole forefront of the painting, captures the viewer and creates a powerful attitude, so does yellow in *Northern Lake*. However, the attitudes created by these striking colors in each painting are very different. The red of *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* is disturbing and captivating, and throws the viewer into feeling an extreme borderline situation of facing life and death, living to the fullest and also dying, trying to grip the entities and hold on to them as they are inevitably escaping that grip and disappearing. The attitude created by the yellow in *Northern Lake* seems just the opposite. It is about calm and peaceful, relaxed and balanced, quiet and joyful flourishing, and it is defined most of all by the yellow light that is fusing with the leaves and changing the way that the leaves feel, simultaneously changing the way that the viewer feels while experiencing the leaves.

One of the main philosophical or phenomenological insights in this painting is the mutual holding, fusing, or using Merleau-Ponty's term, chiasm between the particular entities and the generality of that which is not particular. We have already talked about it when describing the play between the entities and being in the sections on the hill. However, it is much better visible in the relationship between the leaves and the light. The leaves hold the light, and the light can show itself only through the leaves. Yet, at the same time, it is through the light, that the leaves truly show themselves in

remarkable contrast to the other unlit leaves in the painting that look dull and seem to lack precisely the vibrancy and shine brought out by the light. However, the mutual showing of light and leaves does not collapse them into sameness. Their differences are preserved, the light remains dispersed and intangible¹¹⁰ which makes it very different from the leaves. Their fusion, their chiasm becomes the meeting places of their different natures.

It is striking to see how Harris manages to show the light gradually entering into the leaves, filling them with shine and warmth, saturating them with intensity and vibrancy. This can be seen from close up through several layers of the strokes of different shades of yellow, which seem to be revealing the different levels of saturation that light is reaching when it comes into the leaves¹¹¹. The direction of Harris's strokes is parallel to the direction of light and perpendicular to the surface of the leaves. It highlights even more that the light is coming into the leaves and that in doing so, it brightens the mustardy and occasionally even brownish color of the leaves, turning it into succulent brilliant yellow. The shine of the light fills the leaves from and through the sides that face the light and transforms them while still letting them remain the leaves. It takes a great artist to capture and communicate in such a direct and attractive

¹¹⁰ We will see later, that this particular light is also quite clearly felt as warmth and softness, not only as seen from the side on the leaves, but also directly on the skin of the viewer, yet, it is still not tangible in the same way that concrete things are tangible in their dense and hard presence.

¹¹¹ Unfortunately, this is not visible very clearly in most reproductions of this painting.

way these seeming contradictions of a chiasmic relationship, in which each of the sides lends its nature, lends its difference to the other side, without however obliterating that difference into sameness. The light becomes clearly visible, it becomes manifest through the ability of the leaves to absorb it, through the ability of the “matter” of those leaves to be lit. Yet, at the same time, the yellow flesh of the leaves almost melts in the light, the “matter” of it becomes less concrete, less particular, as if filled with shine. The light is such that it does not bring out the details; instead, the attention is drawn to the light itself. In the meeting between the light and the leaves, the light remains “general,” dispersed, “misty”, yet at the same time, it seems just the opposite of misty; it is crisp and clear. The differences between the left and the right side of the painting, especially manifest in the water and the sky that we have discussed in the previous chapter, here in the middle of the painting become fused together. The leaves that are lit by the light retain both the misty dispersed humid shine that characterizes water and sky on the right side of the painting, and the crisp and clear concrete quality of the left side of the painting. As we will see in the next sections, this chiasm that we see in the painting between the leaves and the light is also reflected in the viewer, giving the viewer the experience of merging with the light and with a holy presence that is concealed within the light.

While the yellow of the leaves filled with light is so central in *Northern Lake*, and its brightness is so shiny, the left part of the painting remains almost shockingly dull in

its lack of light. The contrast between the bright yellow leaves in the center and towards the right of the painting and the mustardy leaves on the left is very strong, and it comes up repeatedly as one spends time working with the artwork. It might not be as striking in the reproductions, it manifests much more in person, perhaps also due to the difference in texture and layering of colors. While the lit leaves have multiple layers of yellow strokes and look thick and full, the mustardy leaves on the left have a brighter outline around the edges but otherwise, look thin and flat. Cognitively it is quite clear that these are the same kinds of trees and the same kinds of leaves, the only difference between them is in the light. However, perceptually and perhaps even affectively, they almost look as if they were different species. In the difference between these leaves, there is a clear feeling of a difference between the mundane and the extraordinary. While the bright yellow leaves in the center and on the right feel almost miraculous with their shine and intensity of presence, they also feel extremely real and full of life. The “normal” leaves on the left feel dull, flat and lifeless. Even though they do not lack color, in fact, their color is wonderful by itself, however, contrasted with the lit leaves, phenomenologically they seem to lack precisely that light and warmth that has been “added on” by the light to the lit leaves. The shine of light, which comes into the lit leaves from the outside, even though by nature is very different from the leaves, makes them ooze with presence and liveliness, makes them look more alive, more healthy, more present, and also more proper.

We are reminded again of Heidegger's passage in "Building Dwelling Thinking" (BDT 151, BWD 147), where he juxtaposes the haleness brought by divinities with what is "unsound and common" in mortals. The word translated as "common" is "*Gewöhnliches*", it is that, which is usual, normal, ordinary, habitual. The dull leaves on the left seem to illustrate the "common" for us, while the leaves that are full of shine bring out for us in a direct visual way what "the hale" could look and feel like. Heidegger also talks about the difference between everydayness and the holiday (the day of celebration) in 1943 contribution "Andenken." He juxtaposes the everydayness, the usual, and real with the holiday, saying that the holiday, the celebration, the unusual opens up the space around us and brings us into the realm in which our essence is defined, while the everyday, the usual cannot sustain such an opening. (A 97, R 126) Towards the end of "Andenken," Heidegger speaks again of this opening and says that it is the holy. (A 139, R 169)

The experience of the "chiasm" between light and the leaves, which is strange for the mind but surprisingly comforting for the affective, attitudinal and even sensual regions for the body, shows us something that constantly happens in body hermeneutics when the phenomenological perception challenges and transforms cognitive assumptions and beliefs. Our cognitive assumption is that what is usual and normal, and "purely natural" is what we would perceive, and how we would encounter entities in their most true form. This assumption is challenged here by the

phenomenological experience of the light, which comes into the leaves from the outside and while remaining different from them and in a way even foreign to them, is what makes the leaves really shine forth with their presence and manifest themselves in a way that is much stronger and strangely feels much more alive and real than without the light. The lit leaves shine forth with what they are much more than the leaves that are not lit, and here it is much more appropriate to work with the lit leaves, for they appear as more real and manifest more fully than the ones that are not lit. These are the first illustrations of the hale as the intermediary between the entities and the holy manifesting in a perceptual way. As we proceed, in the next sections, we will see how the chiasmic relationship between the light and the leaves that manifests here through the perceptual region of the phenomenological body is also present in the general way the artwork attunes the whole phenomenological body, and especially its affective side, the mood and the attitude.

7.3. Quiet joy

The yellow light that shines through the leaves attunes the viewer into the mood of serene joy and peace, and this mood becomes the defining mood of the whole artwork. Both children and adult visitors of the gallery immediately sense this mood and have no trouble identifying it even if they had only a short glimpse at the artwork. One does not need to stay long with this painting before one becomes filled with

serenity and satisfaction, especially if one spends time looking at the leaves that are melting in the light which is filling them out. After a few hours with this painting, the light seems to penetrate even deeper into the viewer, creating a clear and lasting feeling of peacefulness that is quiet and joyous at the same time. Insecurities and worries, concerns about work and success, all kinds of uncertainties are gently washed out and cleared by the yellow light and the soft calmness that it creates.¹¹² I have been working with this artwork for several months, and only a handful of times have I left the artwork at the end of the day without feeling cleansed, restored, and deeply grateful. Now we will look in more detail at this quiet joy and several other feelings that accompany it in the affective, sensual, and postural aspects of the body.

While looking and melting into the yellow of this painting, one is often reminded of Hölderlin's "I talk like a fool. It is joy."¹¹³ It comes from his poem "Homecoming / To Kindred Ones," which Heidegger discusses in detail in the lecture with the same name. We have already mentioned this lecture before and will come back to it again in the next section. Hölderlin's line is brilliant in its simplicity, and it really fits this yellow light and the mood created by it, also because it relates an innocent admittance that this feeling and the way it is expressed is not easy to capture succinctly and clearly in

¹¹² We have seen the beginning of such a shift when working with the light in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, however, there it was much less definite, more neutral and still vague compared to a much more definitive quality of mood created by this yellow light in *Northern Lake*.

¹¹³ "Thörig red ich. Es ist die Freude." (HE 28)

cognitive terms, hence “I talk like a fool.” When trying to describe this particular joy, one stumbles into seeming contradictions. This feeling or mood¹¹⁴, as clear and “definite” it is in the way it is felt, when described in words, is constantly eluding by juxtaposing itself to the conventional ways we seem to think of emotions. And so, this humble joy is neither active nor passive, quiet but not lonely, not compelling but not limiting either, empty but full, full but not heavy, pleasant but not decadent, and so on. Our very manner of thinking seems to still be dialectical through and through, jumping from one extreme to the opposite, constantly on the move and constantly shifting, hardly ever able to hold somewhere in the middle. However, it is precisely such a holding in the middle and settling into oneself that is required and gradually created by the yellow light in the painting, and once settled in, this middle becomes a place of an encounter.

The light coming through the yellow leaves lightens and softens the whole painting; it brings out other colors. The blue, white, gray of the sky and the water become lighter and more open, as pleasant as the calmness of the yellow shine, though not so intense, not so saturated and saturating. In that light, everything seems to be more relaxed and satisfied, satiated and saturated as well. It is about the fullness,

¹¹⁴ I am intentionally leaving this ambiguity here of whether to call it a feeling, or a mood, or an emotion, because these concepts seem to limit and slightly augment how this joy actually feels, for it is not even limited to the affective region of the body, it is also sensual, postural, visceral.

though not a kind that makes one heavy, but the kind that is fulfilling in the best sense. It is not just light, it is warmth too, and it makes one feel warm. It opens up and relaxes the viewer and lets one receive the comforting warmth of the sun while tasting it almost lazily, absorbing it through the skin. In this sense, the quiet joy of the yellow light becomes a tactile experience, and one feels this light on one's skin. Here we really have to be grateful to Harris for conveying this feeling of warm and relaxing sunshine so well; one wonders how this painting would look if it were displayed in full natural light. *North Shore Lake Superior* (1926), which is on display at the National Art Gallery in Ottawa, is placed right under a skylight and on a day with mixed clouds and sunshine, one can really see how the light in the painting is intensified manyfold once the cloud has passed by and the painting is picking up the outside sunshine. Everything in the painting becomes fuller and brighter. It comes to presence and shows itself so much more, so much stronger when it meets the natural light. And then everything in the painting recedes and pulls back into itself when the next cloud covers the skylight again. The yellow light in *Norther Lake* is already so much stronger, so much more intensely comforting than the neutral light in *North Shore Lake Superior*. How would it look if it were meeting the real light and sunshine? How would the contrast between the lit and the unlit leaves come across in the live changing light of the sunny day with clouds?

The yellow light attunes the mood, and here indeed, the mood becomes more than just a mood, more than just an affective side of our body. Instead it extends into perceptual, spatial and motor body. It is a bodily attitude of calmness and content, neither passive nor active. The flow of light feels comfortable and comforting quite concretely. It relaxes and stretches out old muscle cramps and the tightness of the spine around the neck, slight headache, and even a hardly sensed bodily sense of being always on guard and never fully safe are melted away by the comforting yellow light of this artwork. There is a sense of melting here. Just like the leaves melt into the light and while absorbing it, the viewer also is invited to melt into the yellow light of the painting, and experience the deep sense of wellbeing, the kind of feeling well, feeling whole and healthy that seems to translate into Heidegger's *heil*, and with it also the grace of *das Heil*, the presence of the divinities, as we will see later in this chapter.

While the affective side of the body responds most directly to light and color in the painting, the posture seems to be attuned more to structural components of the artworks: shapes and lines, planes and movements. In this painting, as well as in the *Beaver Swamp, Algoma (1920)*, the trunks of the trees attune the posture of the viewer, confirm and strengthen the attitude created by light and color. We can look, for example, at the two darker brown trunks that are surrounded by the yellow shiny leaves on the right side and the mustardy ones on the left. Both of them have a very pleasant wavy shape. There is an unexpected yet nice combination of flowing and

sturdiness in them. The trunks look like they are growing, slowly moving, while at the same time, they feel solid and reliable. They feel smooth but not cold. While having a clear vertical quality, they do not stretch out upwards. Rather, they flow into the sky naturally without any strain. Their relaxed and comfortable, natural way of being becomes especially remarkable when compared with the trees in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*. Those trees are stiff and tense, they stick out sharply into the clouds, and their branches hang helplessly towards the earth, beautiful in a way but tragic in their struggle. The tragedy of those dying trees might not be evident from the first look, it might take some time to feel it out and to acquire a clear sense of it, but their strained, tense, and helpless posture is visible right away, even in the reproductions, though undoubtedly more so in the original. Similarly, the red on the branches of those trees, unfortunately hardly visible in the reproductions, pulls one out in an affect, excitement and the feeling of animality, or throws one back at oneself through passion, both ways, however, shows us the bare life which is tension, struggle and pain.

Here in *Northern Lake*, however, Harris is feeling out a completely different attitude, a different way of life. The yellow light and trees in here create a feeling of comfort and satisfaction, calmness and joy. The trees, with their balanced, well-paced way of being compliment the joy attuned by the yellow light. The bodily attitude is calm and confident, balanced in how it is neither over-extended nor self-obsessed or closed-up. While being attuned into this attitude, the body is not extending itself

outwards, not projecting itself into the world and things, but it does not turn inwards and close itself off from the world either. Rather it assumes a receptive attitude when the top of the body, the face and head as if open up, while the rest of the body reclines, moves downwards, at the same time maintaining the openness at the top. Together with the sense of relaxedness, of quiet joy and satisfaction, there is a dual sense of being grounded and supported by the earth while also open towards the sky and absorbing the flow of light that comes through the painting. The leaves absorb the light and warmth from the upper left corner of the painting, and even from somewhere above it, and in a way they seem to open and widen, almost swell towards that light and warmth. In the same way, the body of the viewer opens up into that light of the painting, quite literally feeling that flow flowing into the body from somewhere above. It is important to note that it is not just symbolism or a mental projection; neither is it some fantasy of God in the clouds showering blessings onto our heads. Rather, it happens directly in the body, it is sensed perceptually with the skin and physiognomically or posturally in the way that body parts align themselves to each other and certain parts of the body become as if more present or present in different ways. Just like certain ways of holding Ice Age artworks “take us” straight to the areas of our own body and help us feel them out in different ways¹¹⁵, so does this artwork, perhaps not as strongly as a sculpture held in the hand, but still, clearly enough to be

¹¹⁵ Mallin, *Body on my Mind*, 180-190

felt, attune and open up the body through some kind of visceral or kinesthetic sensation.

The flow of light is a constant theme of Harris's work and can be traced through many of his paintings. It is most obvious in paintings like *North Shore Lake Superior* (1926), where we can clearly see the beams of light shooting from the top left corner into the middle of the painting. Most of the time, however, Harris is working out a subtler kind of light. In quite a few earlier paintings, like *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920) and *Lake Superior* (1921), he explores the light that comes through the cloudy sky and gradually, very slowly, brightens a painting that otherwise seems rather gloomy. Here in *Northern Lake*, however, the light and its brightening seem to be even more subtle than in the cloudy paintings. The light is clearest here, the most transparent, perhaps the hardest to pinpoint in the painting (except through the leaves), but at the same time, it is easiest to feel in one's own body. As opposed to *North Shore Lake Superior*, where the beams of light are clearly outlined, here the light is subtle to the point of being invisible, so atmospheric that it is not localized within an area in the painting. Neither is it localized "there" within the painting but is felt right "here", around the viewer. Perhaps that is why it so clearly brightens up not only the things in the painting, but also the mood and the attitude of people around it. It is true that the light in *Beaver Swamp, Algoma*, also eventually brightens the mood, but it does so very gradually and as if through the contrast with the initial darkness of the painting. Here in *Northern Lake*, the brightening

is already there at the moment of the encounter with the artwork. It is immediate both in terms of time and in terms of space or distance. The sky from where the light is coming is hardly present in this painting, unlike most of his other paintings, as if to suggest that here it is not about where the light is coming from, but about what it does and how it is taken up by things and people.

There is a clear feeling while staying in this light that it is neither about what is “above” nor about what is “below,” but rather about the middle which sustains the balance and manages to relate to what is both “below” and “above”. And so, when the body takes up the yellow light of this painting, it feels deep and high at the same time. One feels so fully grounded, strong and stable, so comfortable physically and content emotionally, directly in touch with the earth, that if one could have roots this would be the time to root in. And yet, at the same time, one feels an amazing openness above the head, reaching upwards and melting into the sky, feeling free like a bird, ready to fly off if that were the desire, and yet not having that desire to fly off. Instead, one feels one is already right there in those heights, in that light, however not by fleeing into it, not even by stretching into it, rather by just receiving it, by meeting the light of the heights right here where one already is. One feels fully oneself, but also powerfully connected to earth and sky and open to receive the gifts of the earth as well as the sky.

This section contains most of the direct phenomenological descriptions of how the yellow light that is filling the leaves in *Northern Lake* attunes the body of the viewer into an attitude of quiet joy, deep satisfaction, balance, ability and in general, an overwhelming sense of wellbeing that comes from the chiasm of one's own body with that light. I have kept Heidegger's text mostly out of this section on purpose, for this is how one really works with an artwork following the body hermeneutics method. We do not force the text onto the artwork, neither do we explain the text with the help of the artwork, forcing the artwork onto the text. Instead, we initially come with open-ended questions, with things that puzzle us, things that we do not quite understand, and then we set those questions aside and take time to live in the same space with the artwork. We play with the artwork, admire it, enjoy it, we listen to what it wants us to do. As much as possible, we try to let the artwork teach us by attuning us, changing us, adjusting our ways, our style, our attitude. If we are lucky, it will happen that the artwork will also answer some of our questions, though often it does not occur exactly the way we expected it. I was fortunate that this artwork gave me so much, even though I did not quite understand at the time how it was answering my questions. It was only after some time that I understood that the yellow light of *Northern Lake* was teaching me about Heidegger's *Heile* and *Heil*, the haleness and the grace, that it was giving me a direct experience of that, which, according to Heidegger, comes to mortals through the presence of divinities, through the experience of the holy. In the next section, we are

taking this experience of fusing with the yellow light back to Heidegger's text, particularly to the holy that Heidegger talks about in the lecture "Homecoming/To Kindred Ones."

7.4. Gaiety in Heidegger's lecture "Homecoming / To Kindred Ones"

Delivered in June of 1943, "Homecoming/To Kindred Ones" is still somewhat in the transition between Heidegger's middle and late thought. While his understanding of the gods here is not quite the same yet as that of the divinities of the fourfold in 1950s¹¹⁶, this lecture is one of the most fruitful ones when it comes to our "human" side of the relationship with the divine. It is, to my knowledge, the last text where Heidegger speaks about joy so extensively. He mentions the "quiet-joyous mood of the poet" in "Hölderlin's Earth and Heaven" (1959) (HEHE 186, HEHD 161) and discusses in half a page the "serene mood" of the cloud as being attuned by the sky (HEHE190, HEHD166). But there he seems to refer to what he has already discovered about joy and gaiety in "Homecoming/To Kindred Ones." Here we will keep making bridges between Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin and the phenomenological descriptions of *Northern Lake* from the previous two sections.

¹¹⁶ In this lecture Heidegger draws his interpretation of gods from Hölderlin's elegy "The Wanderer," where Ether, Earth and Light are called "eternal gods". By 1950 in lectures "The Thing" and "Language" the earth is no more a divinity for Heidegger, but one of the folds of the fourfold along with sky, mortals and divinities.

Hölderlin's poem begins with the joy of the homecoming poet, here manifested as a cloud. Heidegger says that "the joyful" ("*das Freudige*"), which is the "most inviting in the homeland" and "comes to meet" the poet, is the name that "outshines all others in the entire poem." (HE34, HD15) And yet the joy is not created by the poet; it does not originate from within the poet. Instead, just like the joy brought out by the yellow light in *Northern Lake*, the joy in Hölderlin's poem is received from the heights of the sky, from something or someone other than the poet:

The cloud composes poetry. Because it looks straight into that which gazes upon it in return, its poem is not idly invented or contrived. To compose is to find. Accordingly, the cloud must certainly reach out beyond itself towards something other than itself. It does not generate the theme of its poem. The theme does not come out of the cloud. It comes over the cloud, as something that the cloud awaits.¹¹⁷ (HE 34)

¹¹⁷ "Die Wolke dichtet. Weil sie in das blickt, wovon sie selbst angeblickt wird, ist ihr Gedichtetes nicht eitel erdacht und erfunden. Das Dichten ist ein Finden. Dabei muß die Wolke freilich über sich hinausgehen zu solchem, was nicht mehr sie selbst ist. Das Gedichtete entsteht nicht durch sie. Das Gedichtete kommt nicht aus der Wolke. Es kommt über sie als das, dem die Wolke entgegenweilt." (HD 15-16)

Here we see again a reminder about the shift of attitude that we have begun to experience with *Beaver Swamp*, *Algoma* and continued to explore with *Northern Lake*. It is a shift that challenges and changes the outward projective attitude and the subject-object divide that goes hand-in-hand with such an attitude. Instead of the subject being the center and origin of all happening, the one who is active, what we see here is a different situation and a different attitude. The happening is shifted from the center of the person to the middle, to the area in-between. Entering into that area and then waiting there in an open and receptive mode, waiting for the other to also come in some way or another for the meeting to take place, this is what is required if we want to be able to experience the holy and eventually perhaps also the divinities.

In this situation, the relationship that takes place between the poet and the other is that of tuning. From the point of view of the poet, it is about being tuned and becoming attuned. A few lines earlier, Heidegger says:

Joyfulness is composed into a poem. The joyful is tuned by joy into joy. In this way it is what is rejoiced in, and equally what rejoices. And this again can bring joy to others. So the joyful is at the same time that which brings joy.¹¹⁸ (HE 34)

¹¹⁸ "Das Freudige ist das Gedichtete. Das Freudige wird aus der Freude in diese gestimmt. Dadurch ist es das Erfreute und also das Sichfreuende. Dieses kann selbst wieder anderes erfreuen. So ist das Freudige zugleich das Erfreuende." (HD 15)

It is worth noting, that in German the words for mood, voice, sound and attuning all have the same root, so the mood can be seen as that which attunes to or is tuned by something else. In another poem “Greece” (see Heidegger’s 1959 lecture “*Hölderlin’s Erde und Himmel*”), where Hölderlin uses again the same image of the singing cloud, the connection between the mood of the cloud, its attuning and that which does the attuning is made clear:

O you voices [*Stimmen*] of destiny, you ways of the wanderer!

For amid the [eyes’] blue school,

From afar, amid the uproar of heaven

Rings out like the blackbird’s song

The clouds’ [secure] serene [*heitere*] mood [*Stimmung*], well

Tempered [*gestimmt*] by the existence of God, by the thunderstorm.¹¹⁹

(HEHE 179)

¹¹⁹ “O ihr Stimmen des Geschicks, ihr Wege des Wanderers / Denn an der [Augen] Schule Blau / Ferhner, am Tosen des Himmels / Tönt wie der Amsel Gesang / Der Wolken [sichere] heitere Stimmung gut / Gestimmt vom Daseyn Gottes, dem Gewitter.” (HEHD 154-5)

In his own copy of Hölderlin's poems¹²⁰, Heidegger drew two arrows from the "mood" (*Stimmung*) of the cloud to "voices" (*Stimmen*) of destiny and to "tempered" (*gestimmt*), of which perhaps a better translation would be "attuned," thus indicating that the connection here is not merely linguistic, but essential. The voices of destiny in the lecture on this poem are earth, sky, human, and God. It is the existence of God, which attunes the mood of the singing poet. However, God does not manifest but conceals himself within the holy. The mood of joy comes over the poet and is attuned by the presence which itself remains concealed. In a similar way, through the yellow light that comes from the heights in Harris's painting, the mood of the viewer is attuned into quiet joy, the whole posture is attuned into a sense of relaxed satisfaction, the presence behind this light is felt as alive and personal, non-human and yet friendly, even though what or who that presence is remains out of the picture, out of reach.

There is yet another reason to bring this passage from the poem "Greece" into the discussion of Heidegger's lecture on the "Homecoming". When Heidegger is looking for the origin of joy which comes over the poet in "Homecoming," he seems to find the word to name it in "Greece." Translated as "serene" in the quotation above is "*heitere*." What appears to be a mere attribute here to describe the mood, in the lecture

¹²⁰ This copy of the poem with Heidegger's notes is included in Klostermann's *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, p. 257 in the 1981 edition.

on “Homecoming,” becomes a central notion of “gaiety” and is a name for nothing other than the holy itself, that heals everything and keeps everything within the hale:

Gaiety [*die Heitere*] preserves and holds everything within what is safe and sound [*das Heile*]. Gaiety heals [*heilt*] fundamentally. It is the holy [*das Heilige*]. “The highest” and “the holy” are the same for the poet: gaiety. As the source of everything joyful, it remains the most joyful, and it lets the pure brightening [*die Aufheiterung*] come to pass.¹²¹ (HE 37)

It is quite surprising that Heidegger names the holy by the word “gaiety” (*Heitere*). This word is not in the “Homecoming” poem; one is almost tempted to think that “gaiety” steals into Heidegger’s elucidations of “Homecoming” together with the image of the singing cloud from “Greece,” where it is used as a feminine adjective “*heitere*” to describe the mood of the cloud. In the lecture on “Homecoming,” Heidegger begins by using a neuter noun “*das Heitere*” and only in the middle of the discussion he says that there was an old word “*die Heitere*” in the German language, and continues on using the

¹²¹ “Die Heitere behält und hat alles im Unverstörten und Heilen. Die Heitere heilt ursprünglich. Sie ist das Heilige. “Das Höchste” und “das Heilige” ist für den Dichter das Selbe: die Heitere. Sie bleibt als der Ursprung alles Freudigen das Freudigste. In diesem ereignet sich die reine Aufheiterung.” (HD 18)

feminine noun throughout the rest of the text instead of the neuter one he started with¹²².

So why then does Heidegger introduce a new word, rather than keep working with the words related to “joy”? As we will see in the discussion that follows, similarly to the experience we had with describing the feeling created by the yellow light in *Northern Lake*, Heidegger seems to be working with a phenomenon that is greater than what we usually understand by joy, even when speaking of joy that has been attuned by the divine. Perhaps this is why it requires a different word, a word that would hold within itself other aspects of this phenomenon. Unfortunately, the English translation as gaiety does not seem to carry very well the German meanings of *Heitere*. Let us see how gaiety (*Heitere*) is introduced by Heidegger in “Homecoming” and how it is further developed.

We come back to Heidegger’s discussion of the cloud that composes poetry in “Homecoming.” Just after the previously quoted passage about the cloud that receives the joy that is composed into the poetry from outside, Heidegger says:

¹²² Heidegger also used the word *die Heitere* in a written discourse “Andenken” which was published around the same time when “Homecoming” was delivered (1943) but written a year before. There he talks about Hölderlin’s northeast wind which brightens up (*aufheitert*) the air and “extends gaiety [*die Heitere*] into the distance” (R109, A84), but this word is just mentioned and does not become as important as it is in “Homecoming.”

The cloud waits in an open brightness that gladdens [*aufheitert*] the waiting. The cloud is cheered [*aufgeheitert*] in this gladness [*das Heitere*]. What it composes, the joyful, is gaiety [*das Heitere*].¹²³(HE 35)

The verb “*aufheitern*” that here is used once in the active form referring to the open brightness and translated as “to gladden” and once in the passive referring to the cloud itself and translated as “to be cheered,” besides the emotional aspect of the meaning used in translation here, also has a spatial or visual component. It has to do with brightening, clearing, lighting up of the space. “*Aufheitern*” and “*heiter*” relate primarily to the heights of the sky and the sunshine, and as such they seem particularly akin to Harris’s phenomena of light and brightening of the space in several of his paintings. Heidegger is making that connection to space clear as he continues:

We also call it the cheerful [*das “Aufgeräumte”*], but from now on we have to use it in a strict sense: what has been cleared and brightened up. What has been cleared in this way has had a space freely made for it, illuminated and put in order. Only gaiety, that which has been cleared

¹²³ “Die offene Helle, in der die Wolke verweilt, heitert dieses Verweilen auf. Die Wolke ist aufgeheitert in das Heitere. Was sie dichtet, das “Freudige”, ist das Heitere.” (HD 16)

and brightened up in this manner, is able to place everything in its proper place.¹²⁴ (HE 35)

Here again, what Heidegger describes seems completely in tune with the experience of the yellow light in Harris's *Northern Lake*, which permeates and saturates not only the space in the painting and the yellow leaves but also the viewer. It makes the yellow leaves look fully alive and shine with presence, both of their own being and of the light. It also makes the viewer feel comfortable and deeply satisfied within one's own skin. Moreover, with time the light rejuvenates the viewer; it has a healing power of restoring one's wellbeing and sense of belonging, feeling right and feeling in the right place. We see these confirmed once again by the further words of Heidegger:

The joyful has its being in the gaiety that brightens. But gaiety itself appears only in that which gives joy, that which delights. As this brightening makes everything clear, gaiety grants to each thing its essential space, where everything, according to its own kind belongs, in

¹²⁴ "Wir nennen dies auch das "Aufgeräumte". Wir denken dies Wort jetzt und künftig in einem strengen Sinne. Das Aufgeräumte ist in seiner Räumlichkeit freigemacht, gelichtet und gefügt. Das Heitere, das Aufgeräumte, vermag allein, anderem seinen gemäßen Ort einzuräumen." (HD 16)

order to stand there in the brightness if gaiety, like a quiet light, contented in its own being.¹²⁵ (HE 35)

Here the chiasm of the joyful and the gaiety, their mutual fusion, with the joyful being a side that manifests, that is visible, while the gaiety being the founding depth behind the joyful, still leaves one rather puzzled in the same way that “traces of traces” left us puzzled even if we somewhat grasped them cognitively. However, if we remember that Heidegger is about to say that the gaiety is the holy, perhaps then maintaining a distance and a difference between gaiety and the joyful makes more sense. Gaiety founds the joyful and creates such a space for everything, in which it can be oneself, content, and hale. At the same time, that gaiety can be visible only through the joy. Similarly, in *Norther Lake*, the yellow light transforms the leaves (and also the mood of the viewer), makes them more alive, more real, more satisfied, and at the same time shows itself precisely through those leaves and through the quiet joy of the viewer. And yet we can still feel and almost see “behind” the yellowness that shows itself clearly on the leaves and much less clearly but more atmospherically in the air of the painting, the

¹²⁵ “Das Freudige hat sein Wesen im Heiteren, das aufheitert. Das Heitere selbst wiederum zeigt sich zuerst im Erfreuenden. Indem die Aufheiterung alles lichtet, gewährt das Heitere jeglichem Ding den Wesensraum, in den es seiner Art nach gehört, um dort, im Glanz des Heiteren, wie ein stilles Licht, genügsam mit dem eigenen Wesen, zu stehen.” (HD 16)

translucent and colorless, pure and clear life-giving light, invisible by itself, only through the yellow, which it also is and at the same time is not.

That Heidegger finds a word to name this holy “gaiety” can be especially appreciated with regard to the work on Harris’s *Northern Lake*. The difficulties of naming the phenomenon one encounters in the painting and the constant sense that to call it joy is not to say enough about it are all remedied by spending time with Heidegger’s *Heitere*. It is not only because this feeling resists our conventional understanding of joy as an affect, a mood or an emotion. It is also not only because the quietness and satisfaction created by the yellow light of the painting go beyond the affective sphere and permeates the whole body, the posture, the bodily attitude, the deep sense of visceral sensuality. What is most importantly lacking from the conventional understanding of the word “joy” when describing the yellow light in the painting, and what Heidegger seems to find in the word *Heitere*, is the sense of permeation of the whole space through and through, from the concealed depth all the way to the surface, a sense of being “into-the-heights” without reaching and stretching there, and a sense of receiving the bliss and contentment from “the outside,” but not by reinforcing the inside/outside (self/other) dichotomy, rather by inter-fusing the inside with the outside, by absorbing the light and the joy of the light, by merging oneself into the light and letting the light merge through oneself.

This pure opening which first “imparts,” that is, grants, the open to every “space” and to every “temporal space,” we call “gaiety” [*die Heitere*] according to an old word of our mother tongue. At one and the same time, it is the clarity (*claritas*) in whose brightness everything clear rests, and the grandeur (*serenitas*) in whose strength everything high stands, and the merriment (*hilaritas*) in whose play everything liberated sways.¹²⁶ (HE 37)

This is the passage where Heidegger shifts from the neuter *das Heitere* to the feminine *die Heitere*, and keeps using the feminine till the end of the lecture. It is not quite clear why he has not used the feminine noun from the very beginning. The feminine version seems more substantial, more grounded, not only by the reference to tradition and a Latin context that I was unable to trace but also just based on the grammar and the way that language works and feels.

Perhaps the word *Heitere* is so special because it manages to hold together for Heidegger not only Hölderlin’s image of a cloud high in the open sky singing the poems full of joy, but also that which is essential philosophically – the phenomena, which shine through that image, the brightening and coming together of space and of

¹²⁶ “Wir nennen nach einem älteren Wort unserer Muttersprache das reine Lichtende, das jedem “Raum” und jedem “Zeitraum” erst das Offene “einräumt” und d.h. hier gewährt, “die Heitere”. Sie ist in einem zumal die Klarheit (*claritas*), in deren Helle alles Klare ruht, und die Hoheit (*serenitas*), in deren Strenge alles Hohe steht, und die Frohheit (*hilaritas*), in deren Spiel alles Freigelöste schwingt.” (HD 18)

things in that space, the silence and “purity” (as opposed to the clutter of the inessential), and the joy that is full of life but at the same time full of peace and does not destroy the underlying silence. For us, it is important to see that these same phenomena are showing themselves together through the painting Harris has completed about twenty years before Heidegger’s lecture on “gaiety.” They are clearly felt, and that means taken up by the body, and so they are not mere symbols, metaphors or mental associations, but real live phenomena. Perhaps they are rare in our age and sometimes counterintuitive to our cognitive habits, yet they are present in the painting and are powerful enough to start opening for us an entrance into the sphere of the divine. This is indeed where the notion of gaiety takes Heidegger, for through it, he comes back to Hölderlin’s text which describes god:

Here in the highest dwells “the high one,” who is who he is insofar as he has re-joyced “in the play of the holy rays”: *the joyful one [der Feudige]*. If He is one of us, he seems inclined “to create joy, with us.” Since his being is the brightening, “he loves” “to open up” and “to illuminate.” Through a clear gaiety, he “opens” things into the rejoicing of their presence. Through a merry gaiety, he illuminates the heart of men, so that they may open their hearts to what is genuine in their fields, towns, and houses.

Through a grand gaiety, he first lets the dark depth gape open in its illumination. What would depth be without lighting?¹²⁷ (HE 37)

We have seen through the yellow light of the leaves how it can clear and open up the whole space and how it can sustain the things in their blossoming presence. We have also seen how it can enlighten and comfort human beings by washing away the mundane concerns and problems, the stress of everyday life, and instead attune us into the humble joy and quiet satisfaction, the sense of deeply felt wellbeing. In the previous chapter, we also saw how the dark abyss opens through the hill behind the leaves, and gives us a different kind of presence, of the unfathomable, the immeasurable, the mysterious, the completely other, of that which is not an entity. Yet again, the striking similarity between what *Heitere* holds for Heidegger in his interpretation of Hölderlin's "Homecoming" and what Harris brings together in *Northern Lake* confirms for us the reality or the truth of this complex phenomenon.

¹²⁷ "Hier "im Höchsten" wohnt "der Hohe", der ist, wer er ist, als der "vom Spiel heiliger Stralen" Er-freute: *der* Freudige. Wenn je Einer, dann scheint er geneigt, "Freude zu schaffen, mit uns". Weil sein Wesen die Aufheiterung ist, "liebt er es", "zu öffnen" und "aufzuhellen". Durch die klare Heitere "öffnet" er die Dinge in das Erfreuende ihrer Gegenwart. Durch die frohe Heitere hellt er das Gemüt der Menschen auf, damit ihr Mut offen sei für das Gediegene ihrer Felder, Städte und Häuser. Durch die hohe Heitere läßt er erst die finstere Tiefe in ihr Gelichtetes klaffen. Was wäre Tiefe ohne Lichtung?" (HD 18-19)

In the next concluding section, we will peek briefly into the friendly presence which remains concealed behind the light. What we found in *Northern Lake* is definitely not as articulated and specific as Hölderlin's descriptions of god. Yet, the unimposing way in which it is felt comes with its own benefit of a gentle presence that is not intimidating and that only strengthens the homely feeling of haleness that is comforting and reassuring. With that, we will conclude the work on Harris's *Northern Lake*.

7.5. Back to the "light embrace" of the holy

Towards the end of the last chapter, we talked about the hill in the middle of *Northern Lake*, about how it opens out and reveals to the viewer behind its surface the thickness of depth, dispersed and intangible generality, something that is not a thing, and yet that can be perceived. We also talked about how responding to that open depth, feeling it out and letting it attune us resulted in an experience of our being expanding, of our sensitivity flowing to the periphery of our being, into the areas around our outer limits where we meet what is outside, fuse with it, and feel it out. The void of the depth behind the surface of the hill has brought out and echoed in a corresponding void right in the center of ourselves. It created the experience that instead of holding oneself from within, we were held together from outside by that strange presence that was not an entity, not a particular thing. Such an experience could be quite unsettling, even

frightening. Still, it was not so thanks to the yellow light in the leaves and the comforting, reassuring and healing presence that comes together with that yellow light.

Compared to the earlier paintings that seem more realistic, in *Northern Lake*, Harris is coming closer to the abstract style of his later paintings. The lines are clean, minimalistic; there is no excess of shapes, instead, the painting looks quite empty, perhaps even bare. However, the school children who often come to the gallery in large groups never call this painting lonely, while they do not hesitate to use this word with regards to other landscapes. The yellow light in this painting, the way that it saturates the leaves and reaches out towards the viewer, is comforting like a good friend's presence. This sense of "friendliness" is a distinct quality of the yellow light and of the joy it creates, and while it might not be obvious right away, it "grows" on you as you spend time with the artwork and visit it again and again. Eventually, the emotional sense of companionship becomes as evident as the sense perception of the yellow. It is, however, not about companionship between people. In fact, the presence of other people around this painting feels excessive and seems to disrupt the flow of joy, invade a sense of privacy, nearness and closeness, the intimacy that this kind of companionship seems to require. It is in silence, in removing oneself from involvements with other people that the yellow shines the most, and the joy is the deepest. Neither is it about looking for comfort and respite within nature, at least not in the sense that we commonly understand nature. Were we to understand "nature" in Hölderlin's sense as

the holy, then indeed, the presence that comes through the yellow light in *Northern Lake* would seem to be akin to the “smiling grace of the holy” that we have already talked about at the beginning of this chapter but will mention again here:

Formerly, the greeting [*das Heil*] of the holy was “smiling”, all-present, tireless, friendly, quite untroubled if the men “scarcely felt” what was then happening. (AWH 87)¹²⁸

The “friendliness” and the sense of companionship here in the *Northern lake*, which transforms an otherwise strange and alien experience into the one that is comfortable, reassuring and even healing, is about the relationship with a living presence of that, which is completely other, fully different and yet at the same time strangely familiar and akin to us.

Let us come back for a moment to the chiasm between the yellow light and the leaves, as this is precisely what manages to bridge and overcome the difference between the alien and the familiar, the frightening and the healing in this painting. The light takes on the flesh of the leaves and transforms them from being dull and usual to shining with beauty and fullness of life. At the same time, it is only through the leaves

¹²⁸ “»Lächelnd« war vordem das Heil des Heiligen in allem gegenwärtig, mühelos und freundlich und deshalb unberührt davon, daß die Menschen »kaum fühlten«, was da geschehen.” (WWF 63)

that the light really manifests itself. While melting into each other, the light and the leaves, radically different from each other, become as near as they could ever be, without, however, losing what is their own. It is their “companionship,” their “middle” as Heidegger would say, or their chiasm, as Merleau-Ponty would say, that holds them both together and separate. Similarly, the yellow light melts into our emotional, perceptual, motor and kinesthetic body. It comforts in a deep way, brings joy and satisfaction, washes out our mundane concerns, without, however, stealing us away from ourselves, without limiting or forcing us in any way, only by gently offering us the grace of joy and peace which it brings. It is this sense of powerful but gentle, lively but careful flow which opens us up from the top and at the same time grounds us into our ground that makes it more than mere light. It shows behind that light a living presence of a “friendly” kind, the one to which we can relate personally and intimately, in a deeply human way, more so than we can ever relate to things, plants, or perhaps even animals. Hölderlin also mentions this feeling of “friendliness” as a condition of our relating to the divine in a poem which Heidegger talks about in detail in a lecture “...Poetically Man Dwells...”(1951):

... As long as Kindness [*Freundlichkeit*],
The Pure, still stays with his heart, man,
Not unhappily measures himself

Heidegger stresses that “friendliness” here is Hölderlin’s magnificent translation of a Greek word *χάρις*, grace or kindness. However, it seems that Hölderlin had chosen to translate it as “friendliness” to show a special quality of kindness, which is fundamental for human relationship with the divine. It is a kind of companionship that is most personal and full of regard, a relationship that is not about domination and submission, i. It does not arise out of fear, necessity, or some kind of profit, but is based on “friendship,” a mutual feeling that brings close those who are different, and allows them to remain what they are while enjoying the kindness that holds them together. That is why, when the kindness/friendliness is there, humans relate to the divine “not unhappily.” Another thing Heidegger stresses with regard to friendliness, is Hölderlin’s expression “with the heart” (a more literal translation would be “at the heart”), which means that the friendliness does not originate in the human heart, but approaches it from the “outside,” and stays around it once the heart has responded to its call:

¹²⁹ “... So lange die Freundlichkeit noch / Am Herzen, die Reine, dauert, misset / Nicht unglücklich der Mensch sich / Mit der Gottheit...” (DWM 197)

... “at the heart”, that means to arrive to the dwelling essence of man, to arrive as an appeal of the measure to the heart, so that the heart turns itself towards the measure.¹³⁰ (my translation, PMD 227)

Note how in the work with this painting, there is also a clear sense that the joy and comfort come from the “outside” with the yellow light, opens up “the heart,” not just the affective side, by somehow the whole of the body down to the deepest kinesthetic sensations, and stays around as the comforting quiet presence.¹³¹

It is important to say that this notion of “friendliness” is one of the more puzzling moments in a cognitive interpretation of Heidegger’s notions of the holy, the divine, and the human relation with the divine. It is presented in one of those completely unexpected twists Heidegger often makes in the last two pages of the lecture that would take the understanding of the lecture to a whole new level, were they to be truly understood. Needless to say, it is difficult to understand it cognitively; the notion of friendliness and that of the gods seem to be far apart in our conventional

¹³⁰ “... “am Herzen”, des heißt angekommen beim wohnenden Wesen des Menschen, angekommen als Anspruch des Maßes an das Herz, daß dieses sich an das Maß kehrt.” (DWM 198)

¹³¹ Note, that ten years before, in the lecture course *Hölderlins Hymne “Andenken”* (1941-42), and in the following article “Andenken” (written in 1942, published in 1943), Heidegger talks about friendship, but only as a relationship between human companions. Here the friendliness is clearly different, it is about “receiving the measure,” which is a human relationship towards the divine.

cognitive maps. It is even more amazing then to see how, through a body hermeneutics of this artwork, one can “absorb” the bodily understanding of these phenomena and begin to see how they do indeed belong together phenomenologically, even when cognitively they do not seem to fit all that well.

Between the “friendliness,” the “smiling grace of the holy” and the “light embrace” that educates the poets, all of which we can experience phenomenologically with the help of *Northern Lake*, we arrive at a human experience of the holy, which is reassuring, comforting, and healing. It is the experience of haleness, of being at home within oneself, being gently supported and protected. This experience is most desirable as well as fulfilling. While it requires us to change our mode of living, our bodily attitude, to reattune ourselves to the generalities rather than concrete entities, fields rather figures, to learn to be slow and to stay still, to wait for the experience to unfold, this painting (as well as other paintings of Harris) trains us to develop these abilities like a patient teacher. The experience is inspiring and humbling at the same time, it removes layer and layers of artificialities, and at the core is simple and straightforward. The gratitude one feels to the philosopher, the artist and the holy that inspired them comes naturally and is an integral part of this experience. Feeling out, describing and recording such an experience is the most significant achievement of this work.

We should not assume, however, that the experience of joyful gaiety, blessed haleness, peaceful resting in one’s own being is the only possible experience of the holy.

Both Heidegger's text, as well as other paintings of Harris, and also our common sense suggest that it is possible that there could be other and quite different ways that we could encounter the holy. For example, it is possible that rather than experiencing it through joy, we could also experience it through fright, awe, or despair. However, the aspect that was worked on in this project is the one that came out from this particular painting, and called for the dialogue with these particular texts of Heidegger. There were also other themes of Heidegger that could be further developed with this particular artwork: the theme of entities and generalities and the middle where they meet, and of mediation, the theme of the fourfold, the themes of identity and difference, of art and the poetic, of time, to name just a few. Further avenues of exploration could also come from engaging with other artworks of Harris, for instance, *Lake and Mountains* (1928), on which the preliminary work of body hermeneutics has already been done, could provide the developments of current work further and into different directions, perhaps into the phenomena of divinities themselves, which we came close to in *Northern Lake*, but did not yet engage.

Both the beauty and also some degree of frustration of working with body hermeneutics as a method, or with phenomenology in general, is that the work is never complete; it is never finished. We explore a place, learn about it, become more and more at home within it, and at the same time, we never exhaust the degrees of depth that we could plunge into in that place, nor the other neighboring areas we could venture into.

It always remains a work in progress, it always remains living and changing, just like we are living, changing, developing new aspects of ourselves, dropping off some old ones, sometimes expanding, other times reconstituting, withdrawing into ourselves.

Anaximander's "hand of being," Heidegger's "light embrace of the holy," Harris's trees and hills, all of these generously support us in our journey.

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Appendix: Artwork Images and Information



Lawren S. Harris, Canadian, 1885 - 1970 Painting

Beaver Swamp, Algoma, 1920

oil on canvas

Overall: 120.7 x 141 cm (47 1/2 x 55 1/2 in.)

Gift of Ruth Massey Tovell, Toronto, in memory of Harold Murchison Tovell, 1953

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© The Family of Lawren. S. Harris / Art Gallery of Ontario



Lawren S. Harris, Canadian, 1885 - 1970 Painting

Above Lake Superior, c. 1922

oil on canvas

Overall: 121.9 x 152.4 cm (48 x 60 in.)

Gift from the Reuben and Kate Leonard Canadian Fund, 1929

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© The Family of Lawren. S. Harris / Art Gallery of Ontario



Lawren S. Harris (1885 – 1970)

Northern Lake, c. 1923

oil on canvas

82.5 x 102.8 cm

Gift of Colonel R.S. McLaughlin from the Reuben and Kate Leonard

McMichael Canadian Art Collection

1968.7.5

© The Family of Lawren. S. Harris



Lawren S. Harris, Canadian, 1885 - 1970 Painting

Algoma Country, 1920 - 1921

oil on canvas

Overall: 102.9 x 127.5 cm (40 1/2 x 50 3/16 in.)

Framed: 111.8 x 137.2 x 5.7 cm (44 x 54 x 2 1/4 in.)

Gift from the Fund of the T. Eaton Co. Ltd. for Canadian Works of Art, 1948

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© The Family of Lawren. S. Harris



Lawren S. Harris, Canadian, 1885 - 1970 Painting

Lake and Mountains, 1928

oil on canvas

Unframed: 130.8 × 160.7 cm (51 1/2 × 63 1/4 in.)

Framed: 142.2 × 171.5 × 9.5 cm (56 × 67 1/2 × 3 3/4 in.)

Gift from the Fund of the T. Eaton Co. Ltd. for Canadian Works of Art, 1948

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