

THE ONTOLOGICAL RESISTANCE OF MATERIAL IN THE WORK OF ART: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION FROM PLATO TO HEIDEGGER

*A RESISTÊNCIA ONTOLÓGICA DO MATERIAL NA OBRA DE
ARTE: UM EXAME CRÍTICO DE PLATÃO A MARTIN
HEIDEGGER*

Zeynep Münteza Kot 

Istanbul University, Faculty of
Theology, Türkiye
Department of Philosophy and
Religious Studies
zeynep.kottan@istanbul.edu.tr

Received: 15 Jan 2026

Accepted: 25 Mar 2026

Published: 14 Apr 2026

Corresponding author:

zeynep.kottan@istanbul.edu.tr



Within the framework of the concepts of earth (*Erde*) and world (*Welt*) developed in Heidegger's seminar *The Origin of the Work of Art*, the possibility of rethinking material is examined. Afterwards, the following problem is posed: Has Heidegger truly managed to release material into its ontological autonomy?

Keywords: Material. Ontology. Heidegger. Phenomenology. Mimesis.

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo reavaliar o estatuto ontológico do material na obra de arte por meio de uma linha de pensamento que se estende de Platão a Martin Heidegger. A tese central defendida é que, na tradição estética ocidental, o material foi sistematicamente suprimido, e que essa supressão se baseia em um pressuposto ontológico persistente que se mantém até Heidegger. Em Platão, o material é relegado a um plano de aparência que o afasta da verdade; em Aristotele, ele perde

sua autonomia ontológica ao ser concebido como suporte da forma. Embora Roman Ingarden e Nicolai Hartmann transformem esse legado, ainda assim situam o material como uma camada inferior que não produz sentido. No âmbito dos conceitos de terra (*Erde*) e mundo (*Welt*), desenvolvidos no seminário *The Origin of the Work of Art* de Heidegger, examina-se a possibilidade de repensar o material. Por fim, coloca-se a seguinte questão: Heidegger conseguiu, de fato, libertar o material em sua autonomia ontológica?

Palavras-chave: Material. Ontologia. Heidegger. Fenomenologia. Mimesis.

Introduction

Marcel Duchamp's submission of an inverted urinal to the exhibition organized by the Society of Independent Artists can be understood as a decisive intervention that rearticulates the question of what art is at the level of its ontological presuppositions. From 1917—when *Fountain* was rejected by the committee on the grounds that it was not an artwork—to 2004, when Art Review named it “the most influential artwork of the twentieth century” (Camfield, 1989), it has served as a recurring point of reference in numerous debates. It was in this context that the notion of the “ready-made” entered the literature. Duchamp's intervention can be read as a gesture that transgresses the institutional boundaries of art. Yet this submission may be understood not only as a transgression but also as a repetition, insofar as it brings to light an enduring and powerful presupposition within the ontology of art. If an ordinary urinal can become an artwork solely through a signature and a shift in context, then art must already have been grounded, for some time, on a plane independent of material. Indeed, along the trajectory extending from Plato to Aristotle, and from there to Roman Ingarden and Nicolai Hartmann, material has never been conceived as a primary principle constitutive of the truth of the work; rather, it has consistently remained in a secondary position, serving merely as the bearer of form, meaning, or aesthetic structure.

When Plato construes art on the plane of imitation (*mimesis*), material is relegated to a position that is ontologically secondary and epistemologically uncanny (Plato, 1999, pp. 337–339; Demir, 2025, pp.). In parallel, within Aristotle's framework, matter does not possess a *quiddity* (to ti en einai) in its own right; it attains being only upon receiving form (Aristotle, 2014, pp. 310–329). Accordingly, the unity posited between matter and form is not symmetrical. Matter functions as the substratum of form and, as such, does not harbor a mode of unconcealment of its own. When Roman Ingarden adapts the Aristotelian schema into phenomenology and derives from it a stratified ontology, this asymmetry between matter and form is reconfigured into a pyramidal structure in which the lower strata support the (intentional) higher strata (Ingarden, 1973, pp. 259–266). With the advent of the regime of representation, the conception of “material as an ontic bearer” is thus preserved. For Nicolai Hartmann—the third major reference point in this study—material, though necessary, remains aesthetically recessive; it does not constitute a principle that generates meaning in its own right (Hartmann, 2014, pp. 33–41). Even within this metaphysics, which classifies beings, what proves decisive is still the upper stratum. The principal limitation of this approach lies in its focus on

structure rather than process, a preference that ultimately yields a static ontology. In sum, along the trajectory extending from Aristotle to Martin Heidegger, material, although a necessary condition of the work, is never posited as a principle constitutive of its truth. It may therefore be argued that if Duchamp's "Fountain" came to be recognized as an artwork, this is because the relation between art and material had already been attenuated long before this submission. Tracing the line from Plato to Hartmann in accordance with this thesis, the present article reconsiders the efficacy of material within the work through the framework of *The Origin of the Work of Art*; yet it poses a decisive question: has material truly been liberated through the model of the strife between earth and world?

1. Is Painting Distinct from the Canvas, and Art from Nature?

The shoe paintings produced by Vincent van Gogh in 1886 occupied the intellectual agendas of numerous major thinkers—among them Irving Sandler, Meyer Schapiro, Jacques Derrida, John A. Walker, John Berger, Irving Stone, and Fredric Jameson—for an extended period. The same painting also assumes a critical role in Martin Heidegger's project of "overcoming aesthetics." In his 1935 lectures at University of Freiburg, the philosopher approaches this work specifically through the following question: "What makes an artwork what it is?" (Heidegger, 2011, p. 45). One might claim that what renders an artwork what it is consists in paint, canvas, stretcher, glue, or acrylic; for, in the first instance, the work owes its existence to material. At the same time, all these materials are employed in order to bring forth an object of subject matter, and in this respect they occupy an ontologically subordinate position beneath that subject. The subject, however, remains a mere configuration of materials in the absence of the noematic content attributed to it. When the inquiry into the essence of the artwork is traced through the history of Western aesthetics, one encounters a three-tiered ascent from the sensible to the intelligible.

By reiterating the Aristotelian hylomorphic model, Roman Ingarden maintains that, within the aesthetic context, both the temporally bound/real/material pole of a painting (the canvas) and its time-transcending/ideal/spiritual pole (the image) are co-present. Nevertheless, he holds that ontological analysis ought to focus not on the former (the canvas) but on the latter (the image). Once the ontological strata are differentiated, it becomes evident that material recedes into the back-

ground in favor of the intentional structure. The coming-into-being of the artwork does not begin with material but on an intentional plane. The sensory stratum represents the perceptible aspect of the image—namely, “pigments distributed in a particular manner” and “patches of paint.” It is followed by the plastic, iconographic, and aesthetic strata. At the same time, since the artistic context holds together matter and spirit, it may not be methodologically sound to exclude amorphous matter from analysis. As İsmail Tunalı notes, “when we look at a pictorial artwork, we apprehend it as a whole, as a context within the artistic sphere” (Tunalı, 1971, p. 125). Yet, on the other hand, art begins when material acquires form. In order to resolve this paradox, Tunalı attempts to move beyond the duality as such: ‘They too (art and literature) come into being in time; yet once they have come into being, they enter another domain—and this domain is not real but, on the contrary, irreel’ ” (Tunalı, 1971, p. 93).

To analyze the artwork under the two principal categories of ideality and reality would lead to the aporia of an “either–or.” Moreover, the aesthetic object belongs to neither category. In order to identify a different modality grounded simultaneously in both ideality and reality, one may turn to Nicolai Hartmann. When Hartmann defines the artwork as “real being in which spiritual being attains appearance,” he both acknowledges its bond with reality and, much like Tunalı, replaces the “either–or” modality with a “both–and.” This substitution entails a corresponding conceptual reconfiguration. By designating the real aspect of the artwork as the foreground (Vordergrund) and its irreel aspect as the background (Hintergrund), Hartmann presents the artwork as a complex structure. The foreground consists of a single stratum; it is given to our senses as it is and is therefore simple. The background, by contrast, is polyphonic. While the former requires no subject in order to exist, the latter is intentional. A poem is a poem only for one who understands it; a sculpture is a sculpture only for one who apprehends it. Had we, under these conditions, described the artwork as an “ideal being,” this would still be a misnomer, for “ideal being does not, in any sense, exist for someone.” The objects of mathematics or theorems, for instance, exist whether they are perceived or not, whether they are discovered or not. The meaning of a poem or the possible interpretations of an artwork, however, are not of this kind. The concepts developed by Hartmann—“real being in which spiritual being attains appearance” and “appearing ideality”—rest precisely on this line of reasoning (Hartmann, 2014, pp. 28–66; Tunalı, 1971, pp. 111–116). Although this move overcomes dual polarity, the artwork continues to operate with an internal hierarchy:

“For the work of art, this means that not a single simple background layer

becomes visible; rather, a series of layers arranged one after another appears; all of these layers are irreel and exist only within the relation of appearance. Accordingly, they exist for a perceiving subject, and they are clearly distinguishable from one another both in terms of content and in terms of structure” (Tunali, 1971, p. 113).

The layers of the background (Hintergrund) become richer as they recede from the foreground (Vordergrund). The artist embeds the living spiritual structure within the real structure. The target here is the foreground. The viewer reaches the background by passing through the foreground (Tunali, 1971, pp. 109–114). Each movement advancing in this direction brings forth the polyphony of the artwork, while meaning deepens. This progression and deepening occur in stages, since the background itself contains internally non-equivalent strata. Thus, although Nicolai Hartmann, unlike Roman Ingarden, incorporates amorphous matter into the analysis, he nevertheless ties the emergence of the work-character of the artwork to its being left behind. In sum, the structure is complex but not holistic.

2. Can the Hierarchy between Image and Canvas, or between Art and Nature, Be Disrupted?

The apparent consensus that what grants the artwork its work-character lies not in subject matter or material, but rather in the image or interpretation that transcends them, inevitably gives rise to a series of disputes: Are plastic elements, composition, or iconography more decisive in determining aesthetic value? What kind of relation obtains among these three groups of elements? Is depiction more fundamental, or expression? Once material has concretized meaning, does it forfeit its significance? For instance, might the impasto technique—or rough, layered, and irregular brushstrokes—no longer contribute to the sense of labor, fatigue, and lived experience? If so, can it be claimed that “the meaning of the artwork is constituted by the type, texture, resistance, possibilities, and limits of the material”? And if this is the case, is such constitution a one-time event or an ongoing process? Is the meaning of the artwork, as Roman Ingarden proposes, the result of the viewer’s acts of consciousness, or is it, as Nicolai Hartmann maintains, immanent to the ontological structure of the work? Does a hierarchy or a chronology obtain between the image and the canvas? Further questions follow: To what extent, and in what manner, can the artist intervene in the artwork or in nature? Is art representation, or a mode of bringing-forth?

Half a century after Vincent van Gogh painted the *Shoes*, Martin Heideg-

ger interpreted them in 1935 in the context of a seminar delivered at the University of Freiburg. Although he did not directly answer the questions outlined above, he introduced into the literature an original concept of art from which such answers can readily be drawn. Whereas the accumulated tradition prior to him—especially Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Benedetto Croce—had largely confined art to the domain of beauty and philosophy to that of truth, Heidegger posited the artwork as an “event” (das Ereignis) in which truth (or, as he often uses it synonymously, Being) comes into unconcealment. At the same time, the notion of truth at stake here is neither correspondence (adaequatio) in the Aristotelian/Scholastic sense nor certainty (certitudo) in the modern sense. By drawing on Plato and the Presocratics, Heidegger presents truth as “unconcealment” or “disclosure” (aletheia). Just as “concealment” (lethe) is etymologically contained within “unconcealment” (aletheia), so too is “hiddenness” contained within “unhiddenness” (Heidegger, 1975, pp. 57–78). When this paradoxical tension attributed to truth enters the domain of art, it first yields a model capable of accounting for the plurality of interpretations of the artwork. Second, it subjects to a forceful challenge the hierarchy posited by Western metaphysics between matter/material/background/reality/nature/sensation and form/meaning/foreground/ideality/art/thought.

3. The Strife between Earth (Erde) and World (Welt)

What is present in Vincent van Gogh’s *Shoes* that is absent from a pair of shoes displayed in a shop window, or present in Paul Kane’s *Two Canoes and Indians on a Mountain Lake* yet not encountered in the canoes drifting along the Amazon River? A preliminary outline of the possible answer may be drawn by beginning with Plato, who provides the argumentative foundations for the concepts of art, beauty, and representation. For Plato, such paintings and works of art are “copies of a copy” (*mimesis mimeseos*) (Plato, 1999, pp. 337–339). The sensible object (aistheton), which is itself already a copy of the idea (eidos), acquires two additional elements when it is reproduced in artistic production: (a) an appearance of what is not—“what-is-not appearing” (me on phainomenon) (Plato, 2012, pp. 66–67), and (b) an affective charge (pathe) (Plato, 1999, pp. 348–349). In presenting “what is not” as though it were, the artist invests this appearance with his own *pathos*. Since this addition turns not toward the knowledge of truth but toward the allure of appearances, the artwork stands ontologically at a threefold remove from what

truly is (ontos on), and epistemologically within the domain of opinion (doxa). Art, therefore, constitutes a truth-diminishing (apobatike) activity.

For Aristotle, art (*techne*) is a mode of knowing oriented toward discovering the relations of “cause” (aitia) and “end” (telos) operative in natural phenomena. The artist imitates not nature itself but its end (*telos tes physeos*), seeking—just as in nature—to move from potentiality (dynamis) to actuality (energeia) (Aristotle, 2020, pp. 53, 59, 85, 87). Within this schema, the artist appears primarily as the efficient cause (aitia kinetike), while the formal cause (aitia eidos) expresses the organizing principle of the artwork. In the Aristotelian conception, artistic production is not subtractive; rather, it is a productive (poietike) activity that confers form upon matter (morphosis) and thus continues *phusis*, amounting to a perfection directed toward its telos (entelekheia). The work (ergon), like natural beings, is a particular composite of matter (hyle) and form (morphe), as configured in the human mind (Aristotle, 2014, pp. 59–63; 2020, pp. 310, 409–410). When Roman Ingarden transposes this model into contemporary phenomenology, *hyle* and *morphe* are rearticulated so as to correspond to the strata of perception. By the time the Aristotelian model reaches Nicolai Hartmann, it has been transformed into an ontology in which the upper strata both depend upon and transcend the lower strata in constituting the artwork.

Within the Platonic mimetic order, the construction of a temple presupposes, first, the *eidos* of the sacred. Yet the temple is not a direct instantiation of the Idea; rather, it is an eikonic reflection of socially instituted practices of sacredness that come into being through participation (methexis) in the Idea. For Aristotle, by contrast, art does not consist in mechanically copying what exists. Within a teleological conception of production, the temple brings together—within the column–architrave system—the potentials inherent in stone, such as load-bearing and order, with the human potential for orientation toward the sacred; in other words, it “completes what nature leaves unfinished.” (In accordance with the thesis advanced in the *Metaphysics*—that a being derives its essence not from matter but from form.) What governs this completion are principles of order such as column heights, proportional ratios, intercolumniation, frieze rhythms, and the articulation of horizontal and vertical relations. In short, from this point onward, the temple no longer exists as mere stone but as a temple.

From the perspective of Roman Ingarden, it must be said that the temple already begins as a temple. Stone blocks may equally be arranged into a mere wall; yet in assuming the form of a temple, it acquires its ontological identity. Here, material functions only as a bearer, while what makes the temple a temple is the

formal world constituted with stone. Once one reaches the stratum of represented objects (Schicht der dargestellten Gegenstände) (Ingarden, 1973, pp. 30–35)—or, in the more abstract case of architecture, the stratum of represented values—material begins to recede. When the temple ascends to the stratum of meaning (Schicht der Bedeutungen) (Ingarden, 1973, pp. 30–35)—for instance, when the polis represents itself in space, when Apollo becomes present, when a passage to the sacred is opened—marble has entirely withdrawn from the ontological tableau. By contrast, a Hartmannian ontology would argue that material properties—such as the mass of marble, its manner of holding light, or the texture of limestone—condition the formal stratum and thereby yield a more integrated perspective (Hartmann, 2014, pp. 33–41, 45–49, 60–66, 64–68). Within this approach, while the weight of marble determines architrave proportions and its refraction of light informs optical arrangements, it never fully withdraws from the scene. At the same time, material (the foreground) remains merely an ontic bearer: it neither determines meaning nor penetrates it. When the Aristotelian model arrives at the seminar entitled *The Origin of the Work of Art*, *hyle* and *morphe* are reconfigured in light of a new paradigm of art. The aim of this reconfiguration is to reconceive truth not as logical correctness (*veritas*) but as unconcealment (*aletheia*), and art not as representation/imitation (*mimesis*/*Vorstellung*) but as the advent of truth (*das Ereignis*).

Martin Heidegger states: “A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing.” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 40). First the temple, then the poem entitled “The Roman Fountain,” said not to be a depiction, and, in various passages of the text, the painting of the “Shoes,” claimed not to be a copy of actual shoes—all are removed from the regime of representation. It must then be asked: if art neither represents what is, as in Plato, nor possibility, as in Aristotle, what does it do? Heidegger continues: standing in the midst of a rocky ground, the temple both conceals the god and, through its open colonnades, brings it into the open. This concealed-yet-manifest presence of the god determines the boundaries of the Greek temple as a work. The temple gathers unto itself all the paths and relations that lead to it. These paths and relations, as enumerated in the seminar, include birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and defeat, ascent and decline (Heidegger, 1975, pp. 40–41). The expressions found in this passage on the temple resemble less a philosopher’s note appended to the history of Western ontology than the draft of a poem written about the temple. In fact, it is neither.

In the lines that follow on the temple, the same poetic tone is preserved, while the classical Greek distinction between *phusis* and *poiesis* is displaced from the Aristotelian schema:

“As the temple rises, it makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. The temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are.” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 42)

To this rising of the temple—through which the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the violence of the storm, and the darkness of the night are brought into unconcealment—Martin Heidegger will give the name *phusis*, adding: “the emerging and rising in itself and in all things” (Heidegger, 1975, *The Origin of the Work of Art*). This rendering, however, refers to an earlier, pre-Aristotelian sense of the concept. The etymological root of *phusis* is “to emerge” (*phuein*), a meaning already operative in Heraclitus and Parmenides. As Martin Heidegger remarks in *Early Greek Thinking*, “the essence of things likes to hide” (Heidegger, 1985, p. 113), a formulation that points to the dynamic of revealing and concealing at a stage when the concept had not yet been reduced to the meaning of “nature.” In Parmenides, *phusis* appears within the framework of the distinction between *aletheia* and *doxa*, signifying coming-to-be, passing-away, change, and becoming (only to be rejected on the basis of logical principles) (Parmenides, 2022, pp. 90–110). For Aristotle, by contrast, this process no longer primarily involves the interplay of concealment and unconcealment; rather, *phusis* designates an immanent principle of formal-final purposiveness (*eidos–telos*) operative in things (Aristotle, 2020, p. 51). In sum, whereas the Presocratics understand *phusis* as the emergence of something, for Aristotle it signifies a being’s becoming what it is meant to be from out of itself.

Once *phusis* is defined as an autopoietic process—“one whose principle is within” (*arche en auto*)—it becomes necessary to posit another kind of change whose “principle is outside” (*arche ekto*). This second type is articulated as follows: “In things that come into being through making (*poiein*), the principle of motion or the end lies not within the thing but in something else” (Aristotle, 2020, pp. 50–51). Art and craft belong to this domain of human production (*poiein*). What governs the processes of *poiesis* is the composition of *hyle* and *morphe* in such a way as to yield utility. In this light, Martin Heidegger’s decision to designate the mode of being of a temple—something that, by this account, ought to fall within the domain of *poiesis*—by the term *phusis* signals, first, a return of the concept to its pre-Aristotelian roots. Second, and in consequence, it suggests that the conceptual pair *hyle–morphe* will be released from the horizon of meaning in which it had been

fixed within the classical schema of causality and formation, and will instead be reinterpreted within the framework of a more originary mode of unconcealment and in light of a new ontological paradigm.

In classical metaphysics, *hyle* is conceived as passive in relation to form and remains indeterminate unless it is formed; it is thought under the dominance of form and stands in the background of truth. By suspending this ontic schema, Martin Heidegger characterizes matter as “the sheltering of what rises up” and reconceives it through the notion of “earth” (Erde). The ontological status of *morphe* is likewise revised along these lines. The classical schema, which understands form as “the organizing principle that renders the potential in matter into a determinate being,” can no longer account for the constitutive force of the artwork from this perspective. For this reason, a new concept is required to correspond to the form of the work—one that is inspired by the Aristotelian schema but not confined to it. Heidegger responds to this need with the concept of “world” (Welt), adding: “The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are just there. Nor is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. The world worlds, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 44).

The relation between world and earth may be condensed into the following formulation: “The temple-work opens up a world and at the same time sets it back again on earth” (Martin Heidegger, 1975, p. 42). This sentence constitutes the pivotal point of Heidegger’s tacit polemic against Aristotle and the central proposition of the seminar. The ultimate aim of this polemic is to arrive at a new conceptual configuration capable of encompassing the truth-constituting function of the artwork. Approximately 2300 years after Aristotle, Heidegger declares *poiesis* to be not production but “a bringing-forth” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 56). Within the process that brings truth into unconcealment (Entbergen/Unverborgenheit), *phusis* and *poiesis* are to be understood as two fundamental modes (Aristotle, 2020, pp. 83–85). Art is thus to be rethought within the broadest sense of *phusis*, while *poiesis*, within this framework, accompanies *phusis* in bringing a work into emergence.

4. The Emergence of Truth in the Clearing (Evidenz/Lichtung)

Although the concept of “the thing as the composition of *hyle* and *morphe*” is suitable for making sense of the craft process, it proves insufficient to account for the enigma of the artwork and the way natural beings abide in themselves. What is present in Vincent van Gogh’s *Shoes* and makes it a work is neither the leather, the canvas, or the nails of the shoes, nor the pigments on the surface; neither suitability for walking nor resistance to hard ground; neither the arrangement of pigments, composition, or distribution of color, nor the design in the artist’s mind (eidōs noeton). In artworks, there is something that cannot be grasped by thinking them as a kind of making/production (poiein), something whose boundaries cannot be determined in this way, something that exceeds *hyle* and *morphe*.

The seminar, in order to distinguish art from the paradigm of fabrication, poses the question: what makes equipment equipment? The answer must be freed from theoretical presuppositions. Theoretical commitments, categorical schemata, and the established assumptions of traditional ontology are suspended (Martin Heidegger, 1975, p. 32). The equipment itself must be intuited (Anschauung) in its own mode of appearing and described as it shows itself. Heidegger’s decision to leave the phenomenon to itself, without imposing a prior theoretical framework, constitutes the first step of descriptive phenomenology. Subsequently, in order to discern the essential mode of equipmentality (Zeughaftigkeit), two exemplary phenomena are selected: peasant shoes and the Greek temple. Through these examples, a phenomenal field is opened. The essence (Wesen) of equipment is thereby intuited. While the method of exemplification in Edmund Husserl serves to disclose the noesis–noema structure, Heidegger, by contrast, analyzes a “projection of world” (Weltentwurf) through such examples. It may thus be argued that, alongside phenomenological epoché, the use of eidetic exemplification constitutes a second point of continuity linking Heidegger to the Husserlian line. Yet once the seminar moves beyond these points and turns toward determining the ontological status of the phenomenological object, it begins to diverge from Husserlian phenomenology.

Edmund Husserl proposes the establishment of a field of clarity—evidence (Evidenz)—in order to render the object open, thematic, and verifiable for consciousness. Within this field, the strata of meaning of the noema are gradually unfolded. This constitutes the epistemic ground of phenomenological description: “the self-givenness of the thing itself, as it is and as itself.” This givenness operates

within the noetic–noematic structure; that is, the meaning of the object renders itself visible in consciousness. Yet this appearing is never exhaustive of the object. The object manifests itself with a meaning, but it never discloses all its aspects. Accordingly, Evidenz should be understood not as “infallibility” but as “phenomenal clarity”; in this respect, it is gradual, capable of increase and decrease (Husserl, 2012, pp. 182–196). What is at stake here is a radical transformation of Cartesian clarity (*claritas et distinctio*).

On the other hand, Roman Ingarden envisions a mode of disclosure that proceeds in parallel with the multilayered structure of the aesthetic object. Meaning is distributed across ontological strata and becomes concretized to varying degrees, through different perspectives, within different layers of consciousness (Ingarden, 1973, pp. 29–31, 47–52, 52–58). Nicolai Hartmann’s conception of “categorical intuition” (Hartmann, 2014, pp. 16–17), by contrast, displaces Evidenz from serving as a ground of epistemic justification and instead understands it as the limited disclosure of ontologically independent domains to consciousness (Hartmann, 2014, pp. 120–130, 140–150). As Evidenz, from Edmund Husserl to Ingarden and Hartmann, is transformed into a graded mode of clarity with determinate limits, Martin Heidegger posits a pre-ontological clearing (*Lichtung*) within which every instance of Evidenz becomes possible. By the time Husserl’s strategy of Evidenz reaches the seminar, it is thus fundamentally transformed.

Had we approached Vincent van Gogh’s *Shoes* from a Husserlian perspective, we would encounter an object that becomes thematic within the act of visual perception. As color, form, and composition are intuitively fulfilled, they attain evidence (Evidenz), and the shoes thereby become a clear and verifiable object of meaning for consciousness. For Roman Ingarden, however, the multilayered structure of the object precludes any final completion of meaning. The material stratum, meaning, the stratum of represented objects/events (*Schicht der dargestellten Gegenstände*), schematic aspects, and the stratum of values are not arbitrarily constituted in consciousness. For this reason, as a multilayered aesthetic object, the painting cannot be reduced to the painter’s intention, the viewer’s impression, or the historical context. Since Evidenz inheres not in the subject but in the object, the relevant question is not what the shoes represent, but how they come to have being. Evidenz unfolds from the canvas, paint, and brushstrokes; to the emergence of the shoes as a distinguishable form; from this emergence to a supposition regarding their belonging; from there to the schematic presentation that constitutes the active dimension of aesthetic experience; and finally to metaphysical qualities—such as weight, fatigue, stillness, and dignity—that express the depth of the work.

When Nicolai Hartmann expands the ontology that, in Roman Ingarden, remains confined within the limits of the object into an ontology of being as such, a multilayered structure once again emerges. This structure may be concretized through the same paradigmatic example: thick applications of paint, dark tonalities, and a rough surface are sensuously evident, yet they do not produce meaning. However, when the hardened and at times cracked leather, the mud-darkened soles, the worn heels, and the loosened laces disclose their owner and the life he has lived, Evidenz undergoes a modal shift by surpassing the merely sensory. When this testimony is accompanied by an impression of solitude, fatigue, and silence, psychic evidence comes into view. As expressions pertaining to individual experience reach more general categories of meaning—such as poverty or rural existence—Evidenz passes from the phenomenological to the ontological plane. In the evidence of aesthetic value, all other strata resonate and coalesce into a non-inferential intuition: a tragic tonality, a heavy yet dignified melancholy. For Hartmann, aesthetic value is not a construct of the spectator; it is not projected but undergone. Accordingly, disclosure occurs not because the foreground is transparent or because the subject exerts sufficient effort to extract meaning from it, but because the background imposes itself upon the foreground. In this respect, the background is to be understood as the ontological ground that limits the arbitrary operations of consciousness.

When the mode of reception of an artwork is approached from a Husserlian perspective (Edmund Husserl, 2012, pp. 217–221, 223–227, 252–262), it must first be noted that, at the moment of encounter, consciousness does not approach the work as a merely sensory datum; from the outset, an intention of meaning is already operative. *Noesis* targets the work as something, yet here the *noema* is only partially fulfilled. The meaning of the work is not yet fully disclosed. As the phenomenological attitude is sustained through the suspension of the natural attitude, the distribution of colors, the positioning of figures, and the rhythm of the surface begin to present themselves to intuition within an order. At this point, meaning attains intuitive fulfillment. This fulfillment—or the noematic content aimed at by *noesis*—is what constitutes Evidenz in the Husserlian sense. If the concept is understood as the occurrence of a correspondence between intention and fulfillment, one would be compelled to regard it as purely cognitive. Accordingly, Evidenz functions as a moment of verification within the noetic–noematic correlation. When Roman Ingarden interprets this concept—constructed in Husserl as a mode of epistemic verification—as the intuitive differentiation of the ontological strata of the work, Evidenz ceases to be consciousness-centered and becomes tied to ontological layers. Under these conditions, Vincent van Gogh’s shoes can no longer be understood as noematic in a

strict sense. Indeed, when the indeterminacies within the work are filled in, this fulfillment is guided by the ontic structure of the work itself. With Nicolai Hartmann, Evidenz relinquishes its phenomenological character of verification altogether and is transformed into ontological intuition; from this point onward, what is at stake is no longer conceptual inference but the apprehension of the structural necessities of being. The independence of being from consciousness is thus acknowledged, the noema recedes, and consciousness assumes a receptive position. Yet the locus of disclosure remains, in the final instance, consciousness itself.

Along the line extending from Edmund Husserl to Nicolai Hartmann, although Evidenz traverses a considerable distance from knowledge toward being, disclosure is still conceived as that which appears before a subject; it remains bound to consciousness, thematic, and objectifying. Within this schema, one presupposes, first, a knowing subject, and subsequently an external world and the knowledge pertaining to it. Yet, for Martin Heidegger, the human being is not, by definition, a subject that sets objects over against itself, but rather a being that is in the world (*in-der-Welt-sein*) (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 78–89). Knowledge, in turn, is merely one derivative of this existential relation. At this juncture, the question to be posed is no longer “what do we see clearly?” but rather “how is disclosure possible?” or “where is the world?” The replacement of the concept of Evidenz in the seminar with another concept (*Lichtung*) is grounded in such a line of reasoning. It must be recognized, however, that this is not merely a terminological preference, but a radical shift in method and questioning from phenomenology to ontology.

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger defines phenomenology as follows: “Phenomenology means: to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 58). In this formulation, “showing” is articulated through the interrelated notions of seeing, openness, and intuiting. Even if disclosure is not merely cognitive, it remains phenomenological. Evidenz has been transformed, but not yet abandoned; indeed, it remains immanent to the existential structure of *Dasein*. Understanding (*Verstehen*) functions as one of the existential modes of disclosure of *Dasein*, while interpretation (*Auslegung*) constitutes the thematized articulation of this disclosure (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 188–203). Although it is clear that disclosure here is not an act of consciousness, an ontological anonymity is not yet at issue. Likewise, when the ontological status of equipment is considered from the perspective of *Being and Time*, one encounters the same incomplete trajectory moving from phenomenology toward ontology. It is stated that equipment is not thematic in everyday use; rather, it shows itself when it is broken (Heidegger, 1962, p. 98). This self-showing—this being open or describ-

able (in phenomenological terms, capturable)—still bears the attenuated traces of Evidenz. With the seminar, however, when *aletheia* is transformed into a systematic ontology of concealment and unconcealment, equipment comes to be situated within a world-context, and disclosure is no longer conceived as the self-presentation of an object or its givenness to consciousness, but as an event (das Ereignis) that takes place within the tension between earth and world.

5. The Strife of the Artwork

The artwork, which in Edmund Husserl and Roman Ingarden appears as a field in which meaning is verified, comes to be understood in Nicolai Hartmann as a phenomenon that bears the resistance of being. Along this trajectory, Evidenz can be seen to shift from an epistemological mode of clarity to an ontological distinctness. Yet even as this line of transformation continues to conceive the artwork in terms of a kind of “bringing into the open,” the seminar calls this very function into question at its root. For the work neither verifies nor represents. Indeed, within the Heideggerian framework, the schemas of representation and verification fail to do justice to the power of the artwork. The work is not “evident,” nor is its disclosure reducible to intuitive fulfillment in consciousness, to correct concretization, or to the dominance of the foreground over the background. Rather, every artwork constitutes a site of truth in which multiple modes of meaning are simultaneously opened and set into display.

The first item of the exhibition opens with the following lines: “From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field. . .” (Martin Heidegger, 1975, pp. 33–35). In this statement, one encounters a mechanism that operates in reverse of the Husserlian epoché, effectively suspending it. Whereas Edmund Husserl proposes to thematize the object as a pure phenomenon and to retain it within the noesis–noema structure, the seminar initially withdraws the operations of consciousness directed toward the shoes. It is precisely this move that allows the equipment to remain within its own mode of being (*Zeugsein*) and thereby discloses its ontology. The soles, the threads that bind the sole to the upper, the nails, and all other materials conceal themselves when the shoes are in use. All of these (*hyle*) are present in order to serve a purpose (*telos*) determined by form (*morphe*); as long as this service continues, concealment persists. In the face of this determining power of *morphe*, *hyle* becomes transparent.

The silence of material—its withdrawal within a world in order to secure reliability for the one who uses it—is, in the first instance, a phenomenological silence. When this silence is elevated into an ontological principle encompassing even the artwork, the blind spot in the hylomorphic schema identified by Martin Heidegger becomes evident. To conceive the production of equipment as the completed result (*ergon*) of a transition from material (*dynamis*) to form (*energeia*) may be acceptable at the phenomenal level; for an item of equipment is indeed equipment precisely insofar as it is not thematized. Yet when the artwork is interpreted within this paradigm, material, as in the case of equipment, is reduced to a silent bearer: it possesses no voice of its own and acquires meaning only insofar as it takes on form. If one were to answer, from this perspective, what makes art art, one would be compelled to regard canvas, paint, color, or sound as accidental, while treating the formal-organizing principle as essential.

This ontological priority is preserved—albeit in a more refined form—in post-Aristotelian aesthetic theories. For instance, from the standpoint of Edmund Husserl, who transposes the Aristotelian distinction onto the phenomenological-noematic plane, aesthetic experience may be understood as operating on two levels. At the level of *hyle*, there are raw sensory data (textures of color, intensities of sound, the surface hardness of stone, etc.); at the level of *morphe*, there is the intentional act that unifies these data (noematic form). Material here constitutes the condition for the emergence of noematic meaning. On the other hand, the mind encountering the artwork does not attend to the pigment of color, the physical frequency of sound, or the molecular structure of stone. *Hyle* remains as a latent structure. In the final analysis, the artwork is not a material thing but a “meaningful appearance” (*Erscheinungsträger*) (Husserl, 2012, pp. 198–203, 217–227). In Roman Ingarden’s ontology of art, the completion of meaning in the upper strata and the silence of material within the process of meaning-formation, and, for Nicolai Hartmann, the fact that material does not establish disclosure but merely bears it, may be read as successive moments in the transformation of the Aristotelian ontological line after Husserl.

The discussion of the shoes had been initiated by asking what makes equipment equipment, and within the phenomenal field thus opened, it had been concluded that equipmentality consists in usefulness, and that usefulness, in turn, rests upon the self-effacement of material. In the lines that follow, when the shoes enter a different mode of appearing, one witnesses a reconfiguration of both the hylomorphic schema and *Evidenz*:

“From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread

of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field. On the leather there lies the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth. This earth belongs to the ripening grain and to the fallow desolation of the winter field; it withdraws into itself. Accompanying this withdrawal is the silent anxiety for the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending birth and the shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and is protected in the world of the peasant woman” (Martin Heidegger, 1975, pp. 33–34).

For Aristotle, being (to on) is never given as either pure matter or pure form; *ousia* is always grasped as the inseparable composite of *hyle* and *morphe*. *Hyle* is a possibility open to determination, whereas *morphe* is not merely perceptual form but the essential determination of being. This composite finds its realization within the orienting horizon of *telos*: matter comes to rest in form in accordance with its teleological completion. Jean-Luc Marion’s formulation rearticulates Aristotelian ontology in a phenomenological idiom: “...the feminine imposes itself upon the masculine by the rays of the dignity and visible splendor of its form, whereas the unseen suffers precisely from not yet appearing in any form and desires only to attain a mode of appearing” (Marion, 2014, pp. 55–56), thus directing itself toward a mode of visibility that has not yet come to presence. In Heidegger’s account, however, one observes a rupture in this teleological horizon extending from ancient Greek thought to contemporary phenomenology. Indeed, the emergence into unconcealment of the sole, the threads, and the nails—withdrawn into invisibility in the mode of equipment—transposes the meaning of the *hyle–morphe* composite from a fixed teleology into the field of ontological disclosure.

The emergence of material is no longer the silent progression of *telos* or a moment within formal completion. To clarify this claim, one may turn to the second example presented in the seminar, the Greek temple. The stone that constitutes the temple’s raw material is characterized in the text primarily through weight. Weight is resistance. Stone resists being understood; even when broken into pieces, none of its parts bears meaning—they are merely fragments: inert, solid, and mute. When a stone is placed on the scale, even its weight disappears; it is reduced to a number (Martin Heidegger, 1975, pp. 46–47). In the words of Maurice Blanchot, mute bronze is hard everywhere, burning with a merciless fire. What it evokes is the sensation of foam, the sensation of drowning, the absolute absence of desire...

There is neither movement nor even the image of movement; yet neither is there something simply motionless. This experience, expressed as an “endless withdrawal, deprived of non-presence” (Blanchot, 2018, p. 81), raises a question: does it speak of being, or of the absence of absence? In other words, is the material of the Greek temple the same stone as this “mute bronze”?

When stone enters into the Greek temple, it begins to bear and to support; only then does it first become stone. Colors blaze forth, tones resound. In this process, not only does the mystery of the stone emerge, but also the storm that strikes, the invisible expanse of air, the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of night, and the swelling stillness of the sea come into their own. When the work sets itself into the mass of stone, the suppleness of wood, the gleam of metal, and the luminosity of color, stone is no longer merely material, physical nature, raw matter, or a passive bearer; it becomes earth. As Martin Heidegger writes: “Earth is that which comes forth and shelters, the self-secluding” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 47).

The condition for earth to function as a ground is that a world be set up upon it. More succinctly, “to be a work means to set up a world” (Martin Heidegger, 1975, p. 43). But what is world? The seminar approaches this question through a negative elucidation. It is asserted that the world is not something that simply stands there; it is neither a sum of things—countable or uncountable, familiar or unfamiliar—nor an object set before us, nor an imaginary framework added by our representations. The nature of world cannot be known in a determinate way, but it can be intimated. This intimation unfolds as follows: “The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 44). It follows from this that world is not form (*morphe*); to clarify this further with reference to Jean-Luc Marion, what matter desires in order to become visible is not form, but its own formation (Marion, 2002, p. 49). The relation between this “ownness” and form is, in one respect, a strife: world and earth are essentially distinct. World tends toward disclosure, whereas earth tends toward closure. In every opening, earth withdraws itself. For this reason, the mass of stone, the saturation of color, and the sheen of metal do not stand in the work as fully determined properties, but as traces of an inexhaustible concealedness. However much the work brings into openness the striking storm, the invisible expanse of air, the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of night, and the swelling stillness of the sea, it always preserves a dimension of concealment. As world establishes meaning, earth resists dissolution within this configuration and refuses to yield to conceptual determination. Its essence lies precisely in this closure that resists visibility. At the same time, this very closure tends to draw the world

back into itself and to hold it there.

The opposition between world and earth is a strife. Yet to characterize this strife in terms of conflict, disorder, chaos, destruction, or mere opposition would run counter to the proposal of the seminar. For in this strife, each side, by asserting itself, elevates the nature of the other; each opponent carries the other beyond itself. As the horizon of meaning opened by the work, world rises upon earth without exhausting it, and in this very rising it gains depth through the resistance of earth. As world opens meaning, earth weighs down, intensifies, and withdraws this opening. As Martin Heidegger writes: “The world is grounded on the earth, and the earth rises up through the world” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 47). The world that rises upon earth strives to surpass it. The further the strife is carried, the more the opposites surrender to a mutual belonging. If earth is to be earth, it cannot dispense with the openness of world; if world is to rise upon a stable ground, it cannot withdraw from the domain of earth. For earth is not only the condition of visibility but also its limit (Heidegger, 1975, pp. 41–47).

The experience articulated in Maurice Blanchot’s account lends itself to being read as an extension of the strife between earth and world. When approached in this way, both Blanchot’s literary ontology and the ontological disclosure that Martin Heidegger formulates as the “self-repose of the work within itself” gain a certain clarity. As a result of this insight, it becomes evident once more that earth is not absolute closure, nor is world absolute openness; in this connection, the aesthetic model proposed in the seminar acquires a more concrete articulation. The stone, characterized by inertia, solidity, and silence, becomes the ground of appearing once it enters into the temple; yet at the same time, it continues to resist conceptual transparency. This resistance, on the one hand, imposes a limit upon the openness of world; on the other, it manifests a tendency to preserve its own being. The work continually sets up a world while at the same time setting forth earth, thereby provoking this strife. The work-being of the work lies in this strife; it owes its being to it (Heidegger, 1975, pp. 46–48). Although world and earth are essentially distinct, they cannot be regarded as two substances set over against one another. For in this strife, each side, by asserting itself, brings the nature of the other into unconcealment.

“In natural objects—for example, a block of stone, a drop of water (...)—form appears to be determined by matter and almost effaced; whereas in certain other objects—a vase, a hoe, or any other artifact produced by human beings—form seems to determine matter” (Giorgio Agamben, 2019, pp. 22–23). When it comes to the artwork, however, if either form or matter falls silent, one must

conclude that the work itself has fallen silent. Meaning resides in form, and form arises from meaning. As sign and meaning follow one another in a continuous movement, the meaning of the work comes into formation (Agamben, 2019, pp. 22–26). In conclusion, within this conceptual map developed in order to understand the artwork, *hyle* is neither (as in Edmund Husserl) the condition for the emergence of noematic meaning, nor (as in Roman Ingarden) a material that does not participate in the process of meaning-formation, nor (as in Nicolai Hartmann) a ground that falls into silence once meaning has emerged.

Rather than presenting a psychologically coherent protagonist, Thomas the Obscure unfolds around a mode of existence that gravitates toward an obscure, earth-like darkness. Anne, who appears as the other figure in the narrative, is not so much a constructed character as a mode of being that emerges at the limit of Thomas's existence. The relation between them oscillates between proximity and distance, union and dissolution, recognition and estrangement. As Thomas turns toward Anne, he fails to possess her and, at the same time, loses his own essential boundary. In this movement, Thomas ceases to be one who experiences the world and instead becomes the experience itself. This transformation is, in fact, structured so as to break representation and, in this respect, offers a literary counterpart to the discourse of the seminar. Just as the stone in the seminar cannot be reduced to conceptual transparency, so too the figures and objects in the novel often exhibit an excessively dense or elusive mode of being; they cease to be readily identifiable and tend toward an almost anonymous mode of existence. At the same time, the darkness of both Thomas and earth does not stand in opposition to visibility; rather, it indicates a mode of withdrawal that constitutes the very condition of visibility. Maurice Blanchot describes this withdrawal as “a place where there is neither movement nor even the image of movement, yet neither is there something simply motionless” (Blanchot, 2018, p. 81). It is at this point that the ontological instability between the two texts begins to diverge.

The darkness of earth is a moment of concealment (*Verborgenheit*). The mass of stone, the saturation of color, and the timbre of sound, though they appear within the work, retain an inexhaustible closedness. In this sense, closedness points to an ontological concealment. As world establishes meaning, its articulation encounters the opacity of earth. The reason for this lies in the “inexhaustible closedness” in question: the impenetrability of earth constitutes a point of resistance that marks the limit of meaning. Every order instituted by world meets the non-transparent texture of earth. For this reason, even when meaning is established, it is never completed. If one shifts to the other pole and considers the strife from there, one

is compelled once more to affirm that the work-being of the work is indebted to this strife. Earth is not a passive repository of material; it is productive. Indeed, the concretization of the field of meaning opened by world becomes possible only through the distinctive texture of earth. Although colors and sounds acquire function and reference within a world, the bearing of this acquisition depends upon the sensuous-ontic density of earth. Yet the support that earth offers to world is, like the support that world offers to earth, paradoxical. For every possibility granted arrives together with a constraint. The materiality of color, the sonority of sound, and the phonetic body of language generate resistance to the determinations instituted by world. World situates things within conceptual articulations; earth, however, remains within these articulations as a surplus that does not dissolve. Accordingly, this mutual support is not a transparent service, but a relation of tension-laden bearing. In sum, world opens, while earth provides the texture of this opening. The meanings established in this disclosure settle into the opaque continuity of earth. Truth takes place through the dialectic of concealing and unconcealing between these two dimensions.

The darkness of Thomas, by contrast, does not signify the concealment of beings, but manifests as a neutral field in which subject and object begin to dissolve—an expanse in which all determinations are suspended and vision itself becomes unstable. Whereas in the darkness of earth phenomena proliferate in an inexhaustible manner, the darkness in the novel tends toward the erosion of the phenomenal order itself. The well-known scene of entering the sea constitutes the first radical articulation of the themes of presence/dissolution and subject/erasure that intensify in the subsequent sections. This time, the sea is not the sea Thomas has always swum in. Not only the sea, but also the course to be taken is different. The cloud descending upon the sea seems to absorb the surface of the water and, with it, to swallow reality itself. Although the turbulent waters shake him, they do not give the sense of being amidst waves or of rolling within familiar elements. The awareness that the water might not, in fact, exist could have dispelled the mist—had Thomas’s gaze been able to anchor itself anywhere. A stillness accompanies the violent winds that shatter the sky, a stillness that suggests that nothing is, in fact, there. Are the swirling vortices truly water? As the water scatters foam resembling white clusters, it is rather the absence of water that carries the intoxicated body away. Thomas steps outside himself and drifts into the void; he drowns within the thought of water. Everything becomes an interminable journey in a nonexistent sea with a nonexistent organism (Maurice Blanchot, 2018, pp. 12–13). The tension of this scene owes much to what Blanchot repeatedly develops as a phenomenology of the night. The sea functions

like the night: it not only renders things invisible, but also erodes their determinate modes of being. Perception ceases to be a form of appropriation and is transformed into an openness in which the subject loses itself. Although this ontological shift recalls death, it signifies less death itself than the suspension of being, the dissolution of identity, and the attenuation of presence.

The darkness of the sea recalls the darkness of earth. Both destabilize the ground of visibility. Yet in Martin Heidegger, this instability finds the truth of the work, whereas in Maurice Blanchot it produces a limit-experience that dissolves the referential networks of existence. The strife between earth and world constitutes a productive tension, while the sea into which Thomas enters presents a phenomenology of dissolution. Can one therefore claim that “the darkness of earth is productive, whereas the darkness of the sea is ‘mere darkness’”? When one turns to another swimming scene in Blanchot’s novel (Blanchot, 2018, pp. 80–87), it becomes apparent that, although there is no strict conceptual parallel between the two texts, an isomorphism open to interpretation nevertheless emerges. First, the fact that the work in the seminar is the site of truth does not imply that darkness generates pure illumination or that the work renders everything fully visible. In bringing-forth, the work at the same time conceals. Even as material shines within the work, it does not become transparent, nor does it dissolve into meaning. Surplus, resistance, and inexhaustibility continue to prevail. This is precisely why interpretations of a work inevitably reach a limit: interpretation cannot surpass the material–ontological structure of the work. Earth both enables interpretation (since darkness generates an inexhaustible multiplicity of phenomena) and constrains it (since it never fully yields itself to disclosure, thereby resisting arbitrary projection). The work is not a mechanism for producing correct interpretations; it is the opening of truth within determinate limits. Interpretation participates in this opening; it does not invent it. Blanchot’s night—or the dark sea—likewise offers no determinate content: neither the mist, nor the water, nor the act of swimming is fixed. The intentional directness of the subject is suspended; Thomas’s cold arms grow numb, his breathing slows, he slips out of himself and drifts into the void, unable even to feel the excitement he ought to feel (Blanchot, 2018, pp. 11–13). Here, the work no longer sets up a world; rather, it becomes a threshold at which the world itself is suspended.

The darkness that constitutes Thomas’s ontology breaks, in the later sections, toward a productive register. For instance, an excitement absent in the first immersion is now introduced. Along with it, other affects—sorrow, resentment, joy, melancholy, compassion, hatred, fear—are returned to Thomas (Maurice Blanchot, 2018, p. 80). Yet this restitution is not enduring, just as meaning itself is not

infinite. The affects are felt, but they cannot be named. For the work is not only world; if it were, it would collapse into a purely conceptual text. The work is also earth, resisting determinations by foregrounding its darkness. Yet it is not only earth either; otherwise, the artwork would resemble the pitch-dark sea into which Thomas enters, and no meaning could be constituted. Were that the case, when Thomas encounters the stone again, mute bronze would not evoke the sensation of foam. When Thomas enters the sea a second time, earth comes to be gathered into a world: “What I felt was the source of what is felt, the origin thought to be insensible, the indistinguishable origin of pleasure and disgust” (Blanchot, 2018, p. 81). This time, the mist does not entirely cover the sea, nor does the storm wholly obscure the water. When one speaks of “what is felt,” one no longer refers to raw sensation, but to an interpreted, situated, and meaningful experience. Pleasure and disgust are now value-laden categories, articulated and positioned within a world. This is the plane of world—the clearing in which meaning, distinction, and value are constituted. Yet the sentence does not end there; it seeks to descend toward the “origin thought to be insensible” as the source of experience (Blanchot, 2018, p. 81). What is sought is a field of intensity that resists disclosure, cannot be exhausted, and eludes conceptual determination. Although earth is not absolute darkness, it yields only weakly to modes of meaning. All meanings attained retain within themselves an irreducible opacity; this is the “insensible origin.” The indistinguishability of two value modalities—one positive, the other negative—at this level points to the intensity prior to the constitution of world. Pleasure and disgust exist not as determinate entities, but as possibilities. Likewise, although earth bears the oppositions that appear within world, it cannot itself be constituted as opposition. Once world opens, pleasure and disgust will be differentiated, acquiring value and name. Yet, due to earth’s resistance to this disclosure, neither differentiation, nor valuation, nor naming ever reaches completion. It is perhaps for this reason that Thomas hesitates, even as he names, to name the affects he evokes.

When Jesus emerges from the tomb and encounters Mary Magdalene, he says, “Noli me tangere!” (“Do not touch me”). The sentence, which appears in the Resurrection narrative of the Gospel of John, concerns a presence on the verge of withdrawal. Jesus is either here or not; seeing, hearing, and understanding are deferred to the other. For Jean-Luc Nancy, who interprets Titian’s 1514 painting of this episode, Christ’s utterance signals an indeterminate context and does not constitute a stable linguistic formation. Within the darkness of the sentence, meanings proliferate inexhaustibly. “You will hurt me,” “I will hurt you,” “I will defend myself” (Nancy, 2020, pp. 39–40), along with other echoes, form a vortex, while

the presence of Christ—like the sea into which Thomas enters—remains suspended. Where “do not touch me” is spoken, touch is at once impossible and necessary. Being withdraws. Mary reaches out to touch, for a world has opened. Yet she cannot touch, because earth is dark. Being resists objectification. While Thomas’s experience oscillates between “what I feel” (world) and “the origin of what I feel” (earth), Mary’s witnessing oscillates between Christ’s absent presence (earth) and “noli me tangere” (world). The uneasy pleasure we experience before a work of art may stem from the incapacity of earth to yield the world over to a secure ground; in other words, from the work’s “endless withdrawal, deprived of non-presence.”

Conclusion

In setting up a world, the work at the same time brings earth to the fore. This central proposition of Martin Heidegger’s seminar not only casts new light on the hylomorphic model—whose explanatory power remains limited or obscure with regard to the nature of the work—but also shifts art from a representational to a constitutive function. Under this new light, material becomes visible with the specific gravity attributed to it by Heidegger: the stone shines as stone, paint condenses as paint, and the word resists as sound and rhythm. In other words, material that dissolves into function in the mode of equipment comes into unconcealment in the work. Yet this unconcealment occurs, paradoxically, as concealment. Through its resistance to objectification and conceptualization, earth frames the meanings opened by world and imposes limits upon the horizon within which they are established. The richness of interpretations elicited by the work arises from the tension between earth and world.

At the same time, it may not be entirely accurate to claim that earth directly participates in the meaning of the work within this dynamic. Material still recedes into the background; it does not constitute meaning, but participates in the process of its formation in a negative manner. Strife (*Streit*) inevitably operates within a logic of opposition and, as such, remains open to being read as a reiteration of the Aristotelian hylomorphic model. This raises a further question: does there truly exist such a phenomenological boundary or threshold between material and meaning? Or can the dynamic pole of strife—referred to as “the world of a historical people”—provide the work with the dynamism required for it to be what it is? And if it does, would such a determination not risk constraining the transhistorical and transspatial dimension of art, thereby limiting the multiplicity of meanings?

Material, suppressed in classical ontology, may have gradually acquired the

possibility of appearing in its own mode along the line extending from Roman Ingarden to Nicolai Hartmann and Martin Heidegger. Finally, the silence of material may, in Heidegger, have been transformed into an ontological mode of speaking. Yet this speaking is paradoxically a “non-speaking.” Accordingly, even if the threshold between material and subject/interpretation—or the hierarchy between *hyle* and *morphe*—is eroded, it nevertheless persists. If one assumes, for this reason, that Heidegger’s project of releasing material remains incomplete, it becomes possible to envisage another ontology in which oppositions—and the thresholds that follow from them—no longer obtain. Under this alternative assumption, matter may be conceived not as that which closes, but as an active force that continually opens in varying intensities, distributes itself differentially across multiple meanings, and, in the very act of this distribution, disrupts the topography into which it spreads. It would then be difficult to place matter, thus operative within the work, in opposition to meaning or to distinguish it from meaning altogether. Here, material is not darkness but the luminosity from which all meanings are carved into being. The work, in turn, is not a mediator between earth and world, but a regime of multiplicity that suspends all oppositions and dualities.

Statements such as “This is truly a masterpiece before us,” “The blue sky in this painting by Koch symbolizes the divine element in nature,” or “Michelangelo’s genius lies in his flawless depiction of psychological responses,” when formulated from a metaphysical–aesthetic perspective, may not be entirely false; yet they fail to grasp the multi-component structure of art. In this sense, they are both true and false. One might also say: all works are anamorphic. When viewed from a certain point, a painting may appear as a masterpiece, Vermeer as a virtuoso, the sky as a symbol of the divine, or the exhaustion of Noah on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel as real. Within such a configuration, artist, work, viewer, representation, the represented, styles, different periods and places, painting and picture, art and nature are all distinctly separated from one another. Viewed from another point, however, matter and form appear divided by a rift (Riss) and manifest as earth and world.

What in fact presents everything to us as properly ordered—leading us toward a seemingly universal agreement about what things are and where they stand—is the curved mirror through which we view the work from within. When we step away from this mirror, the arrangement collapses. First, the artist and the art historian/critic lose their privileged position; indeed, such privilege never truly existed in the first place. Our ability to interpret the work stems not from standing above it, but from being part of the world it opens. When we encounter the work and

begin to reflect upon it, a field of clarity (Evidenz) is disclosed. Within this field, artist, interpreter, work, the subject of the work, styles, different periods and places, painting and picture, art and nature, matter and form all participate in a shared domain in which they mutually partake of one another.

References

- Agamben, G. (2019). *İçeriksiz Adam* (K. Atakay, Trans.). Monokl.
- Aristoteles. (2014). *Metafizik* (A. Arslan, Trans.). Sosyal Yayınlar.
- Aristoteles. (2020). *Fizik* (S. Babür, Trans.). Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
- Blanchot, M. (2018). *Karanlık Thomas* (S. Dolanoğlu, Trans.). Metis.
- Camfield, W. A. (1989). *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*. The Menil Collection.
- Demir, A. (2025). Anamnesis Between Myth And Epistemology: Recollection İn Plato And Cross-Cultural Memory Symbolism. *Synesis* (ISSN 1984-6754), 17(3), 83–97.
- Hartmann, N. (2014). *Aesthetics* (E. Kelly, Trans.). De Gruyter.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1975). *Poetry, Language, Thought* (A. Hofstadter, Trans.). Harper & Row Publisher.
- Heidegger, M. (1985). *Early Greek Thinking* (D. F. Krell & F. A. Capuzzi, Trans.). Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, M. (2011). *Metafiziğe Giriş* (M. Keskin, Trans.). Avesta.
- Husserl, E. (2012). *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (W. R. B. Gibson, Trans.). Routledge.
- Ingarden, R. (1973). *The Literary Work of Art*. NorthWestern University Press.
- Marion, J.-L. (2014). *Görünürün Kesişimi* (M. Erşen, Trans.). Monokl.
- Nancy, J.-L. (2020). *Noli Me Tangere* (M. Erşen, Trans.). Dergah.
- Parmenides. (2022). *Fragmanlar* (K. H. Ökten, Trans.). Alfa Yayınları.
- Platon. (1999). *Devlet* (S. Eyüboğlu & M. A. Cimcoz, Trans.). Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
- Platon. (2012). *Sofist* (F. Akderin, Trans.). Say.
- Tunah, İ. (1971). *Sanat Ontolojisi*. İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları.

Acknowledgment and conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Any errors or omissions are my own.