Going Elsewhere

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF AESTHETIC IMMERSION

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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What happens in an immersive aesthetic experience? Where do I “go” in those moments when I lose myself in an artwork? This study proposes an answer by developing a systematic phenomenology of immersive experiences in a topological register. By applying resources from hermeneutic and existential phenomenology, this study argues that aesthetic immersion can be systematically described as a change in the perceiver’s mode of being-in-the-world. The central thesis of this study is that aesthetic immersion occurs as an existential dislocation, where the perceiver’s sense of being “there” in the world is momentarily changed into an “elsewhere”, an existential place located in between the lifeworld and the poetic world of the artwork. In this dislocation, the experiences of time, space, meaning and selfhood are momentarily altered.

Part I examines historical and methodological issues related to the phenomenological description of aesthetic immersion. Chapter 1 discusses various deconstructive perspectives on the history of aesthetics and uses them to provide coordinates for a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. Chapter 2 outlines the methodological basis of this description. Since aesthetic immersion resists direct reflective access and is prone to unwarranted retrospective reconstructions, the study proposes a method of indirect phenomenology, where aesthetic immersion is approached in terms of the way it disturbs quotidian experiences of being “there” in the world. To facilitate such a description, Chapter 2 develops a general experiential framework using elements from Martin Heidegger’s event ontology and contemporary French phenomenology.

Part II outlines in two further chapters a systematic phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. Chapter 3 examines the conditions and structures of aesthetic immersion in terms of an existential dislocation from the “there” to the “elsewhere”. The chapter presents a description of the topological features of the “elsewhere” by outlining the situation in which it can occur, its spatio-temporal structure, and the way the artwork makes sense in and through aesthetic immersion. Chapter 4 completes the description by examining aesthetic immersion from the perspective of the perceiver’s sense of selfhood. The chapter argues that being aesthetically immersed in an artwork entails a mode of self-forgetfulness, which results from the diachrony between the work’s overpowering manifestation and the perceiver’s reflective grasp of it. The study closes with an examination of the ways the experience of “going elsewhere” relates to affectivity, understanding, language and intersubjective relations.
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INTRODUCTION
§ 1. Standing spellbound

The painting would not let me turn my back on it. I don't know how long I stared at the image, frozen in place. Perhaps for a few minutes, perhaps for half an hour – the ticking of the clock no longer had meaning. Neither was I any longer there, in the Louvre, among the other tourists: the desperate scene on the canvas shot through the hustle and bustle around me, and I felt closer to the sinking raft, stranded in the vast Atlantic Ocean, than the room where I was physically standing. Though I was not actually there among the starving survivors, the painting seemed for a moment to break the barrier between reality and pictorial space, sucking me into the tumultuous ocean. I tried turning my back on the painting so as to continue my tour, but I had to turn back several times, since it was not done with me yet. It felt as if the painting had a gravitational pull of its own, one that made me lose control of my gaze and let the painting take over.

I had seen Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–1819) before, but this was the first time it truly hit me. After I managed to tear myself away from its pull, I was perplexed. I had had such experiences several times before – in the theatre, in cinemas, in concert halls, on my own sofa – but perhaps never before so tantalisingly, so grippingly. What exactly had happened? Why was it that of all the paintings in the Louvre it was this one that struck me so forcibly? Why did it speak to me now, and not at the earlier times I had seen it? Moreover, where exactly did I go, when the painting seemed to lift me from the halls of the Louvre and fling me into the stormy ocean?
Such questions are seemingly simple and concrete. And despite their seeming simplicity, they evade simple answers. Even with small probing, they open onto a complex phenomenological issue, which, as this study intends to show, has its roots deep in the existential make-up of human being-in-the-world. This issue concerns the peculiar experience of aesthetic immersion. By aesthetic immersion I mean the experience of being captivated by a phenomenon to the extent of losing one's sense of time, space, and even one's sense of selfhood. The qualification “aesthetic” refers to the perceptual nature of this experience in contrast to, for example, being lost in one's own thoughts; aesthetic immersion occurs in sensuous receptivity to the appearing of phenomena.

Let me formulate the central question of this study somewhat more philosophically. Aron Gurwitsch has famously claimed that “[…] there are no other philosophical problems except problems of sense, meaning, and signification.”¹ If so, then what kind of an experience of sense are we dealing with in aesthetic immersion? What are the meaning-structures of this modality of aesthetic experience? This study dedicates itself to the phenomenological investigation of this peculiar experience of “going elsewhere” in and through encounters with art. To my best knowledge, existing phenomenological research has not provided a systematic description of aesthetic immersion despite its deep interest in aesthetic experience. This study proposes to fill this lacuna and argue that aesthetic immersion is phenomenologically interesting in its own right.

The central thesis of this study is that aesthetic immersion is not merely an experience of heightened feeling or an isolated Erlebnis, but an existential event in which the perceiver’s way of being there momentarily changes. One often hears claims that works of art open up new worlds, and that one goes to a new place when encountering a work of art. Martin Heidegger claims in The Origin of the Work of Art (Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, 1935–36)² that, when faced with Van Gogh's

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¹ Gurwitsch 1947, 652. Emphasis original.
² Heidegger’s meditations on the origin of the work of art developed in a series of lectures he gave during the years 1935–1936. The transcripts of these talks afford us three versions of The Origin of the Work of Art. The first, titled “Vom Ursprung des Kunstwerkes: Erste Ausarbeitung” (published in Heidegger Studies vol. 5) is a draft of a lecture Heidegger never presented. The second version, also titled “Vom Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” (published in 1985 in a bilingual German-French edition by Emmanuel Martineau) is based on a lecture Heidegger gave on 13 November 1935 for the Kunstwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft in Freiburg. The third and best-known version, titled “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” (published in 1950 in the collection Holzwege and republished in 1976 in Gesamtausgabe, Band 5) is based on a series of lectures given in 1936 for the Freien Hochstift in Frankfurt am Main. In addition, Heidegger’s personal notes regarding the lectures have been published in Heideg-
painting of peasant shoes, “we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend
to be.” Such claims are intuitively easy to understand: is it not that, while listening
to Debussy’s *Reflets dans l’eau*, I am as much, if even not more so, standing by a pool
of glistening water than I am sitting in a concert hall? Do I not, in some sense, go
into space in Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, or melt in the breathing colour fields of Rothko’s
*Seagram Murals*?

In this study, I will argue that this “travelling theory” of aesthetic experience
should not be taken as merely figurative speech. Instead, I will argue that aes-
thetic immersion should be taken as a “carrying-over” to a distinct modality of the
*there*, an existential locality opened up by the artwork. The precise problem
is to indicate where we go in and through aesthetic immersion, how we get there,
and what happens to us in this dislocation. Surely, such a framing of the question
flirts with easy misinterpretations, and I wish to emphasise at the outset that what
I am aiming at is not some magical transportation to another world. Instead, the
paradox of aesthetic immersion stems precisely from the fact that even without
going anywhere I still seem to go somewhere: being immersed in an artwork is to
fall into an enigmatic *in-between*, which, I will argue, is not a transportation to an-
other world, but a dislocation, where the constitution of the *there* is momentaril-
y modulated. In other words, I do not leave my place in aesthetic immersion, since
it is the *place* itself that changes. This existential place, which immersion brings
about, is what I call the *elsewhere*. The choice of this term aims to highlight my
fundamental thesis that the “place” in which I go in aesthetic immersion is not
directly identifiable with the world presented through the artwork, nor is it strictly
speaking located in the everyday lifeworld either. Instead, what characterises this
*topos* is its non-localisability, its anonymity, its *atopia*. In this way my phenome-
nological description takes an inherently *topological* form: it inquires the nature
of the existential *place* in which both the world and the being-in-the-world of

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3 Heidegger 2001, 35; Heidegger 1977b, 21: “In der Nähe des Kunstwerkes sind wir jäh anderswo ge-
wesen, als wir gewöhnlich zu sein pflegen.” Translation modified. All translations are mine unless
an existing English translation is cited.

the work's perceiver are momentarily transformed by the artwork. Through such perspective, I argue, it is possible to formulate a systematic and comprehensive phenomenology of aesthetic immersion.

Before I explain further the methods of this study and its position with regard to existing research, a few preliminary remarks on the aims and scope of this study are in order.

It is important to note at the outset that this study must not be taken as suggesting an exhaustive description of aesthetic experience in its whole scope. This is because aesthetic experience is not a uniform and singular experience, as aesthetic theories sometimes make it seem, but rather it consists of different phases, intensities, and modes, which cannot easily be crammed into a comprehensive description. In this study, the main point is, as many thinkers before me have noted, that aesthetic experience can be roughly divided into non-reflective and reflective phases. As J.G. Fichte puts it, after the “sweet intoxication” (süße Trunkenheit) of aesthetic immersion, there follows a period of “cool self-possession” (kalte Besonnenheit), which occurs precisely after the fact, since reflection destroys the very thing it attempts to reflect. In phenomenology a similar argument can be found in thinkers like Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hans Robert Jauß, Georges Poulet, and Arnold Berleant. What interests me in this study is the non-reflective, immersive phase that sometimes occurs in encounters with art, though by no means always – in other words, to borrow a line from Walter Pater, it is “not the fruit of experience, but experience itself” that I aim at here. Previous hermeneutic and existential phenomenology has concentrat-

5 Here I understand topology in the Heideggerian sense and not as a branch of mathematics. Heideggerian topology studies being in terms of the way reality opens as a meaningful place, the there. Otto Pöggeler (1963, 294): “Topology is the Saying (logos) of the abode (topos) in which truth as occurring unconcealment gathers itself.” (“Die Topologie des Seins ist das Sagen (logos) des Ortes (topos), in den die Wahrheit als die geschehende Unverborgenheit sich sammelt.”) On Heidegger’s topology, see Pöggeler 1963, 280–299; Malpas 2008; Malpas 2012.


7 Gadamer 2010, 130–132; Jauß 1982b, 244–245; Poulet 1969, 63; Berleant 2000, 106.

8 Pater 1900, 236.

9 As Arto Haapala (2003, 101–102) notes, existential analysis should not be outright equalled with existentialism and identified solely with thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Though the borders between these two are somewhat ambiguous and strict demarcations are difficult to make, existential phenomenology here can be taken as being generally interested in the overall structure of human existence as it is accessible via the phenomenological method, that is, in the ontological level from which existentialist themes such as freedom, authenticity, anxiety, and choice stem. In this study, I will not be touching on these themes and instead will largely concentrate on (post-) Heideggerian existential phenomenology.
ed mainly on the reflective phase and its cognitive import, all the while sometimes
shunning aesthetic immersion as a trivialising way of encountering artworks. This
study aims to augment the existing literature by offering an apology for immersive
experiences. It aims to argue that defending an interest in aesthetic immersion does
not amount to a return to outdated Romantic ideals, but that the experience of im-
merison resonates in exciting ways with contemporary phenomenological findings
regarding the constitution of subjectivity and being-in-the-world.

The assumption that aesthetic experience is a uniform category of experience
deserves another remark. The experience I describe here in terms of aesthetic im-
merison is just one possible way of experiencing a piece of art, and the study is
not aimed at covering the whole range of encounters we can have with art. Most
often aesthetic experiences are much less immersive, impressive though they may
be; some pieces of art interest me very little, some do not speak at all, and some hold
my interest for a while. Pieces of art can speak to me and touch me in a variety of
ways, of which aesthetic immersion is only one, though phenomenologically rather
peculiar possibility. Sometimes I control the encounter by attending to the piece as
a critic, scholar, or connoisseur. Sometimes I may be too distracted or distressed to
devote full attention to a piece; sometimes there is too much to take in for any one
piece to address me in the polyphony of many pieces demanding my attention, as
often happens in museums. Encounters with art never occur in a vacuum, and the
one who encounters them is never a tabula rasa upon which the piece can imprint
its impression without mediation. Instead, an encounter with a piece of art is a
complicated hermeneutical situation in which not only the piece itself but also the
dispositions of the spectator as well as many contextual factors take part in the for-
mation of the particular experience. Ignoring such contextuality can lead to overt
simplifications, as Hans-Georg Gadamer notes: “The work of art cannot simply be
isolated from the ‘contingency’ of the chance conditions in which it appears, and
where this kind of isolation occurs, the result is an abstraction that reduces the ac-
tual being of the work.”

This study aims to offer a contextual model of why some
aesthetic experiences have an immersive character and others don’t.

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10 In this study, I make a conceptual distinction between a piece of art and a work of art: the former
denotes the object of encounter (a painting, sculpture, symphony, poem, performance, etc.) and the
latter the event of encounter itself, the piece’s way of working. See § 16 of this study for further details.

11 Gadamer 2004, 115; Gadamer 2010, 121: “Das Kunstwerk ist nicht von der ‘Kontingenz’ der Zu-
gangssbedingungen, unter denen es sich zeigt, schlechthin isolierbar, und wo solche Isolation doch
geschieht, ist das Ergebnis eine Abstraktion, die das eigentliche Sein des Werkes reduziert.”

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In keeping with the fact that this study does not aim at a comprehensive phenomenology of aesthetic experience in its whole scope, it needs to be added that nor does this study endeavour to cover the whole scope of immersive experiences, which, in addition to aesthetic immersion, could be taken to include such experiences as flow, oceanic feeling, and sublimity. It would certainly be worthwhile to investigate whether these experiences have common phenomenological structures, but such an investigation needs to be conducted on another occasion.

Furthermore, this study must not be taken as an evaluative endeavour. My goal is by no means to suggest that aesthetic immersion is the sole aim of art, or that experiences with art should be evaluated solely according to their immersive merits. Indeed, much of 20th-century art, ranging from Dada to Pop Art and Brechtian drama, has intentionally attempted to destroy any illusionistic and immersive experience, and one would entirely miss the mark if they were evaluated on the standards of immersion. I wish to suggest nothing of the kind in this study. One can attend, learn from, and be touched by works of art in ways that include no immersive aspects whatsoever. These experiences have their own value, and my intention here is not to embark on weighing the values of different types of aesthetic experience. My interest is solely a phenomenological one, and my emphasis on aesthetic immersion should not be taken as suggesting its priority over other ways of experiencing art.

The final and perhaps the most pressing issue in the framing of this study concerns the somewhat problematic limitation of aesthetic immersion to the sphere of art. This naturally begs the question, does aesthetic immersion occur only when dealing with art? Is it somehow different to be absorbed in an artwork than, say, in a natural landscape, religious ritual, sporting event, video game? Though I cannot discuss this matter here at any length, I am willing to assume that other immersive experiences share at least some phenomenological characteristics with immersive experiences with art. However, if the experience I am aiming at can come about in other situations as well, then on what grounds can I limit myself to art? This question warrants two responses.

In the first place, it cannot be straightforwardly said that experiences that share the same characteristics are straightforwardly identical. Cramming experiences with art, nature, religion, sports, and mass media straightforwardly into the same category would be philosophically crass, unless one is first willing to do a detailed analysis of all these experiences separately. However, nothing of the kind is possible in the scope of this study, and the applicability of my description to non-artistic experiences must be left for future study.
However, why concentrate on experiences stemming from the arts, if other options are available? One can respond to this question by following the lines of G.W.F. Hegel, Mikel Dufrenne, and Paul Crowther. They all acknowledge that aesthetic experiences can be found outside the domain of art, and yet they limit their discussion precisely to this domain. In the Lectures on Aesthetics (Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, compiled in 1835), Hegel's thinking on beauty is developed solely in relation to art, even though he recognises the possibility of beauty in nature as well, since in his view artistic beauty is purer than that of nature, “born of the spirit and born again” (aus dem Geiste geborene und wiedergeborene). Dufrenne too, though for somewhat more mundane reasons, concentrates solely on art in his The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience (Phénoméno- logie de l’expérience esthétique, 1953), since he claims it is at its purest in the case of art, and that describing aesthetic experiences induced by natural phenomena would require bracketing more variables. Paul Crowther, on the other hand, has argued that artificial things, such as artworks, which are custom-made to engage with our consciousness in certain ways, offer more enhanced and complete experiences than natural phenomena. All of them claim that the domain of the aesthetic is not commensurate with the domain of art, but that the aesthetic can be approached most purely in and through art. Similarly, I will follow here the hypothesis that art provides a par excellence source of aesthetic immersion. Hence, despite the fact that I limit myself here to the domain of art for these heuristic reasons, my intention is by no means to suggest that aesthetic immersion can occur only in experiences with art.

In conclusion, the primary aim of this study is to expand existing phenomenological accounts on aesthetic experience by developing a systematic phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. This I attempt to do by arguing that the notion of place is a focal notion in which many central issues concerning aesthetic immersion converge, and that the notion of the elsewhere offers the possibility of uniting many heretofore fragmentarily described features of aesthetic immersion.

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13 Dufrenne 1953, 8–9.
§ 2. Remarks on previous scholarship

Outlining the existing research on the topic is a complex task, since this study relates to several partially overlapping discussions. On the one hand, there is the general discussion regarding aesthetic immersion in such heterogeneous fields as reader-response theory, cognitive psychology, and art history. On the other hand, there is the topological approach to art, exemplified by thinkers like Éliane Escoubas, Henri Maldiney, and Jeff Malpas, who interpret Heidegger’s ontology of art in terms of place disclosure. Lastly, there is the vast phenomenological literature concerning aesthetic experience and art in general.

The methods, perspectives, and sources of this study come mainly from the tradition of hermeneutic and existential phenomenology. It still needs to be noted that questions regarding aesthetic immersion have been discussed far and wide throughout the history of aesthetics. Ernst Gombrich dates the birth of “illusionism” in art to the “Greek revolution” between the 6th and 4th centuries. Werner Wolf argues that aesthetic theory picks up on the illusory aspects of aesthetic experience at the latest in Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s Poetics, and that the topic emerges recurrently in the history of aesthetics from there on. In another text, Wolf argues that illusory effects become prominent in Renaissance art, exemplified by Cervantes’s Don Quixote and Shakespearean drama, whereas Michael Fried has identified how 18th-century French painting and criticism exemplifies a shift of emphasis toward aesthetic “absorption.” From the 19th century onwards, discussions on aesthetic immersion can be seen as dividing into two antagonistic traditions: the tradition of illusionistic fiction and the anti-illusionistic counter tradition exemplified most notably by many strands of modernist art, which attempted to distance artistic creation from the illusionist paradigm through different mechanisms of defamiliarisation.

Here it is not viable, or even possible, to review this tradition in any wealth of detail. At this point all I wish to say is that even if I position this study within the so-called “post-metaphysical” strands of contemporary phenomenology, I will

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15 Gombrich 1960, chapter IV.
16 Wolf 2011, paragraph 29.
17 Wolf 1993; Fried 1980.
18 Wolf 2011, paragraph 29.
recurrently draw examples from the “metaphysical” tradition, especially from the German Idealists, whose thinking includes valuable phenomenological insights. Though this admittedly flirts with the danger of falling into eclecticism and accidental metaphysics, I do think that awareness of the tradition offers not just textual evidence for the specific experience I am dealing with, but also vital phenomenological insights regarding its description.

More recent debates, varying from narratology to reader-response-theory, possible world theory, emotion theory, and cognitive psychology, have discussed matters related to aesthetic immersion under many names, such as absorption, recentring, involvement, psychological participation, and transportation. I will not be referring to all of these, and instead I will limit myself mostly to the phenomenological resources. One general remark regarding this broader context is in order. The Living Handbook of Narratology summarises the experience denoted by these different concepts in terms of aesthetic illusion:

Aesthetic illusion consists primarily of a feeling, with variable intensity, of being imaginatively and emotionally immersed in a represented world and of experiencing this world in a way similar (but not identical) to real life. At the same time, however, this impression of immersion is counterbalanced by a latent rational distance resulting from a culturally acquired awareness of the difference between representation and reality.20

Werner Wolf recommends the usage of aesthetic illusion, since the term etymologically hints to the “presence of playfulness” (Lat. in+ludere, literally “in-playing”) and highlights the participatory nature of the experience. I, for one, prefer the term immersion, which is often used interchangeably with illusion, for the following reasons, which somewhat set my interest in aesthetic immersion apart from discussion regarding the illusory aspects of art.

According to Wolf, there is “a general proviso” in these lines of research that aesthetic illusion is a matter of finding oneself in another world, and that there-

19 Wolf 2011, paragraph 2.
20 Wolf 2011, paragraph 1.
21 Wolf 2011, paragraph 27.
by the pieces, which can elicit aesthetic illusion, need to be representational.22 The illusion in question regards the capacity of the piece to create an impression of a world structurally akin to the perceiver lifeworld. Consequently, some researchers are willing to exclude instrumental music from the category of illusionistic art.23 For me, aesthetic immersion is in this respect a wider category, since I emphasise self-forgetfulness and changes in spatial and temporal awareness, as well as the overall sense-structure of the situation, rather than the illusion of being in a representational world. I hold that also such genres as non-representational music, dance, and abstract painting can be sources of immersion, and that the illusion of another “lifeworld” is only a subcategory of aesthetic immersion. Wolf’s definition also emphasises the affective character of the experience, whereas my treatment is bent toward the peculiar hermeneutic character of aesthetic immersion, even though I do not wish to underplay the role of emotions in this experience.

Then, of course, there are those who flatly deny either the value or the very existence of aesthetic immersion. I will shortly discuss – and return time and again – to Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s critique of Erlebnis aesthetics, where aesthetic experience is reduced to immersive wallowing in pleasurable feelings. The Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky famously argued that art aims not at immersion but at estrangement (ostranenie), that is, “the complication of form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception […]”.24 Bertolt Brecht’s wish to revitalise art as a social practice shows itself, both in theory and practice, in his emphasis on various Verfremdungseffekte, which intentionally hinder the audience’s immersion into the theatrical performance by reminding them of the artificial and constructed nature of the performance, so as to turn any passive immersion into critical and reflective attention.25 Finally, some thinkers, most notably George Dickie, have questioned the claim that experiencing artworks entails a special mode of attention, arguing that the special kind of perception purported in theories of aesthetic attitude is simply “an encrusted article of faith” rather than an existing feature of aesthetic experience.26

22 Wolf 2011, paragraph 12.
23 Wolf 2011, paragraph 12.
24 Shklovsky 2015, 162.
26 See Dickie 1964.
All this being said, it is time to move on to the phenomenological tradition, to which this study mainly associates itself. However, its exact position is somewhat hard to locate. The general philosophical background of this study lies in existential and hermeneutic phenomenology, which approaches art in terms of its event-character, that is, in terms of the way artworks work in eliciting certain experiences. My main source of inspiration is Heidegger’s Ereignis ontology in which meaningful presence is accounted for in terms of the contextual unfolding of an opening – the there (Da)\(^{27}\) – where thinking and being appropriate and codetermine one another in a dynamic process. Such thinking shifts the attention of ontology from eternal and immutable structures of reality to the instantaneous and hermeneutic event-character, or taking-place,\(^{28}\) of the there from which I always find myself in the midst of meaningful presence.\(^{29}\) Here the central point is that the notion of place functions as a nodal point, which unites other features of Heidegger’s thinking on art. Though this place-oriented thinking is very much present in the third version of The Origin – where Heidegger treats the artwork as the “play-space of openness”

\(^{27}\) Throughout this study I translate the term Da as “there” despite Thomas Sheehan’s (2014b, 264) warning: “This word Da should never be translated as ‘here’ or ‘there’ but always as ‘openness’ or ‘the Open’ in the sense of that which is thrown-open.” The translation “there” contains the danger of understanding the Da in a demonstrative sense as pointing to some ontic locality among others. However, Heidegger himself stresses that the Da is not some point localisable “here” or “there”, but rather “the openness of beings as such and as a whole, the ground of the more originally conceived alētheia” (Heidegger 2012, 234; Heidegger 1989a, 296: “Das Da aber ist die Offenheit des Seienden als solchen im Ganzen, der Grund der ursprünglicher gedachten alētheia.”), which first makes such ontic localities possible. Thus my translation of the Da as “there” needs to be taken as referring to an ontological structure of existence, the openness of the Open, and not some locality among others within a pre-established time-space.

\(^{28}\) Due to its rich semantic field, Heidegger’s Ereignis is next to impossible to translate satisfactorily into other languages. Indeed, Heidegger himself notes this in The Principle of Identity (Der Satz der Identität, 1957), where he claims that Ereignis “can no more be translated than the Greek logos or the Chinese Tao.” (Heidegger 1969, 36; Heidegger 2006, 45: “Als so Gedachtes Leitwort läßt es sich soweitig übersetzen wie das griechische logos und das chinesische Tao.”) Those English translations, which have not left Ereignis untranslated, have deployed renditions such as event (Rojcewicz’s and Vallega-Neu’s 2012 translation of Contributions), event of appropriation (Joan Stambaugh’s 1969 translation of Identity and Difference), and enowning (Maly’s and Emad’s 1999 translation of Contributions). In order to highlight my topological interpretation of Heidegger’s ontology, I opt for the translation taking-place in places where this translation communicates the point better than the German original.

\(^{29}\) In my interpretation of Heidegger I largely follow Thomas Sheehan’s (2014a & 2014b) claim that for Heidegger, being (Sein) means meaningful presence (Anwesen), and that Heidegger’s thinking from beginning to end revolves around the question of meaningfulness and its source.
and “the clearing of the there”, where “an opening of beings happens”\(^{30}\) – the topological language is even more emphatic in the earlier versions of the text. In the first version of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger writes that the work:

 […] is the middle of the play-space, in which the earth as world-bound (*welthaft*) is closed and the world as earth-bound (*erdhaft*) is open. The work first grounds this play-space by opening it. This play-space is the openness of the there, into which things and men come to stand and withstand.\(^{31}\)

In the second version, he elaborates that:

 […] in the juxtaposed separation of the strife, an Open opens itself. We call this the there. It is the illuminated play-space, in which an individual being first enters and appears as something manifest. This openness of the there we call truth. […] Art is therefore a way for truth to happen, the opening the there in the work.\(^{32}\)

My place-oriented interpretation of Heidegger’s philosophy of art is heavily influenced by Henri Maldiney’s, Éliane Escoubas’s and Jeff Malpas’s commentaries.\(^{33}\) According to Escoubas, “the most notable moment” in Heidegger’s texts, in contrast to previous thinking, is precisely the way he thinks of the artwork not as a *reproduc-

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\(^{30}\) Heidegger 1977b, 21, 49: “Im Werk ist, wenn hier eine Eröffnung des Seienden geschieht […]” and “Der Spielraum der Offenheit (die Lichtung des Da)” respectively.


\(^{33}\) See Escoubas 1986; Escoubas 2011; Maldiney 2003; Maldiney 2010; Maldiney 2012; Malpas 2012, Chapter 12. Miguel de Beistegui has also referred *en passant* to the topological character of Heidegger’s philosophy of art in the essay “Art, ‘Sister of Philosophy’?” (de Beistegui 2003, 130) and described Eduardo Chillida’s sculptures in a register that closely resembles the topological interpretation of Heidegger’s thinking of art (see the essay “Sculpture: Chillida” in de Beistegui 2012, 129–170).
tion of singular beings but as a restitution (or opening, Eröffnung) of the place, the openness, in which beings are gathered together in the tensional unity of the world and the earth.34 Escoubas writes:

Art, be it painting, architecture or sculpture, or even poetry or music, installs a space, a scene: the scene of the Wiedergabe – the scene-space as Wieder-gabe. All art is the art of space, all art is spacing (espacement): Geräumigkeit.35

Similarly, Miguel de Beistegui summarises Heidegger’s view by claiming that “In the work, then, it is the very ‘Da’ that is freed up – not the actual, physical contours of the work, its presence here and now, but the scene of presence itself, the ‘there is’ in excess of everything that actually is, including the artwork itself.”36 For Heidegger, then, the work of art, in the verbal sense, is to “space” (einräumen) a clearing in which, as Heidegger himself says, “all things gain their lingering and hastening, their distance and proximity, their breadth and their limits”, that is, come to presence in their own right in their truth, understood as unconcealedness (alētheia).37 The artwork is the event of opening (Eröffnung), which clears a place for the happening of truth.

This emphasis on the work of art as “spacing” or “opening up” of a place informs my fundamental aim of describing aesthetic immersion in terms of a change in the way the perceiver occupies the Da of his or her Da-sein. However, my point of view slightly differs from that of Heidegger, Maldiney, Escoubas, Malpas, or de Beistegui. As far I understand, their efforts aim at establishing ways in which the artwork can

34 Escoubas 1986, 88.
35 Escoubas 1986, 91: L’art, qu’il soit peinture, architecture ou sculpture, ou même poésie et musique, installe un espace, une scène: la scène même de la Wiedergabe – la scène-espace comme Wieder-gabe. Tout art est art de l’espace, tout art est espacement: Geräumigkeit.” Escoubas is referring to a word play in The Origin (Heidegger 1976b, 22) between Wiedergabe as “repetition” or “reproduction” and Wiedergabe as “restitution”.
36 de Beistegui 2003, 130.
37 Heidegger 1977b, 31: “Indem eine Welt sich öffnet, bekommen alle Dinge ihre Weile und Eile, ihre Ferne und Nähe, ihre Weite und Enge.” Here, of course, the tricky question is, whether this opening up should be understood as creating a world or just illuminating a pre-existing world. I follow here Julian Young’s argument (2001, 29–38), according to which the so-called Promethean interpretation of art as world-creating is somewhat problematic, and in the Heideggerian context art is best understood as thematising or rendering visible the otherwise inconspicuous structures of the world, which might thereby be evaluated and subjected to change.
disclose anew the very *lifeworld* in which we always already find ourselves rather than at inquiring the precise nature of the “place” one occupies when one is in contact with the *poetic world* of the piece. In this study I approach aesthetic experience precisely as a disturbance or anomaly in the constitution of the *there*, and not as its illumination. This, of course, runs somewhat counter to Heidegger’s own aspirations of leaving the immersive *Erlebnis* aesthetics of previous centuries behind. I will argue later on how my shift from the *there* to the *elsewhere* does not amount to a return to pure and simple *Erlebnis*, an isolated and trivial wallowing in pure aesthetic pleasure. Furthermore, by no means do I wish to counter Heideggerian analyses regarding the truth-value of art and deny the possibility that art can make us see the surrounding world in a new light. I merely wish to point out that this illumination occurs reflectively, and sometimes there is another, pre- or non-reflective place disclosure at work, which is not reducible to the Heideggerian notion of art as world disclosure.

Indeed, despite the fact that I hold Heideggerian *Ereignis* thinking to be instrumental for my project, Heidegger’s own texts give rather little direct material for a phenomenological description of aesthetic immersion. On the whole, it has to be said that aesthetic immersion has gained rather little systematic attention from phenomenologists, even if immersive aspects of aesthetic experience have been discussed by no less thinkers than Mikel Dufrenne, Emmanuel Levinas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Maurice Blanchot, just to name few. Though this is a crass generalisation, one can say that the “post-aesthetic” accounts of the phenomenological tradition following Heidegger have been more interested in salvaging the cognitive value of art from the trivialising threats of modern “aesthetic alienation” than flirting with the immersive aspects of aesthetic experience which were so dear to the *Erlebnis* aesthetics they aim to leave behind. However, by systematically combining the fragmentary descriptions of aesthetic immersion found in their texts, I argue that it is possible to piece together a systematic account of aesthetic immersion, which does not contradict the claims of the more cognitively bent phenomenology, and which rather complements existing accounts by offering a model of a heretofore somewhat fragmentarily discussed aspect of aesthetic experience.

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38 By “post-aesthetic” theories of art, J.M. Bernstein (1992, 3) denotes theories that aim to transcend the narrowly “aesthetic” understanding of art as an object of sensuous experience outside of truth and morality.

All this means that in this study I will not limit myself to solely Heideggerian accounts of art, as I will draw material from a broader range of phenomenological research. My fundamental bent is toward hermeneutic and existential phenomenology, as my main sources come from Heidegger, Gadamer, Levinas, Miguel de Beistegui and the rather recently developed “evential hermeneutics” of Claude Romano. I will also draw heavily from more Husserl-inspired phenomenology, namely from Mikel Dufrenne and Jean-Luc Marion, as well as from thinkers who are influenced by phenomenology, like Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, and Paul Crowther. Occasional reference is also made to other phenomenological thinkers like Oskar Becker, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Roman Ingarden, Arnold Berleant, and Henri Maldiney. Here it is impossible to itemise every detail I pick up from each thinker. On the whole, one can characterise the general architecture of this study as being grounded upon a topological interpretation of Heideggerian Ereignis ontology, modified by Romano’s evential hermeneutics and some elements of Marion’s phenomenology of givenness, and ornamented by several insights from other phenomenologists. This, of course, brings about the problem of compatibility of different theories and interpretation, which I attempt to highlight whenever necessary; however, I find such polyvocality necessary for me to be able to flesh out a systematic phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. Thus, this study is, in a sense, a work of a philosophical Dr Frankenstein: it is collected from bits and pieces taken from here and there and patched together in the hopes of animating something into life.

40 For practical reasons, I have excluded many valid sources, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and John Dewey. Though their writings offer viable phenomenological insights, including all possible thinkers regardless of their philosophical backgrounds would have enlarged the need of exegetical work beyond the scope of the present study.
§ 3. Methodology

The preceding discussion has already hinted at several methodological approaches I will be using in this study. A few further remarks still need to be made. The topological framing of the study can be seen to manifest itself in three ways, following Jeff Malpas’s distinction of the ways the notion of place figures in (Heideggerian) philosophy: 1) place as the focus of thinking, or that which thinking aims to articulate, 2) place as the horizon of thinking, or the historical embeddedness that informs and delimits thinking, and 3) place as the origin of thinking, or the context of life from which thinking arises and to which it returns.41 In this study, I take as my focus the place of immersion, whose structure I aim to articulate; also, I am concerned with the place, or horizon, of my thinking within the history of aesthetics and the influence this horizon has on its target; and lastly, my aim is to articulate how aesthetic immersion is existentially positioned in and against the context of everyday life, from which it takes its origin. In order to accommodate these aspects, this study takes up two methodological approaches: a deconstructive reading of the history of aesthetics and a constructive phenomenology of aesthetic immersion, both of which are informed by a hermeneutic framework. Let me discuss these methods one at a time.

3.1 Phenomenology

The main aim of this study is to describe one peculiar way in which the there can be constituted as the elsewhere in and through aesthetic immersion. It is a fundamental conviction of mine that it is precisely in the light of phenomenology that the experience of aesthetic immersion becomes describable in its elusiveness. That is why the phenomenological method I employ requires further qualifications.

The term phenomenology stems from the Greek words phainomenon, the medio-passive present participle of the verb phainō, “to show”, “bring forth”, thus signifying “that which shows itself”, and logos, which stems from the verb legō, “to gather” and “to say”, and therefore primordially signifies “gathering” but also comes to denote, for example, “speech”, “concept”, “ground”, and “order” in Greek thinking.42 Here logos can be interpreted as referring, firstly, to the meaningful organi-

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41 Malpas 2012, 13.
42 See entries legō an phainō in Frisk 1970, 94–95, 982–984; Chantraine 1999, 625–626, 1170–1172;
sation of reality in such a way that it is simultaneously individualised into singular entities, which nevertheless are embedded within a relational network with each other, and which gain their meaningfulness – and thus the possibility of discursive articulation – only within this network. As Jussi Backman puts it, logos “is precisely the legibility, the readability of reality, in other words the possibility of reading individual and separate beings as united, through their mutual references, into a single network of meaningfulness – Being.”

"Phenomeno-logy", then, is essentially a matter of legein ta phainomena, the articulation of that which shows itself in its meaningful organisation. In other words, phenomenology entails the description of meaningful reality as manifested lived, concrete experience.

As is well known, the phenomenological tradition is not unanimous about the method which is most faithful to lived experience, and I will formulate my own phenomenological stance later on in Chapter 2. Here it suffices merely to outline the fundamental starting point and some methodological issues involved in it. In this study, I argue that the work of art is an event that turns out not to be a product of the constitutive activity of consciousness, but which, instead, inverts this constitutive activity and constitutes the subject as its witness. Thus, when I speak of “work of art”, I am not speaking of any specific piece of art, but rather the event, the work, that occurs in certain encounters with art. In order to accommodate these sorts of events in phenomenology, I lean toward approaches that disregard the notion of Husserlian transcendental subjectivity and consider subjectivity not as being prior to phenomenality but instead as being co-constituted with and through it. I have in view particularly the phenomenological accounts presented by Heidegger, Gadamer, Marion, and Romano. I adopt the hermeneutical stance to phenomenology which rejects the project of attaining suprahistorical essences through eidetic reduction and instead emphasises the historical, cultural, and social embeddedness of human experience. In this context phenomenology is understood as the constructive interpretation of how experiences become meaningful in their own context.

In particular, I take as my starting point Heidegger’s later Ereignis thinking, which I interpret as a phenomenological description of the way the there (Da) unfolds as a meaningful place through the reciprocal and chiasmatic co-determination of receptivity and givenness. My reading of Heidegger emphasises, via Edward

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Beekes 2010, 841, 1545–1546.

43 Backman 2009, 58.

44 Backman 2009, 58.
S. Casey’s and Jeff Malpas’s commentaries, the topological nature of Heidegger’s thinking and posits the there as a focal point upon which other dimensions of his phenomenology converge.45 This is why I take Heidegger’s thinking to be the fundamental starting point for thinking the work of art as an opening of a place – even though Heidegger himself does not pursue this line of thought to the extent I propose it here.

However, my stance is not exhausted by Heidegger’s phenomenology. This is because I hold it crucial for my project to register that there are events, like aesthetic immersion, which strictly speaking are at the limits of phenomenology, since they resist being brought to reflection: they reveal themselves as disturbances or blind spots in the discursive continuity of understanding. It is a controversial issue whether Heidegger’s phenomenology can accommodate such events.46 Because I am unable to address this issue here, I wish to circumvent it by taking my cue from thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and Claude Romano. I take it that my phenomenological stance here resembles closest the evential hermeneutics of Romano’s books Event and World (L’événement et le monde, 1998) and Event and Time (L’événement et le temps, 1999), since neither Levinas nor Marion emphasise the hermeneutic dimension I find crucial, whereas Romano builds it into the very heart of his thinking while at the same time retaining the vital importance of phenomena that overflow the receptive capacities of understanding. Nevertheless, both Levinas and Marion are important sources in this study. Even though I take it that understanding is the primary way of accessing reality and rendering it meaningful, phenomenality cannot solely be circumscribed within the horizon of understanding. Therefore the philosophical background of this study is a polyvocal field, which requires delicate navigation so that the differences of individual thinkers are not evened out – though needless to say, this study is not exegetical in nature and the point is not to follow each thinker to the letter.

My insistence on the impossibility of direct phenomenological access into aesthetic immersion produces at the outset a severe methodological problem. As Heidegger points out, the phenomenological attitude itself influences the way a phenomenon under description shows itself as meaningful – or as Levinas puts it, the
mode of access is part of the meaning of that which is accessed.\textsuperscript{47} So, for instance, a chair is given to me differently in a natural, everyday attitude, where it sinks into the background of my practical engagement with it and hardly announces itself as a thematic object of my consciousness. Things change in the adoption of a phenomenological attitude, where I turn to the specific way of the chair’s self-giving in this particular moment, as my intentional stance toward the chair changes. It is difficult to capture phenomena \textit{in flagranti}, as the very method used to capture them influences their givenness. Phenomenology, if it wishes to remain faithful to phenomena, should take into account the effect of the method itself and attempt to catch sight of phenomena, as it were, retrospectively reconstructing an experience that it itself changes.

This problem becomes especially pertinent in the case of aesthetic immersion, since this experience entails the suspension of mineness of experience, so that while being captured by the work I cannot take a thematic stance toward the experience as \textit{my} experience. Thus, adopting a phenomenological attitude is detrimental to the event itself: at the moment I gain self-mastery, the magic is gone. In other words, aesthetic immersion is an experience that resists direct reflection: an experience of immersion cannot be accessed reflectively without thereby losing the very thing reflection attempts to grasp – and hence immersion excludes the phenomenological attitude from directly taking the experience as a theme. This is why immersion has a peculiar event-character that, in certain sense, escapes the register of phenomenology. What can be done – and here my phenomenology resembles Levinas’s phenomenology of otherness – is to describe the \textit{traces} this phenomenon leaves as it effaces itself. Levinas writes, “[…] if, consequently, the trace does not belong to phenomenology, to the \textit{comprehension} of appearing and \textit{dissimulating}, we can at least approach this signifyingness in another way by situating it with respect to the phenomenology it interrupts.”\textsuperscript{48} One of my main methodological starting points is that immersion can be described only \textit{indirectly} in terms of the way it differs from the structures of experience that phenomenology can more directly access. In what follows, then, aesthetic immersion is described in terms of its way of interfering with being-in-the-world and modulating its structures.

\textsuperscript{47} Levinas 1964, 135.

\textsuperscript{48} Levinas 1996, 61; Levinas 1964, 154: “[…] si, par conséquent la trace n’appartient pas à la phénoménologie – à la compréhension de l’apparaître et du se dissimuler, on pourrait, du moins, en approcher par une autre voie, en situant cette signification à partir de la phénoménologie qu’elle interrompt.”
Such a methodological stance has its pros and cons. On the positive side, acknowledging the essential elusiveness of aesthetic immersion even at the level of methodology helps one to avoid – though by no means guaranteeing it – falling into a problem that I consider a central characteristic of the tradition of aesthetics, namely the *unwarranted influence of theory on its object*. As I will argue in Chapter 1, philosophical approaches to art have recurrently tended to reduce experiences of art within a pre-given philosophical system in which the peculiar way artworks affect us are rendered intelligible and thus tamed and neutralised. In this way the strangeness of aesthetic experience is covered over by the function it is given within a larger philosophical scheme of things. Phenomenology, if it is to stay true to the way art addresses us in and through its work, should not aim at solving its riddle so as to tame it, but should see it as a riddle and describe it as such.49 A method, which approaches aesthetic immersion in terms of its otherness and obtrusiveness, aims precisely at describing the experience without thereby rendering it transparent in ways that no longer correspond to the experience’s resistance to reflection. Being faithful to the experience entails putting the integrity of one’s grasp of the world at risk and admitting the inherent elusiveness of sense that announces itself in and through aesthetic immersion.

The problem, however, with this retrospective reconstruction of a non-reflective event is that the description remains necessarily an incomplete approximation of what happens in the experience. As Maldiney puts it, “the task of a phenomenology of art is to *detect* (*déceler*) the being of a work of art as such as it lights up from itself.”50 I will argue that this lighting-up – when understood as manifesting itself in and through immersion – and its thematic detection cannot be simultaneous. Here phenomenology must accede to its own limits and acknowledge that it attempts to bring to language something that phenomenological reflection cannot directly access. Language can, surely, approximate the event, but only if the expressive capacity of language is put into play. This is why this study often employs word-play, adopts strange terminology, and delves into etymological connotations. This practice is not meant to make the event at issue more esoteric than it actually is, but to render it thinkable without thereby compromising its resistance to reflection. However, even

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50 Maldiney 2012, 256: “La tâche d’une phénoménologie de l’art est se déceler l’être d’une œuvre d’art en tant que telle en l’éclairant à soi.” Translation and emphasis mine.
such a practice should not be taken to hide the fact that what I am describing here eludes direct description, and whatever the description achieves, the result is a pale approximation of the wonder that no description can equal.

3.2 Hermeneutics and deconstruction

Though the method of this study is emphatically phenomenological, I find it crucial to point out that going straight to the description of immersion holds the danger of going astray due to the philosophical baggage that phenomenology, knowingly or not, carries. One of my main starting points in this study is that thinking always builds on a sedimentation of its own history, or, as Gadamer has it, thinking is always bound up with a certain “history of effects” (Wirkungsgeschichte).\(^{51}\) Thinking – even phenomenological description, as Edmund Husserl originally intended – does not start from a pure, presuppositionless point in its inquiries, but is always mediated by a certain tradition which informs its conceptual space and ways of questioning. Thinking always occupies a certain topos that forms its horizon. This also applies to the history of aesthetics, and the philosophical resources we have in approaching art and aesthetic experience are by no means neutral and presuppositionless. They are mediated by certain philosophical paradigms that a priori inform and guide theorisation of aesthetic phenomena. As I argue throughout this study, aesthetic immersion is an elusive experience that is very susceptible to unwarranted speculative thinking. That is why I insist that one cannot embark headlong upon phenomenological description, since one must first examine the conceptual tools at one’s disposal before attempting to formulate a positive contribution.

This means that the phenomenological method I employ here has both hermeneutic and deconstructive dimensions. Since I find these dimensions to be intimately connected – though by no means reducible to each other – I will discuss them here together.

In Being and Time (Sein und Zeit, 1927), Heidegger points out that the logos in phenomeno-logy has the character of hermēneuein, which means that phenomenological description is interpretative in nature.\(^{52}\) Whereas Husserlian phenomenology aims at reducing experience to its universal, eidetic structures, the Heideggerian variety of phenomenology I employ here aims at describing experiences and at in-

\(^{51}\) Gadamer 2010, 305–312.

\(^{52}\) Heidegger 1976a, 50.
terpreting their theoretical articulation in their historical and situational contextu-
ality. This emphasis on the influence of the meaning-context in which experiences 
are had and in which they are discursively articulated, makes phenomenology a 
hermeneutic enterprise.

This hermeneutic interpretation of phenomenology shows itself in two ways 
in the course of this study. Firstly, as already mentioned, this study does not aim 
at reducing aesthetic immersion to some universal and eidetic structures in which 
the contextual nature of our engagement with art is abstracted away, but instead it 
aims at describing immersion in its context-bound structure. Secondly, this her-
meneutic starting point shows itself in the study’s emphasis on the importance of 
understanding the historical contextuality of contemporary theories of aesthetic 
experience. In keeping with the hermeneutical notion of the inevitable situatedness 
of human understanding, one of the starting points of this study is that there is no 
such thing as theory-neutral access to aesthetic experiences, and that the philo-
sophical heritage influences even phenomenological reflections on art. This means 
that before embarking on the phenomenological description of aesthetic immer-
sion, an interpretative study of its philosophical topos is in order. Jussi Backman 
writes: “Phenomenological interpretations seek to enter and ‘go along with’ the 
discursively articulated network of meaning in which these thinkers think and to 
map out its structures, with a particular eye for the fundamental presuppositions, 
points of departure, and ideals implicitly present in the respective ‘hermeneutical 
situation’ of each thinker.”53 Chapter 1 of this study is dedicated to mapping certain 
contextual coordinates in relation to which this study positions itself.

This interpretative dimension also has, in addition to its hermeneutic charac-
ter, a deconstructive aim. Due to the historical embeddedness of experience and its 
theorisation, historical deconstruction becomes a necessary self-critical dimension 
in phenomenology. In practice, this task amounts to inquiring into the assumptions 
that remain unthought and unquestioned in the tradition itself. Heidegger calls this 
task destruction (Destruktion) and dismantling (Abbau), though this practice 
is currently better known through the Derridian term deconstruction.54 Though I 
will be here employing the term deconstruction, I wish to emphasise that Derridian 
deconstruction differs slightly from Heideggerian Destruktion, and my deconstruc-
tive method is closer to Heidegger than Derrida. Whereas Derridian deconstruc-

53 Backman 2009, 43–44.
tion aims to show the inevitable instability of texts with regard to their intended meaning, Heideggerian destruction aims to unearth the relationship between philosophical theories and the experiences they articulate, showing how historical understanding takes part in the theorisation of experiences.

Deconstruction does not aim at merely negatively showing the impasses of the tradition but at positively opening up new possibilities of thinking. The aim is to escape such impasses, and release thinking from its traditional limits. As Backman puts it, "de(con)struction is thus a ‘critique of the present’ in the pregnant sense that it decides (German entscheiden, Greek krinō), literally ‘cuts out’, the traditionally constituted limits of current thinking, thereby opening up the possibility of thinking beyond these limits, of thinking beyond the tradition."55 This does not mean that the philosophical tradition would be simply disregarded, but instead that thinking accepts its historical indebtedness to a tradition, while deliberately positioning itself outside the limits of its inheritance. Backman, again, expresses this eloquently:

In making the philosophical tradition transparent in our current situation by sketching out its mainframe, its basic aims, structures, and dynamic, we assume phenomenological “responsibility” for it. In other words, we do not blindly endorse the tradition and the limits it imposes upon our thinking, nor do we, with equal blindness, attempt to ignore or deny its weight by “relativizing” it in a trivial historicist sense. We rather admit that we are inevitably bound by and constituted through an inherited historical background, a basic discourse that is by no means absolute or exhaustive, and that we are therefore compelled to respond to this tradition. In coming to see prejudices as prejudices, limits as limits, we accept the finitude of the tradition that constitutes us, and thereby our own finitude. We accept the fact that in picking up certain possibilities of thinking, the tradition has given up and excluded many other possibilities.56

In order to bypass certain problematic prejudices recurrent in the history of aesthetics, this study employs a range of deconstructive perspectives on the metaphysical tradition of aesthetics so as make visible certain unsaid assumptions that

55 Backman 2009, 78.
56 Backman 2009, 78.
inform it. Methodologically, this requires not just making visible the prejudices of individual thinkers but raising to the surface certain general philosophical spaces in which the tradition unfolds. The deconstructive efforts in this study will concentrate on outlining specific tendencies in the history of aesthetics and making visible how these tendencies inform the ways theory relates itself to its objects. This will be done in Chapters 1 and 2, following the example of Heidegger, Gadamer, Berleant, and de Beistegui. The motive for such deconstruction is to open a historically informed path for a constructive phenomenology of aesthetic immersion.
§ 4. Outline of the study

This study is divided into two parts, both of which are further divided into two chapters. Part I serves as a preparation for the systematic description of aesthetic immersion, which is carried out in Part II. All chapters, in their own ways, circle around specific topoi that function as the horizon, origin, and focus of this study. The structure of the study is as follows.

Part I consists of Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1, titled "Lessons of History", offers five perspectives on the history of aesthetics and uses them to provide coordinates for a phenomenological description of aesthetic immersion. Following historical narratives presented by Heidegger, Gadamer, Berleant, and de Beistegui, I examine certain ways in which the aesthetic tradition has abstracted and explained aesthetic experience in the light of theoretical frameworks and a priori assumptions that, at least when judged from the contemporary situation, do not do justice to the concrete ways we experience art. The main point of the chapter is not to formulate a comprehensive critique of the past, nor a neutral, objective historical narrative, but instead to flesh out certain dominant horizons in the tradition in relation to which contemporary thinking can coordinate itself.

Chapter 2, titled “How to See the Riddle without Solving It”, discusses certain methodological issues that arise from the deconstructive lessons of Chapter 1. My main aim is to address the problem regarding the relationship between theory and its object: would it be possible to approach aesthetic immersion discursively without thereby letting theory dominate the very experience it attempts to articulate? Philosophical, even phenomenological approaches never come to the scene unarmed, and if the a priori assumptions and motives of the theory are left unexamined, they can inform the subsequent theorising in unwarranted ways. This is an especially pertinent problem in the case of aesthetic immersion, which by its very nature precludes direct reflection and is thereby very prone to speculative attempts to explain it. In this chapter, I outline an indirect method of approaching aesthetic immersion: I argue that immersion is best approached by studying the way it interrupts and destabilises ordinary, quotidian structures of experience. This requires that I formulate a general phenomenology of certain experiential orders that the artwork can be seen to disrupt. In the topological register, this amounts to paying heed to the there-place of human existence, from which thinking takes its origin, and in respect to which the elsewhere can be taken to occur.

I will do this by focusing mainly on Heidegger’s Ereignis ontology and his topological thinking of place, while also incorporating into it some elements from later
thinkers, such as Levinas, Nancy, Marion, and Romano. The crucial aspect of this model is that attention shifts from static, metaphysical structures of reality to the constant coming-into-presence or taking-place of unique, instantaneous, and excessive constellations of meaning. This taking-place is shown to have two crucial dimensions: first, this event occurs essentially as an unfolding of a spatio-temporal place, the there; and second, this place opens as meaningful in and through the reciprocal correlation and appropriation of thinking and being (or, to be more precise, receptivity and givenness). Based on this model I argue that aesthetic immersion is best articulated in terms of the way the artwork modulates the taking-place of the there by turning it into an elsewhere and thereby affecting both the givenness of sense and the receptivity of the perceiver, that is, the modality of the perceiver’s subjectivity.

These conclusions motivate the structure of Part II, which outlines a systematic phenomenology of aesthetic immersion following the guidelines reached in Part I. On the whole, Part II takes the place-character of the elsewhere as its thematic focus. This part is further divided into two chapters, which approach aesthetic immersion first from the perspective of givenness and then from the view of receptivity. Both chapters describe the same event from different perspectives and in many ways overlap each other – structurally they may be seen to resemble Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event) (Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis), 1936–38, published 1989) or Dufrenne’s Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience, both of which circle around one issue and attempt to penetrate it from many different angles. The main aim of this part is to show that aesthetic immersion can be systematically analysed as the taking-place of a peculiar modality of the there, which I denote with the term elsewhere.

Chapter 3, titled “The Elsewhere”, is the most substantial section of this study, as it lays out the basic topology of the elsewhere and describes the conditions in which it can occur. The description entails a detailed mapping of what I call the poetic complex – the complicated situation which is formed in the encounter between perceivers, their lifeworld, and the piece of art, and all the interactions they might have. I argue that when the poetic complex fulfils certain conditions, the encounter amounts to aesthetic immersion, that is, the opening up of the elsewhere and the perceiver’s dislocation into this existential place. I then proceed to analyse the ontological structures of this place – its spatio-temporality and the way it “makes sense”, that is, absolves sense from its quotidian strictures.

Finally, Chapter 4, titled “The Witness”, completes my phenomenological description by investigating the other side of the correlation, that is, the modality of
subjectivity in the elsewhere. There I adopt the term “witness” as the operative term to denote the subjective dimension of aesthetic immersion. I argue that witnessing a work of art in and through aesthetic immersion entails self-forgetfulness, which results from the work’s way of suppressing the subject’s capability to take over the event by circumscribing within his or her existential project. In other words, the work of art is shown to be an excessive event, which floods and saturates witnesses’s receptive capacities and thus compromises their grasp not only of the sense of the world but also of their own selfhood. I then proceed to analyse how this excessive exposure to the work shows itself at the level of affectivity, understanding, language, and intersubjectivity. Finally, I bring the chapter to a close by analysing the required dispositions of the witness, which are required on his or her side for the work to occur: this discussion is meant to show that the role of the witness in the experience of immersion eludes any easy positioning within the activity/passivity dichotomy.
 PART I

Preparations
CHAPTER 1:
LESSONS OF HISTORY

As for the individual, everyone is a son of his time; so philosophy also is its time apprehended in thoughts.

G.W.F. Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right\(^1\)

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1 Hegel 2009, 15: “Was das Individuum betrifft, so ist ohnehin jedes ein Sohn seiner Zeit; so ist auch die Philosophie, ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfaßt.”
§ 5. In search of coordinates

The question of beginning is a perpetual problem in philosophy. The advice given by the King of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*, “begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop”\(^2\) is difficult to apply to philosophy, since it is not easy to see where to begin and when to stop. But when dealing with aesthetic experience, the starting point might seem obvious: just place yourself before a piece of art, let it do its magic, and describe what happened. So why not cut to the chase and go straight to business?

Here the problem lies in the assumption that such a description could actually start from a pure and absolute beginning. Encounters with art have puzzled thinkers for millennia, and there is a long history of philosophical determinations of aesthetic experience. These accounts, knowingly or not, shape and orient our contemporary ways of approaching art and aesthetic experience philosophically. I share a conviction with thinkers such as Friedrich Schlegel, G.W.F. Hegel, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, that there are no absolute, ahistorical starting points for philosophy – not even for phenomenological description – and that philosophy needs to find its coordinates by inquiring into its historical situatedness. As Schlegel says, “philosophy, like epic poetry, begins in the middle”,\(^3\) we as thinkers

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3 Schlegel 1967, 172, no. 84: “Subjektiv betrachtet, fängt die Philosophie doch immer in der Mitte an, wie das epische Gedicht.”
come into the scene in medias res and, knowingly or not, begin from a specific historical context, which conditions our thinking.

Such is also the case with the phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. It is an elusive experience which is very difficult to capture in the nets of discursive thinking. The sedimentation of tradition can quickly step into the picture when one begins to conceptualise this experience in philosophical terms. If left unexamined, a theory can turn into blinkers, which unwittingly delimit the possibilities of thinking and lead one to articulate the experience in ways unwarranted by the experience itself. This threat is, I think, more pressing than it might at first seem, and that is why some preparations are in order before going into the matter itself.

Therefore, much in the same way as Kant’s critical project began by setting limits to the human cognitive apparatus, so that philosophical inquiries would not be reduced to “mere groping” (ein bloßes Herumtappe), I think a salient way of beginning a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion is to start with a critique of aesthetics, which entails mapping the topoi of aesthetic theories as their contours emerge in the course of history. This chapter aims to draw a series of lessons from the history of aesthetics in terms of which I can orient and coordinate my own phenomenological description. By no means do I aim to provide a comprehensive historical narrative of aesthetic, nor will I outline a history of aesthetic immersion (I will refer to that several times later on); instead, I wish to discuss specific phenomenological narratives of history that have been used to coordinate contemporary thinking. The point is to gain some phenomenological momentum from individual historical narratives rather than tell a general history of aesthetics per se.

But first, let me say a few words on the general historical position with which I associate this study. In Writing and Difference (L’écriture et la différence, 1967), Jacques Derrida alludes to something he calls “an event” (un événement) in the history of philosophy – a radical rupture in the way philosophy has started to re-evaluate its own validity and identity from the turn of the 20th century onwards. What, according to Derrida, has characterised Western philosophy from its inception is the tendency to look for something that would grant philosophical knowledge absolute validity and truth, something that would secure philosophy and allow it an absolute status. However, Derrida says, this tendency has been ruptured by a shift in the way philosophy understands its own structure and validity, most emphatically expressed by Nietzsche’s critique of the Christian-Platonic foundations of Western

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4 Kant 1911, 7.
philosophy, by Freud’s questioning of the notion of the autonomous and self-identical subject, and, lastly, by Heidegger’s destruction of the onto-theological tendencies of Western philosophy. What is articulated by all these thinkers is the loss of a centre around which philosophy structures itself and secures the grounding of its structures. In other words, the event that Derrida points out is the decentring of philosophy, where philosophy loses its belief in absolutely grounded and all-comprehensive knowledge and mastery.5

Here Derrida summarises a long line of thinking which emerged at the end of the 19th century and became a dominant theme in 20th-century philosophy. This event is better known as the end of metaphysics. What this rupture has been seen to call for is a re-evaluation of the tradition of Western philosophy and its re-in-vigoration by formulating its task anew. Many of the philosophical developments of the 20th century – from logical positivism and pragmatism to critical theory, phenomenology, and deconstruction – are different ways of taking up this task and searching for new possibilities of thinking beyond the traditional limits of philosophy. That is also the historical context within which I position this study.

But what is meant by “metaphysics”, and why would someone claim that it has ended? The Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie begins its entry on metaphysics with a reservation that it is easier to say what metaphysics historically has been than to define what it is, since there is little consensus on the exact meaning and scope of the term.6 The Oxford English Dictionary defines metaphysics as “that branch of speculative inquiry which treats the first principles of things […] theoretical philosophy as the ultimate science of Being and Knowing”,7 voicing the common usage of “metaphysics” as naming a sub-category of philosophy devoted to studying the fundamental structures of reality. With the so-called post-metaphysical thinkers,8 such as Heidegger and his followers, metaphysics does not name just a branch of philosophy but becomes synonymous with the tradition of Western philosophy as such. What they mean by this is that Western philosophy is not just a collection of philosophical theories, but that the tradition, despite its seeming heterogeneity, is

8 The term “post-metaphysical thinking” comes from Jürgen Habermas’s book Nachmetaphysisches Denken (1988).
dominated and structured by a certain space of thinking which informs the possible directions thinking can take. John Sallis summarises:

Metaphysics is taken to have a history that is not simply extrinsic to it – that is, it is taken as something which was founded, which has run a certain course, and which since Hegel has come to a kind of end, as something which cannot be defined independently of this history. […] Metaphysics is to be understood here not so much as a particular discipline alongside others within philosophy as a whole but rather as the execution and elaboration of the fundamental movement or gesture which first opens up philosophy as a whole, which founds it.9

In other words, metaphysics names in this context a specific logic that has underlined and guided Western philosophy throughout its history. The precise nature and scope of this logic remains disputed, and philosophers have offered several suggestions on the dominant traits of Western thinking. To name a few: Heidegger views metaphysics as onto-theology, as the search for an absolute, eternal ground of reality, one that would sustain and secure the meaningfulness of the ever-changing phenomenal world.10 For Levinas, Western philosophy is essentially a philosophy of the Same, which aims at eradicating all forms of otherness and bringing reality under the synoptic view of human comprehension.11 Derrida’s critique of philosophy under the rubrics of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence concentrates on the way philosophy has had the tendency of dividing reality into hierarchical binaries in which priority is given to presence over absence.12 More recently, Miguel de Beistegui has combined Heidegger’s and Gilles Deleuze’s philosophies in arguing that metaphysics is inherently onto-tauto-logy, which thinks of the being of beings in terms of stable identities instead of inquiring into the process of differentiation that precedes these identities.13 Jürgen Habermas summarises many of these aspects

10 See, for example, Heidegger’s essay “Die ontotologieische Verfassung der Metaphysik” in Indentität und Differenz (Heidegger 2006).
11 See, for example, section 1 “Le Même et l’Autre” in Levinas’s Totalité et infini (Levinas 2012).
12 See, for example, De la Grammatologie (1967a) and L’Écriture et la différence (1967b).
13 de Beistegui 2004, Part I.
as he claims that from the post-metaphysical perspective, metaphysics is characterised by 1) identity thinking, whereby identities of phenomena are anchored on some transcendent ground, 2) idealism, or the prioritisation of the ideal and supersensory over the material and empirical, 3) the priority of self-consciousness in modern philosophy, which shows itself as the foundational role of subjectivity with respect to the realm of objects, 4) the strong concept of theory, that is, the prioritisation of a disengaged and abstracting view of reality over the natural attitude, and 5) totalisation, which aims at gathering reality under a panoptic view.14

What is also essential in the post-metaphysical interpretation is that metaphysics is tied to the history of Western thinking: metaphysics is seen as the dominant conceptual space within which philosophy has moved through its history. According to Heidegger, this movement has reached a completion in the thinking of Hegel and Nietzsche.15 They mark a point where the possibilities offered by the metaphysical paradigm have been depleted, and the boundaries of metaphysics have become visible: thinking has traversed from transcendent Platonic Ideas to the absolutely self-immanent subject and thus emptied out all options available in philosophy’s search for the foundation of reality. The end of metaphysics means neither completion, where the project fulfils its goal, nor termination, where metaphysical thinking simply stops, but rather a point of saturation, where all the possibilities offered by a specific paradigm have all become depleted without the questions being fully answered.16 The contemporary situation is marked by the “age of transition” (Zeitalter des Übergangs),17 where the limits of metaphysics have become visible and thinking faces the task of finding possibilities that have remained unthought in metaphysics.

In this context, aesthetics has not been immune to the fundamental project of metaphysics. On the contrary, philosophical considerations of art have been caught up with the more general tendencies of metaphysics to such an extent that the ways in which art has been taken as a theme of thinking have been primarily guided

14 Habermas 1988, 36–42.
15 See, for example, “Überwindung der Metaphysik” in Heidegger 2000a. For a discussion on Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s role in the completion of metaphysics, see Backman 2009, 156–167 and Backman 2015, 55–62, and for a comprehensive list of places where Heidegger himself discusses the matter, see Backman 2015, 265n163, 266n169.
17 Heidegger 1989a, 3.
by the currents of metaphysics. Such, at least, is the conviction of thinkers like Heidegger, Gadamer, and de Beistegui, who formulate their phenomenological accounts of art in response to their views on the dominant trends of metaphysical aesthetics. Since I model my account heavily on their examples, I find it useful to begin by briefly outlining the historical views against which their accounts claim to react. Therefore, in the following, I will look at five ways of looking at the history of aesthetics. These do not form a single, comprehensive and unitary narrative, nor is anything of the kind is my aim here; instead, I am interested in the positive possibilities of thinking that open up in certain perspectives to different aspects of history.

First, in § 6, I present my own, admittedly fragmentary and partial narrative of the relationship between theory and aesthetic experience in the course of modern aesthetics. I will argue that the tradition has not sufficiently taken into account how theories themselves condition and delimit how aesthetic experience can be taken up as an object of inquiry. In § 7, I discuss the prevalence of aesthetic Erlebnis in modern aesthetics as argued by Heidegger and Gadamer and raise the issue of the discontinuity of aesthetic immersion in the face of the continuity of experience. In § 8, I discuss the problem of aesthetic detachment in the light of Arnold Berleant’s critique of disinterestedness. In § 9, I outline Miguel de Beistegui’s account of the mimetic paradigm of Western aesthetics and describe the possibility of thinking aesthetic experience beyond the dichotomy of idealistic and realistic mimesis. Finally, in § 10, I briefly discuss why the post-metaphysical critique should not be taken as entailing an absolute separation from the tradition of aesthetics.

But before continuing, a healthy dose of reservations is in order. Post-metaphysical narratives on metaphysics have a tendency to cram history into a neat “from…to” pattern in which all the twists and turns of history fall into a linear and consistent constellation. These narratives, though often impressive in their depth, are rather selective in their scope. They entail the risk of pigeonholing the history of philosophy and turning it into a simplified story which overlooks the fact that throughout history there have been all sorts of movements and counter-movements which do not fit easily into a linear progression. Thus, one needs to pay heed to Andrew Bowie’s warning:

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18 Incidentally, Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy and Heidegger’s Nietzsche lectures argue that the birth of aesthetics is concurrent with the birth of metaphysics in the shift from pre-Socratic philosophy to Plato and Aristotle (see Nietzsche 1972, Chapters 12–16; Heidegger 1996b, 77–81). James I. Porter (2016) has recently shown that Plato’s and Aristotle’s formalism was a response to an earlier tradition of materialistically bent aesthetic thinking.
If we are to remain concerned with the history of philosophy, one of the major tasks must be to save what is valuable from being lost in the levelling process that increasingly dominates discussions of “Western metaphysics”. It is too often the case that versions of philosophy based on the new vogue of textuality depend for their biggest claims upon a caricature of Western philosophy [...].

The first reservation to keep in mind is, as de Beistegui formulates it, that there is no “such … thing as Metaphysics, that is, a unitary and entirely homogenous system of thought, the unfolding of which since Plato would have determined our history, and of which aesthetics would be a moment and a branch.” Instead, it is more viable to take the narratives as suggesting certain dominant but by no means exhaustive trends in the tradition which have guided and delimited the theorisation of aesthetic experience in problematic ways, at least when judged from the phenomenological perspective. These narratives have a deeply instrumental purpose in suggesting possibilities of thinking that remain unthought in the tradition itself. As Jussi Backman notes, Heidegger approaches the history of philosophy “for the specific purposes of present-day philosophy, a specific perspective on the preceding philosophical tradition and of present-day possibilities of transforming the modes of thinking inherited from this tradition.” Similarly, these narratives are more interested in excavating new possibilities of thinking rather than presenting general and neutral reconstructions of history – indeed, from a hermeneutic perspective, there are no such thing as a neutral reconstruction of history. So, while bearing in mind that phenomenological narratives are influenced by specific interests, I wish to emphasise their heuristic value, since it is precisely against the backdrop of these narratives that phenomenologists have managed to formulate descriptions of aesthetic experience that I consider to be closer to actual experiences than the abstractions offered by the aesthetic tradition. The goal of the following discussion is merely to outline the background against which phenomenologists have formulated their own accounts of aesthetic experience. Although at times these accounts need to be taken with a pinch of salt, I consider them useful in my attempt to coordinate my considerations with regard to the tradition that precedes them.

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19 Bowie 1993, 12.
20 de Beistegui 2012, 2.
§ 6. The influence of theory

The first lesson I wish to draw does not come from any direct source but combines several threads of thinking. The lesson has to do with the possibility – or impossibility – of articulating discursively an experience that eludes discourse. It is a deep-seated presupposition in Western philosophy, voiced by Hegel’s famous dictum “what is real is rational, and what rational is real,” that reality is rationally structured and therefore commensurate with human reason. According to Levinas, Western philosophy has been characterised by an obsession to reduce all aspects of reality under the domain of the Same (le Même) and achieve a panoptic view of reality, where everything is gathered under the horizon of our comprehension: “The itinerary of philosophy remains that of Ulysses, whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island – a complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the Other.” Western thinking has been, Levinas claims, so utterly allergic to all things resistant to intelligibility that it has made every attempt to totalise them. In practice, this means that phenomena that seem to endanger philosophy’s capacity to take hold of them are neutralised and explained away.

What interests me here is whether the history of aesthetics fits into Levinas’s view of metaphysics as a history of domination. What kind of position does theorising take with regard to its object during the history of aesthetics? This is a methodologically important question, since, as I claim throughout this study, aesthetic immersion is an elusive experience which is very difficult to describe without letting reflection reconstruct it in ways that do not stem from the experience itself. Fichte points out in “On Spirit and Letter in Philosophy” (“Über Geist und Buchstab in der Philosophie”, 1794) that humans are riddled with a “knowledge-drive” (Erkenntnistrieb), which aims to stabilise the unknown by turning it into an object of cognitive knowledge, and which thereby encounters a challenge in the face of aesthetic experience, because by its very nature aesthetic experience defies being pinned down by reflection. Thus, as Nietzsche remarks in § 153 of Human, All Too Human (Menschliches, Allzumenschli-

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22 Hegel 2009, 14: “Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig.”
23 Levinas 1996, 48; Levinas 1987, 43: “L’itinéraire de la philosophie reste celui d’Ulysse dont l’aventure dans le monde n’a été qu’un retour à son île natale – une complaisance dans le Même, une méconnaissance de l’Autre.”
ches, 1878), “art makes the thinker’s heart heavy”\textsuperscript{25}: it affords experiences that urge the thinker to make all sorts of unwarranted philosophical conclusions, and “it is in such moments,” Nietzsche continues “that his intellectual probity is put to the test.”\textsuperscript{26}

Some aspects of the history of modern aesthetics can be taken as instructive examples of ways in which theory can dominate its object, even when it recognises the elusiveness of what it tries to describe. Though J.M. Bernstein has intriguingly suggested that throughout the whole of its history, philosophy has attempted “to tame art, to suppress its tendential protest to the reign of theory”\textsuperscript{27} I will concentrate here solely on some aspects of modern aesthetics, because it is after the rise of Cartesian rationalism that the question of art’s resistance to reason became a thematic question in aesthetics. Indeed, Andrew Bowie argues that aesthetics became a central concern in modern philosophy precisely because aesthetic experience was seen as “involving aspects of the self which cannot be theorised in terms of the self’s becoming transparent to itself as its own object of knowledge”, exemplifying the limits of the modern preoccupation of self-objectification.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, Martin Seel suggests that the reflection of indeterminacy and its articulation has been one of the dominant threads of modern aesthetics from Alexander Baumgarten to Theodor Adorno.\textsuperscript{29} Though I agree with Bowie and Seel in seeing the problem of indeterminacy as a recurrent theme in modern aesthetics, I wish to briefly exemplify its history from partly different sources than they do. This is not meant to be taken as a comprehensive analysis of the relation between art and theory from Descartes to the contemporary moment, but as a partial and heuristic narrative which one can draw upon for further thinking. On the whole, post-metaphysical narratives on aesthetics tend to emphasise the theory-ladenness of the aesthetic tradition. As I will soon explain further, in de Beistegui’s narrative the history of aesthetics testifies time and again how philosophy subjugates art within its preconceived vision of truth, and thus makes art only a piece in the overall architecture of metaphysical reality. Bowie makes a similar point: “Aesthetic theory from Kant onwards […] often searches for the whole into which the single phenomenon can fit, once theological certainties have been abandoned, and this search is relat-


\textsuperscript{26} Nietzsche 1967, 147: “In solchen Augenblicken wird sein intellectualer Charakter auf die Probe gestellt.”

\textsuperscript{27} Bernstein 1992, 12.

\textsuperscript{28} Bowie 2003, 2–3.

\textsuperscript{29} Seel 2016, 11.
ed to the other ways in which modernity attempts to make the world cohere, from the political to the scientific. These totalising attempts occur most often through the adoption of an idealistic framework, where aesthetic experience is explained as a sensuous access to an ideal, super-sensuous reality. In Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s histories, art’s claim to truth is neutralised, and art is left to be consumed like cakes, so that art cannot match, let alone challenge, philosophy’s understanding of reality as intelligible and fundamentally controllable phenomenon. But before I discuss their narratives and the ideas which they raise, I wish to argue that the relationship between aesthetic experience and the limits of understanding has a complex history in which art’s resistance to conceptual determination has both been appraised and quashed.

6.1 Encountering the je-ne-sais-quoi

Modern aesthetics is usually taken to emerge in the first decades of the 18th century, though sharp delineations are difficult to make. In contrast to pre-modern aesthetics, which can be roughly seen as concentrating on the objective properties of beauty, here the focus of aesthetics turns toward the perception of the subject, that is, toward aisthēsis. In other words, the birth of modern aesthetics shows itself as the shift of interest to the aesthetic experience of the subject in contrast to the earlier focus on the nature of the aesthetic object. Andrew Bowie connects the birth of aesthetics as its own branch of philosophy to “the emergence of subjectivity as the central issue in modern philosophy […]”. In this turn, it was soon discovered that aesthetic experience might lie beyond the reason’s capacity to make sense of it, and hence the indeterminateness of aesthetic experience became a recurrent theme in modern aesthetics.

Already one development in late 17th-century aesthetics shows, perhaps for the first time, a moment where the metaphysical drive for intelligibility is momentarily disrupted. This development arose from a counter-reaction to the all-encompassing Cartesian rationalism, which was by no means universally accepted. Especially in France, Cartesian rationalism was taken as contradicting the fundamental experience of the unknowability of the self and the world, or, as Erich Köhler puts it, “the nega-

30 Bowie 2003, 5.
31 de Beistegui 2012, 2.
32 Guyer 2014a, 6–8.
33 Bowie 2003, 2.
34 Köhler 1966, 252.
positive feeling in the presence of a dark residue, through which reason could not shine its light.\textsuperscript{35} This experience of an indeterminate presence which resists attempts to rationalise it, became a fashionable theme in 17\textsuperscript{th}-century French culture, and it gave birth to a wide lexicon of phenomena that defy definition: hommèteté, galanterie, bel esprit, sprezzatura, and so on, all of which name aspects of human qualities that cannot be captured in linguistic explanations.\textsuperscript{36} The key term for this fascination with the undefinable was the je-ne-sais-quoi, the I-don't-know-what, whose presence French thinkers detected not only in human emotions, but also in nature, culture, and the arts.\textsuperscript{37} At first, this term was used to denote a “certain something” in the presence of phenomena that were seen to be outside the reach of the Cartesian ratio.\textsuperscript{38} Soon the originally epistemological and moral interpretation of the je-ne-sais-quoi developed into an aesthetic one. In the following, I will limit myself to only one, and perhaps the most famous example of this development, though it was by no means the only one.

Reacting against Nicolas Boileau’s rationalistic aesthetics, according to which beauty can be explained by reducing it to certain rules, Dominique Bouhours argued in Les entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugène (1671) and La manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d’esprit (1687) that the charm of sensory beauty stems precisely from its inexplicable nature, its richness, which is irreducible to pre-given rules. What pleases us in art, then, is not intellectually graspable harmony or rational proportions, but instead something “incomprehensible and inexplicable”,\textsuperscript{39} which “escapes the most penetrating and subtle intelligence”.\textsuperscript{40} According to Bouhours, the poems of Vincent Voiture are “secret charms, fine and hidden graces”,\textsuperscript{41} whereas the works

\begin{enumerate}
\item Köhler 1966, 254: “[…] die negative Gefühl vom Vorhandensein eines dunklen Restes, den keine Ratio zu durchleuchten vermag […].”
\item The notion itself has a long history, which has its roots at least in the Roman world. However, it first gains an aesthetic meaning in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. For a conceptual history, see the entry "je ne sais quoi" in Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie (Ritter, Gründer & Eisler 1976, 639–643), the essay "’Je ne sais quoi’: Ein Kapitel aus der Begriffsgeschichte des Unbegreiflichen” in Erich Köhler’s Esprit und arkadische Freiheit (1966), and Richard Scholar’s The Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi in Early Modern Europe (2005).
\item See Scholar 2005.
\item Köhler 1966, 252.
\item Bouhours 1671/2016, 322: “Il est bien plus aisé de le sentir que de le connoisir […]. Ce ne seroit plus un je ne sçay quoy, si l'on sçavoit ce que s'est ; sa nature est d'estre incomprehensible, & inexplicable.”
\item Bouhours 1671/2016, 326: “En effet c'est quelque chose de si delicat, & de si imperceptible, qu'il échappe à l'intelligence la plus penetrante, & la plus subtile.”
\item Bouhours 1687/2012, 159: “[…] les ouvrages de Voiture, qui sont ces charmes secrets, ces graces fines & cachées […].”
\end{enumerate}
of Raphael and Rubens are “difficult things to see with a single glance and which, by the force of their subtlety, escape us when we think we have grasped them.”42 The delicacy of these works cannot be explained by any rationalistic laws, and the experience they afford cannot be sufficiently put into words. The je-ne-sais-quoi of aesthetic experience lies beyond the limits of reason.

However, we must not make too much of Bouhours’s account and claim that the drive for intelligibility is here interrupted in toto. For Bouhours the je-se-sais-quoi intimates the presence of the transcendent God: the je-ne-sais-quoi is “of another order, which God promises in this life, and which man cannot yet conceive”.43 The je-ne-sais-quoi does not stem from the non-discursivity of sensuousness itself but instead from the presence of God inherent within it. In this way, Bouhours’s thinking does not divorce itself from the metaphysical division of the sensuous and the transcendent world. What is crucial to note, however, is that Bouhours does not give art the idealistic function it often has in aesthetics: for Bouhours, art does not present divinity in a sensuous form but only intimates a mode of presence that cannot be brought into discourse. But what does happen in Bouhours’s texts is that the je-ne-sais-quoi is, however, tamed by grounding it upon a metaphysical substructure – this is a philosophical move that can be attested on a number of occasions during the history of modern aesthetics. Even if Bouhours’s account of art does not amount to a full transgression of metaphysical aesthetics, it does interrupt the metaphysical drive for intelligibility in a way that precedes later anti-metaphysical approaches to art.

Many factors already present in the aesthetics of the je-ne-sais-quoi will recur in the subsequent tradition. Some of these factors will be taken up by later thinkers: the interest in the subject’s response, the identification of an irreducibly non-conceptual dimension of sensuous perception, and the notion of free, instinctual enjoyment in the face of indeterminateness. On the other hand, some reactions are totalising in nature. The interruption affected by the je-ne-sais-quoi quickly became unstable in the face of the metaphysical aversion of anti-rationalism. As Köhler writes: “The more the je-ne-sais-quoi gains meaning as an unconscious, psychological and aesthetic expression of an existential insecurity […] the more grows the need for a

42 Bouhours 1687/2012, 159: “Ce sont de ces choses qu’il est difficile de voir d’un coup d’œil, & qui à force d’être subtiles nous échappent lors que nous pensons les tenir.” In the context, Bouhours is speaking of “delicate thoughts” (pensée delicate), but the preceding paragraphs have made it clear that he regards the delicacy of art to be similar to the delicacy of thought.

43 Bouhours 1671/2016, 343: “je ne sçay d’un autre ordre, que Dieu promet dès cette vie, & que l’homme ne peut pas encore concevoir.”
comprehensive, over-rational grounding.”

As we will see, while from Baumgarten and Kant onwards the indeterminate character of perception is still acknowledged, the metaphysical drive for intelligibility domesticates the radicality of the je-ne-sais-quoi by providing a metaphysical background in which it becomes tamed by reason.

The problem of the je-ne-sais-quoi was inherited, via G.W. Leibniz, by the German rationalists of the 18th century. As Fredrick C. Beiser notes, most of the rationalists were surprisingly ready to admit that aesthetic experience was beyond the grasp of reason; indeed, he claims that only Christian Wolff and J.C. Gottsched were among the few rationalists who would outrightly deny art’s capacity to challenge the sovereignty of reason. However, this acceptance was wrought with tension, as the rationalists had a hard time deciding whether the attempt to intellectualise aesthetic experience heightens it or destroys it. Instructive here is what Beiser calls “the Poets’ War” of the 1740s, where Gottsched fell into a bitter dispute with the Swiss rationalist thinkers J.J. Bodmer and J.J. Breitinger over the relationship between aesthetic experience and the limits of reason. Gottsched held on to the rationalist thesis that beauty – the sole source of aesthetic pleasure for him – is always rational, lawful and capable of being explained by the principle of sufficient reason, whereas the Swiss claimed that also the sublime and the wonderful could give birth to aesthetic experience, but this time in ways that exceed the limits of reason. Here, where you least expect it, there is an attestation of the possibility that aesthetic experience might elude full theoretical articulation and over-rational grounding.

It was around this time, and in this rationalistic context, when aesthetics as a separate philosophical discipline was born. In his Reflections on Poetry (Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus, 1735) and later in Aesthetics (Aesthetica, 1750), Alexander Baumgarten suggests that a whole new branch of philosophy should be dedicated to “sensuous knowing” (cognitio sensitiva) or, in Greek, aisthēsis, which gave the new science its name, aesthetics. This was though, as Paul Guyer notes, “an

44 Köhler 1966, 262: “Je mehr nun das ’je ne sais quoi’ als unbewußter psychologischer und ästhetischer Ausdruck einer ihre Not zu einer Tugend wandelnden existentiellen Unsicherheit an Bedeutung gewinnt, um so mehr wächst das Bedürfnis nach einer umfassenden überrationalen Begründung.”
45 Beiser 2011, 40–41.
47 Beiser 2011, Chapter 4.
48 Beiser 2011, 113.
adult baptism”, as aesthetic questions had become a thriving subject in philosophical discussions already prior to their naming.\(^5^0\) Baumgarten envisioned this new science as a new form of epistemology, which took as its aim, among other things, “the improvement of knowing over the boundaries of the distinctly knowable”.\(^5^1\) According to Baumgarten, sensuous knowing possessed a character completely of its own, irreducible to distinct, conceptual-propositional knowledge.\(^5^2\) Whereas the latter is involved in determining the conceptual identity of the phenomenon, “sensuous knowledge”, in the words of Martin Seel, “is specialized in perceiving complex phenomena – not in order to analyse them in their composition but to make them present in their intuitive density”.\(^5^3\) In other words, sensuous or aesthetic knowing aims to understand, not the universal ideas of things, but the particular things in the repleteness of their sensuous immediacy. This mode of knowing, though “inferior” to distinct conceptual knowledge, must be taken in its own right: conceptual knowledge cannot gain a complete grasp of the world, but instead needs the complementary contribution of the lower, sensuous faculties in order to animate the knowledge of universals with the living presence of the particulars. As Beiser notes, Baumgarten grants the indeterminate and confused nature of sense perception a systematic role in his aesthetics and seems to accept the existence of the *je-ne-sais-quoi* inherent to aesthetic experience.\(^5^4\)

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50 Guyer 2014a, 7.

51 Baumgarten 2007, § 3: “[…] cognitionis emendationem etiam extra distincte cognoscendorum a nobis pomeria proferre […].”

52 This claim has its roots, at least partly, in Bouhours. Bouhours’s view of the indeterminacy of sensuous perception was taken up by no lesser a thinker than Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In the wake of Bouhours, Leibniz argued that sensuous perception cannot be brought to the level of distinct conceptual knowledge, since by its very nature it remains indeterminate, or, in Cartesian terminology, indistinct. In the *New Essays on Human Understanding* (*Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain*, 1704), Leibniz (1981, 255) writes: “[…] the ideas of the sensible qualities which are associated with particular organs, e.g. the ideas of colour and warmth […] are clear, because we recognize them and easily tell them from one another; but they are not distinct, because we cannot distinguish them from their contents. Thus, we cannot define these ideas: all we can do is to make them known through examples; and, beyond that, until their inner structure has been deciphered we have to say they are a *je ne sais quoi*.” In other words, sensible qualities are understandable precisely in their sensuous presence, but this presence cannot be reduced to distinct conceptual knowledge. Though sensible ideas make sense in their immediacy, attempts to discursively take them up always fail to articulate the *je ne sais quoi* which makes these ideas what they are. Through Leibniz, this notion of sense perception was passed on to the German rationalists, like Baumgarten. See Köhler 1966, 265–266; Beiser 2011, 40–41.

53 Seel 2005, 2; Seel 2016, 17: “Die ästhetische Erkenntnis ist nach Baumgarten auf die Wahrnehmung komplexer Phänomene spezialisiert – nicht um sie in ihrer Zusammensetzung zu analysieren, sondern um sie in ihrer anschaulichen Dichte zu vergegenwärtigen.”

54 Beiser 2011, 122.
6.2 The example of Kant

Andrew Bowie has pointed out a fundamental shift in art theory that occurs during the time Kant formulated his critical philosophy. According to Bowie, the project of modernity begins as the theological presupposition of God as the ultimate foundation of reality loses its force and human reason is left to establish its own legitimacy.\(^\text{55}\) Bowie points out that still in the case of thinkers like Baumgarten and J.G. Hamann – as in the case Bouhours, as I earlier showed – aesthetic theory could still leave the indeterminacy of aesthetic experience unexplained, since a theological foundation provided a divine guarantee of the ultimately rational structure of reality.\(^\text{56}\) This changes from Kant onwards, as philosophy begins to secure the rationality of reality without recourse to theological justification. Here aesthetic experience is no longer treated as a singular experience, but instead it is taken up as a piece in a larger philosophical picture of reality, which explains and rationalises the transgressive character of aesthetic experience.\(^\text{57}\) Kant's aesthetics is a case in point.

I will at a later stage discuss Kant's aesthetics further in terms of Heidegger's and Gadamer's interpretations. Here I will focus on Kant's notion of “fine art” (schöne Kunst). In Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgement (Kritik der Urteilskraft, 1790), aesthetic perception gains an unprecedentedly important role, as in Kant's view it is the middle term between nature and freedom, and thus also the bridge between theoretical and practical reason, which remained separated by a gulf in his first two critiques. The beauty of art is portrayed by Kant as being linked to the sensuous presentation of super-sensible ideas, and the pleasantness of aesthetic judgement rises from the experience of the super-sensuous purposiveness of the empirical world.

What I primarily wish to discuss at this point is the way Kant's thinking on art can be seen to recoil in the face of the indeterminateness of sense this thinking unearths – much in the same way as Heidegger argues that Kant “recoils” (zurückweihen) in the face of the inexplicable primordiality of transcendental imagination by subsuming it to understanding in the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft, 1781).\(^\text{58}\)

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\(^\text{55}\) Bowie 2003, 1–2.

\(^\text{56}\) Bowie 2003, 5.

\(^\text{57}\) Bowie 2003, 5.

\(^\text{58}\) Heidegger 1991, § 31. A similar recoiling could also be identified in Kant's analysis of the sublime (Kant 1913, §§ 23–29), where Kant derives the pleasure we take in sublimity from the way the over-
Kant begins his discussion on art by distinguishing *mechanical* (*mechanische*) art, which simply reproduces its object in representation, from *aesthetic* (*ästhetische*) art, which gives rise to a feeling of pleasure through the representation.\(^{59}\) Aesthetic art is either *agreeable* (*angenehme*) or *fine* (*schöne*): the former has its end in the feeling of pleasure itself, whereas the latter incites pleasure through the *cognitive* processes to which it gives birth.\(^{60}\) Here – as in the third *Critique* itself – it is precisely the fine arts that merit most attention. Kant is explicit in arguing that for him, the end of the fine arts is not just to imitate sensuous nature – though the artwork should appear as free as a natural phenomenon\(^{61}\) – but to point to something beyond nature. Works of art – or, more precisely, the *aesthetic ideas* presented by them – "strive toward something lying beyond the bounds of experience, and thus seek to approximate a presentation of concepts of reason (of intellectual ideas), which gives them the appearance of an objective reality."\(^{62}\) In other words, works of art embody in sensuous forms ultimately rational ideas that are beyond the limits of sensuous experience, and the aesthetic ideas presented by art aim "to animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations".\(^{63}\) Art, then, is not the presentation of nature but the presentation of rational ideas in sensuous terms.

In this respect, Kant might seem to exemplify a standard idealist account of art. Though this is by and large true, there are a couple of twists in Kant’s theory. The first is that for Kant, the knowledge afforded by art is not *theoretical*, but is first and foremost *practical*. According to Kant, fine art "promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication".\(^{64}\) When Kant writes that "the poet ventures to

\(^{59}\) Kant 1913, 305.
\(^{60}\) Kant 1913, 305.
\(^{61}\) Kant 1913, § 45.
\(^{62}\) Kant 2000, 192; Kant 1913, 314: "[…] weil sie zu etwas über die Erfahrungsgrenze hinaus Liegenden wenigstens streben und so einer Darstellung der Vernunftbegriffe (der intellectuellen Ideen) nahe zu kommen suchen, welches ihnen den Anschein einer objectiven Realität giebt […]" that transcends the finite being in us which is threatened by the vastness of the world.
\(^{63}\) Kant 2000, 193; Kant 1913, 315: "[…] eine ästhetische Idee, die jener Vernunftidee statt logischer Darstellung dient, eigentlich aber um das Gemüth zu beleben, indem sie ihm die Aussicht in ein unabsehliches Feld verwandter Vorstellungen eröffnet."
\(^{64}\) Kant 2000, 185; Kant 1913, 306: "Schöne Kunst dagegen ist eine Vorstellungsart, die für sich selbst zweckmäßig ist und, obgleich ohne Zweck, dennoch die Cultur der Gemüthskräfte zur geselligen Mittheilung befördert."
make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings […] beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature", what he has in mind are moral ideas that the contemplation of the artwork enhances in the mind of the perceiver.65 This is later echoed in § 59 of the third Critique, where Kant famously declares beauty to be “a symbol of morality” (Symbol der Sittlichkeit). In Kant’s terminology, symbol refers to an indirect presentation of concepts “to which no sensible intuition is adequate”66. Beauty is the symbol of morality in that it sensuously presents something that is both disinterested and beyond the limits of sense experience – and, in Kant’s reasoning, this can only be the morally good.67 The capacity to judge disinterestedly the beauty of an intuition – that is, taste – prepares one for the similarly disinterested judgements of moral responsibility. Therefore, the function of the fine arts, whose sole business is the presentation of the beautiful, boils down to the promotion of moral edification. In this way, as de Beistegui notes, Kant’s thinking on art remains close to neoclassical allegory, “for which the aim of art is to point beyond the sensuous and toward the rational, and the morally edifying”68.

The second twist concerns the way Kant formulates the contemplation of aesthetic ideas. “By an aesthetic idea,” Kant writes, “I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible.”69 In this sense, Kant’s view of aesthetic experience resembles the je-ne-sais-quoi-aesthetics of the previous decades: the work of art does not reveal super-sensory ideas in their full transparency but rather imparts only “a multiplicity of partial representations” through “the free employment of imagination”, so that the perceiver’s consciousness becomes flooded, leaving thereby the presented idea opaque and conceptually inexhaustible.70 Thus Kant

65 Kant 2000, 192–193; Kant 1913, 314: “Der Dichter wagt es, Vernunftideen von unsichtbaren […] zu versinnlichen; oder auch das, was zwar Beispiele in der Erfahrung findet […] über die Schranken der Erfahrung hinaus vermittelst einer Einbildungskraft, die dem Vernunft=Vorspiele in Erreichung eines Größten naheifert […].”
66 Kant 1913, 351: “[…] dem keine sinnliche Anschauung angemessen sein kann […]”
67 Kant 1913, § 59.
68 de Beistegui 2012, 32.
69 Kant 2000, 192; Kant 1913, 314: “[…] unter einer ästhetischen Idee aber verstehe ich diejenige Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft, die viel zu denken veranlaßt, ohne daß ihr doch irgend ein bestimmt Gedanke, d. i. Begriff, adaquat sein kann, die folglich keine Sprache völlig erreicht und verständlich machen kann.
70 These characterisations are part of Kant’s second definition of the aesthetic idea (Kant 2000, 194):
does acknowledge that in the aesthetic experience understanding faces something that exceeds its capacities to pin it down and grasp it conceptually.

And yet, much like Bouhours, Kant can go this far only because he manages to formulate a rational sub-structure that neutralises the possible threat to the integrity of reason posed by aesthetic experience, though he does this in a different way from Bouhours. Whereas Bouhours could still appeal to God, Kant excavates a rational grounding from the very functioning of consciousness in aesthetic contemplation. Here the notion of *purposiveness* (*Zweckmässigkeit*), which Kant discusses earlier in the third *Critique*, steps into the picture: even in cases such as the intuition of beauty, where consciousness cannot ascribe the representation a definite purpose but can treat the object as having “a bare form of purposiveness” (*die bloße Form der Zweckmäßigkeit*), that is, consciousness can engage with the phenomenon even without an ascription of a definite purpose. The pleasure we take in beauty – and one would assume this applies to the presentation of beauty in art – stems precisely from the fact that in cases where understanding cannot fathom what it faces, the object of intuition does not halt the functioning of the faculties but enables their “free play”. In other words – and this is what Kant will elaborate in the section on teleology in the third *Critique* – the existence of beauty stems from the rational organisation of nature, which renders nature commensurate with our cognitive capacities and ultimately points to that which exceeds nature, to the super-sensible order of rational ideas.

In sum, Kant’s thinking on art (by way of his thinking on beauty) can be seen to exemplify two strategies of rationalising aesthetic experience. The first is the assignment of an idealistic function to art, whereby art is given the task of presenting super-sensible – and this time moral – ideas; the second is the neutralising of the inexhaustibility of beauty by assuring that the pleasure we take in the experience of it is not evidence for the incommensurability of mind and reality, but on the contrary is a proof of the ultimately rational structure of reality.

“[…] the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, associated with a given concept, which is combined with such a manifold of partial representations in the free use of the imagination that no expression designating a determinate concept can be found for it, which therefore allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculties and combines spirit with the mere letter of language.” (Kant 1913, 316: “Mit einem Worte, die ästhetische Idee ist eine einem gegebenen Begriffe beigesellte Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft, welche mit einer solchen Mannigfaltigkeit der Theilvorstellungen in dem freien Gebrauche derselben verbunden ist, daß für sie kein Ausdruck, der einen bestimmten Begriff bezeichnet, gefunden werden kann, die also zu einem Begriffe viel Unnennbares hinzu denken läßt, dessen Gefühl die Erkenntnissvermögen belebt und mit der Sprache, als bloßem Buchstaben, Geist verbindet.”)
6.3 Approaching the Absolute: German Romanticism and Idealism

For some, Kant’s critical claim of the limitedness of reason was almost scandalous. Soon after the publications of Kant’s critiques, counter-reactions began to emerge on the German philosophical scene, claiming that philosophy can be salvaged from Kant’s verdict if only philosophy is done in the right way – most prominently K.L. Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* and Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. This counter-reaction generated another counter-reaction, one claiming that philosophy cannot be grounded upon first principles, and that therefore it cannot ever gain a complete, all-encompassing grasp of reality. This scepticism was voiced by the early German Romantics, most notably by K.W.F. von Schlegel and Novalis (G.P.F. von Hardenberg), who wished to separate philosophy from scientific models and bring it closer to poetry and history. Here the relationship between art and philosophy is re-configured in an unprecedented manner, and the presupposition of philosophy’s capacity to reach to the depths of reality – aesthetic experience included – receives a severe blow.

For Novalis and K.W.F. Schlegel, the attempt to secure philosophy’s claim to absolute truth by a first principle was as absurd as “trying to find the quadrature of a circle”. Especially Schlegel emphasised that there is no neutral, ahistorical, or absolute starting point in thinking, since thinking is always immersed in and conditioned by its historical context; philosophy always comes to the scene *in medias res*. According to the early Romantics, philosophy never begins at the beginning and never quite reaches the end. The inexhaustibility and fundamental incomprehensibility of the Absolute always trump philosophy’s pretension of attaining final truths. Philosophy can never exhaust its own project, Schlegel claims:

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71 Millán-Zaibert 2007, 62–65, 68–70. Both of these were based on the conviction that a metaphysical system can be secured by “a first principle”, from which knowledge concerning both the subjective consciousness and the reality of the thing-in-itself can be derived.

72 German Romanticism can be divided into three phases: early German Romanticism (1794–1802), middle or high Romanticism (1808–1815), and late Romanticism (1815–1830). I will here concentrate on the early German Romantics, since the movement became somewhat more conservative in its later phases. See Millán-Zaibert 2007, 2–3. On the historical origins of the Romantic movement, see Frank 1989, Frank 1997, and Beiser 2003.

73 Novalis 1960a, 270: “Alles Suchen nach einem Prinzip wäre also wie ein Versuch, die Quadratur des Zirkels zu finden.”

If knowledge itself is infinite, and so always incomplete, then philosophy as a science can never be finished, closed, complete, and it can only strive for this high goal, and seek all possible ways of getting nearer and nearer to it. Philosophy is, on the whole, more a searching, a striving for a system of knowledge, than a system of knowledge itself.\(^75\)

The early Romantics saw the metaphysical desire for complete intelligibility as a sort of illness, a destructive force, which suffocates the inexhaustibility of the Absolute and turns it into a dead letter.\(^76\) In the Logological Fragment no. 15, Novalis writes:

To philosophise is to dephlegmatise, to vivify. Up till now, philosophical investigation has first stricken philosophy dead and then dissected and dissolved it. It was believed that the component of this *caput mortuum* were the elements of philosophy. But every time each attempt of reduction or recombination failed. Only in the most recent times has philosophy begun to be observed alive, and it might well be that we have art in order to make philosophy.\(^77\)

Accordingly, philosophy needs to "endow […] the known with the dignity of the unknown."\(^78\) This does not mean that philosophy should surrender to irrationalism, but

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75 Schlegel 1964, 166: "Ist die Erkenntnis des Unendlichen selbst unendlich, also immer nur vollendet, unvollkommen, so kann auch die Philosophie als Wissenschaft nie geendet, geschlossen und vollkommen sein, sie kann immer nur nach diesem hohen Ziele streben, und alle mögliche Wege versuchen, sich ihm mehr und mehr zu nähern. Sie ist überhaupt mehr ein Suchen, Streben nach Wissenschaft, als selbst eine Wissenschaft."

76 For example, Novalis writes in Das allgemeine Brouillon (Novalis 1960b, 384, no. 638): "Ein absoluter Trieb nach Vollendung und Vollständigkeit ist Krankheit, sobald er sich zerstörend, und abgeneigt gegen das Unvollendete, unvollständige zeigt."


78 The whole fragment (Novalis 1960a, 545, no. 105) is as follows: "Die Welt muß romantisiert werden. So findet man den ursprünglichen Sinn wieder. Romantisieren ist nichts als eine qualitative Potenzierung. Das niedre Selbst wird mit einem bessern Selbst in dieser Operation identifiziert. So wie wir selbst eine solche qualitative Potenzreihe sind. Diese Operation ist noch ganz unbekannt. Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehen, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein gebe, so roman-
should instead bear in mind that it is an infinite task of sense-making. Philosophy must concede to its fate of trying to articulate, again and again, that which forever eludes articulation. This “epistemological humility”, as Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert calls it, contrasts sharply with the Idealist claim of the fundamental transparency of being and of philosophy’s capability of seeing into the very depths of the Absolute.  

As Novalis’s citation above already hints, this decentralisation of philosophy opens a new way of understanding the relation between art and philosophy. So far, philosophical accounts have kept art and philosophy apart and have most often held art to be inferior to philosophy. With the early German Romantics, this hierarchy is dissolved. For them, the absolute ground of reality cannot be reached by philosophical reflection, but it can be approximated in and through art: aesthetic experience, in which the audience merges with the artwork, testifies to the fundamental unity of subject and object. Philosophy, then, needs art to get in touch with the Absolute, as Schlegel says in a private lecture in 1807: “It should be brought to mind that the necessity of poetry is based on the requirement to represent the infinite, which emerges from the imperfections of philosophy.” This does not only mean that art is to be taken as the organ of philosophy, as Schelling has it, but that “poetry and philosophy should be made one”. Since philosophy cannot pretend to progress like the natural sciences and should concede to its yearning toward that which it cannot entirely attain, its best attempt at getting closer to the Absolute is to displace the reign of reflective knowledge with the non-conceptual opacity of aesthetic knowing and turn it into poetry. Here the Platonic hierarchy of art and philosophy is inversed: with the early Romantics, art, not philosophy, becomes the highest access to truth.

Here, however, it is essential to bear in mind that this aversion to the totalising tendencies of philosophy does not amount to rejecting the metaphysical framework and approaching art outside its parameters. The early Romantics shared the monistic conviction of the Idealists that the human mind and nature are not separate but instead are products of the same all-encompassing Absolute, like two sides of the same

coin. In this notion, art becomes conceptualised in terms of the Romantic symbol, which was formed mainly as a reaction against the neoclassical conception of mimesis as allegory.82 According to de Beistegui, the Romantics “broke with neoclassical mimesis and its emphasis on allegory, premised on the irreducible distance separating the imitator and imitated, the human mind and nature, the sign and its signification” by replacing it with the notion of the symbol, the key term of Romantic aesthetics.83

Against this background, the notion of mimesis shifts in such a way that mimesis is no longer seen as the direct representation of the perfect eidos of nature but instead as the indirect intimation of the belonging-together of mind and nature in the infinite self-creation of the spirit. Artworks were not seen as naturalistic representations of nature but as mysterious revelations of the primordial unity of the world. Therefore the “vulgar”, straightforward imitation of nature was replaced with “a higher, more complete form of mimesis”, which no longer presented nature as given to the senses but rather disclosed it as the work of the spirit.84 As such, art became symbolic in the etymological sense, since it presents the union (symbolon) of the human mind and nature. It was seen to present the unpresentable – the totality of reality, which exceeds our intellectual grasp and is only accessible to our imagination. Here the notion of mimesis is reformulated to such an extent that it seems to escape the parameters of metaphysics. This, nevertheless, is not the case. As de Beistegui argues, the Romantic notion of mimesis moves neatly within the space of metaphysics:

Isn’t, once again, art an intimation (and an imitation) of the immaterial, a sensible presentation of the supersensible? True, it’s no longer history and the noblest virtues, as is neoclassical art, nor the perfect eidos of, say, the human body, as in mannerism, that’s imitated: nature itself is pointing beyond itself, and is its own transcendence. It’s the place where the Idea of all Ideas, that of infinity, can be experienced. In that respect, it would seem that the Romantic metaphysics of the symbol […] is a different answer to the same problem Kant was raising, namely, that of the possible unity of the sensible and supersensible, nature and freedom, or the sensuous and sense.85

82 de Beistegui 2012, 23–28.
83 de Beistegui 2012, 23. For a more detailed genealogy of the Romantic Symbol, see Halmi 2007.
84 de Beistegui 2012, 30.
85 de Beistegui 2012, 28.
The importance of all this in respect to my discussion is that once again we see in action the characteristic double movement of aesthetics: even though Romantic metaphysics sees art as revealing an excess that overflows our intellectual grasp of it, this excess is still thought in terms of the division between the sensible and the super-sensible, whereby a philosophical theory influences its object.

The other, philosophically more influential reaction to the Kantian legacy was German Idealism. Reacting to Kant’s critical project, the German Idealists wished to provide evidence against Kant’s radical claim that the thing-in-itself is unknowable. Like the early Romantics, the Idealists held art to be a valuable tool in philosophy’s attempt to access realms that were beyond the boundaries of the phenomenal world. This high esteem led the Idealists to give unprecedented philosophical attention to the essence of art. The difference between the Romantics and the Idealists is that with the latter philosophy regains, in monumental fashion, its old position as a master discourse which can attain an absolute conceptual grasp of reality. As art get caught up in this discourse, the result is a philosophy of art which in many ways exemplifies the domination of theory over its object in its most consummate form.

In this grand finale, Schelling’s philosophy of art mediates between the Romantics and the absolute idealism of Hegel. On the one hand, Schelling shares with the early Romantics the conception that it is art, not philosophy, which can get in touch most efficiently with the Absolute. In the famous section of System of Transcendental Idealism (System des transcendentalen Idealismus, 1800), he writes:

Art is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious. Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart.

86 See Bowie 2003 and Gordon 2015 on the role of aesthetics in German Idealism.

87 Schelling 1978, 231; Schelling 2005, 328: “[...], die Kunst das einzige wahre und ewige Organon zugleich und Document der Philosophie sey, welches immer und fortwährend aufs neue beurkundet, was die Philosophie äußerlich nichts darstellen kann, nämlich das Bewußtlosen im Handeln und Produciren, und seine ursprüngliche Identität mit dem Bewußten. Die Kunst ist ebendeßwegen dem Philosophen das Höchste, weil sie ihm das Allerheiligste gleichsam öffnet, wo in ewiger und
At the same time, Schelling departs from the Romantics in that he was still confident about philosophy’s capability to form a complete system of knowledge concerning the Absolute. Through aesthetic experience, art can show what philosophy can merely know. Resembling the Romantics, Schelling says in On the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature (Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zur Natur, 1807) that through the artwork “the spectator is taken over, with sudden clarity, by the memory of the primordial unity of the essence of nature with the essence of the soul.”

However, for Schelling art remains fundamentally a mere tool of philosophy, not its model. Hence, philosophy need not be humble in front of art but can be assured in its ability to understand what art is and what it does. In The System of Transcendental Idealism, Schelling argues that there is, in the end, only one absolute artwork, of which every particular instance of art is an insufficient version. No artwork in empirical reality manifests this absolute artwork, but, Schelling seems to suggest, philosophy can conceptually fathom the nature of this absolute artwork. Thus, reference to existing artwork in empirical reality becomes redundant in philosophy’s effort to understand art. Indeed, in his lecture-series On University Studies (Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums, 1803), Schelling informs his listeners: “Nothing of what is more commonly meant by art can concern the philosopher; for him, it is a necessary phenomenon, which flows immediately from the Absolute, and only insofar as it can be demonstrated and proved as such, has it reality for him.” Similarly, in a letter to A.W. Schlegel, Schelling claims: “In the same way there are real or empirical things, there is also real or empirical art – these are the things theory relates to; – but in the same way as there are intellectual things, things in themselves, there is also art in itself, of which the empirical is only the appearance, and it is this through which it has a relation to the philosophy of art.”

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89 Schelling 2005, 327.
90 Schelling 1982, 125–126: “Nichts von dem, was der gemeinere Sinn Kunst nennt, kann den Philosophen beschäftigen; sie ist ihm eine notwendige, aus dem Absoluten unmittelbar ausfließende Erscheinung, und nur sofern sie als solche dargetan und beweisen werden kann, hat sie Realität für ihn.”
ising drive of metaphysics is visible in full force: philosophy need not concern itself with the empirical reality of art, since it is able to explain exhaustively its essence \textit{a priori} from the system itself. Such reference is merely empirical confirmation of what the philosopher is capable of deducing directly from the Absolute Idea.

Similarly, in the \textit{Lectures on Aesthetics}, Hegel attacks those who, like the early Romantics, claim that art resists conceptualisation and thus cannot be the object of philosophical inquiry by aiming to demonstrate how the idea of beauty and the system of arts can be directly derived from the Absolute Idea.\footnote{Hegel 1986, 25–29.} For Hegel, art is first and foremost a matter of sensuous presentation of the super-sensuous Idea, and thus inherently a medium of \textit{knowledge}. Hegel's philosophy of art is one of the most explicit examples of the idealistic interpretation of art, as the following quotation shows:

In works of art the nations have deposited their richest inner intuitions and ideas, and art is often the key, and in many nations the sole key, to understand their philosophy and religion. Art shares this vocation with religion and philosophy, but in a special way, namely by displaying even the highest \textit{[reality]} sensuously, bringing it thereby nearer to the senses, to feeling, and to nature's mode of appearance. What is thus displayed is the depth of a \textit{super-sensuous world} which thought pierces and sets up at first as a \textit{beyond} in contrast with immediate consciousness and present feeling; it is the freedom of intellectual reflection which rescues itself from \textit{this side}, called sensuous reality and finitude. But this \textit{breach}, to which the spirit proceeds, it is also able to heal. It generates out of itself work of fine art as the first reconciling middle term between pure thought and what is merely external, sensuous, and transient, between nature and finite reality and the infinite freedom of conceptual thinking.\footnote{Hegel 1999, 7–8; Hegel 1986, 21: "In Kunstwerken haben die Völker ihre gehaltreichsten inneren Anschauungen und Vorstellungen niedergelegt, und für das Verständnis der Weisheit und Religion macht die schöne Kunst oftmals, und bei manchen Völkern sie allein, den Schlüssel aus. Diese Bestimmung hat die Kunst mit Religion und Philosophie gemein, jedoch in der eigentümlichen Art, daß sie auch das Höchste sinnlich darstellt und es damit der Erscheinungsweise der Natur, den Sinnen und der Empfindung nähebringt. Es ist die Tiefe einer übersinnlichen Welt, in welche der \textit{Gedanke} dringt und sie zunächst als ein \textit{Jaunes} dem unmittelbaren Bewußtsein und der gegenwärtigen Empfindung gegenüber aufstellt; es ist die Freiheit denkender Erkenntnis, welche sich dem \textit{Diesseits}, das sinnliche Wirklichkeit und Endlichkeit heißt, enthebt. Diesen \textit{Bruch} aber, zu welchem der Geist fortgeht, weiß er ebenso zu heilen; er erzeugt aus sich selbst die Werke der schö-
Arthur Schopenhauer, too, argues that the nature of aesthetic experience and the division of the arts can be derived from the different objectivities of the Will provided by his metaphysics, so that phenomena pertaining to art can be explained in terms of access to the super-sensuous Ideas behind sensuous appearances.\(^94\) Here we are far off from the “epistemological humility” of the Romantics: the Idealists were confident that they could explain the whole phenomenon of art and aesthetic experience by imposing their all-encompassing systems upon aesthetic phenomena. Philosophy again is raised above art and explains from the outside what art is and what it does; for the Idealists, it is art that needs philosophy to make the Absolute comprehensible, and not the other way round. Hegel even insinuates in the Lectures that in the modern world, where the progress of Spirit has passed beyond art’s ability to sensuously represent it, we have art in order to make philosophy of it.\(^95\) Hence, the Idealists embrace what Guyer calls the “implications of the aesthetics of truth”: when art is approached with respect to its truth value, it must, in the end, give way to philosophy, if the truth sought in art is already determined beforehand by philosophy itself.\(^96\) The Idealists look at art “from above”\(^97\) and absorb the experience of art within an all-encompassing system.

6.4 Thinking art after metaphysics

After the high noon of German Idealism, grand metaphysical speculation went out of fashion, and toward the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century the limits of reason were under heavy attack from the likes of Nietzsche and Freud. With respect to aesthetics, the collapse of metaphysical speculation opened the possibility of thinking of art and aesthetic experience outside the parameters of metaphysical dualisms. Phenomenologists have proposed several candidates who should be given the honour of first thinking art post-metaphysically: John Sallis has argued that the honour should be given to the early Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy (Die Geburt der Tragödie, 1872)*; Martin Seel claims it is the poet Paul Valéry; and de Beistegui gives the hon-

\(^94\) Schopenhauer 1991a, § 36.

\(^95\) Hegel 1986, 26.

\(^96\) Guyer 2014a, 60.

\(^97\) Paul Guyer (2014b, 327) notes this view “from above” was already the central target of G.T. Fechner’s critique of German Idealism in the *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1876).
ours to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Heidegger has lengthily discussed how Nietzsche overturns Platonism but falls back on metaphysics in his thinking on art in the *Nietzsche*-lectures on *The Will to Power as Art*. To my knowledge, the role of aestheticism in this development, especially Walter Pater’s aesthetic theory, has not been discussed in phenomenological literature. But instead of dwelling on this matter here, I would like to briefly discuss how theory’s tendency to dominate its object carries over to contemporary thinking.

Gianni Vattimo has argued that many contemporary trends concerning aesthetics are still committed to the foundationalist project of metaphysics. He picks out three examples: strands of thinking which emphasise the dialectical nature of knowledge, such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism all preserve the Hegelian

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99 Heidegger 1996b. Heidegger also discusses in passing art’s role in Nietzsche’s thinking of will-to-power in “Überwindung der Metaphysik” (Heidegger 2000a, 79–80).

100 The crux of this discussion lies in locating the first explicit formulations, where the art and aesthetic experience are explicated outside the idealist framework, where art is seen as opening an access to a super-sensible realm. This jubilation about aesthetic appearing can be found in Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* (1873). In the book’s Preface, Walter remarks how the student of aesthetics has “no need to trouble himself with the abstract question what beauty is in itself, or what its exact relation to truth or experience – metaphysical questions, as unprofitable as metaphysical questions elsewhere” (Pater 1900, viii–ix). Instead, the aesthetician should be interested solely in the artwork’s power of “producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique in kind” (Pater 1900, ix). There is nothing over and above the instantaneous, irretrievable, and unique manifestation of the aesthetic object – no pointing towards anything beyond the manifestation itself. In the book’s Conclusions (written already in 1868), Pater argues that “not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end” (Pater 1900, 236) and that philosophical theories – the “facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel” (Pater 1900, 237) – that aim to extract from art an access to something higher miss the whole point of art. However, assigning Pater’s theory to the category of post-idealist thinking faces the problem that in denying art the mediating role between the sensuous and the super-sensuous, Pater severs aesthetic experience from meaning altogether and sees aesthetic experience as a surrender to pure, unorganised phenomenality, where “the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer” (Pater 1900, 235).

Art abstracts sensuousness from its semantic function and allows the observer to see it purely in itself. Hence, Pater’s theory exemplifies par excellence the “aesthetic consciousness” that becomes prominent in modern aesthetics. Pater’s antimetaphysical move of denying art an idealist function entails going to the other end and claiming that art holds no truth whatsoever, since it is a matter of pure aesthetic perception. In this way, Pater adopts – though admittedly in a radical form – the Kantian legacy of aesthetic alienation and exemplifies full-blown Erlebnis thinking, and consequently he does not represent the “third” option between idealism and realism, where art is seen to open up access to dimensions of sense that are usually hidden beneath the phenomenality that they sustain. Thus, Pater’s aestheticism can be seen as being caught up in the subjectivism of modern philosophy, like Nietzsche’s thinking of art, though in a different manner. Heidegger’s discussion of the matter is scarce, but he seems to be referring to aestheticism in his remarks on “the aesthetic man” (der ästhetische Mensch) as one of the signs of nihilism in modern man’s relation to art in the 19th century (Heidegger 1996, 89–90).
the notion of the world as a comprehensible totality in relation to which all its parts derive their meaning;\textsuperscript{101} the neo-Kantian undertones of contemporary philosophy of culture conceive aesthetics as the study of the transcendental structures of aesthetics experience, which remains enclosed within the sphere of subjectivity;\textsuperscript{102} and finally, phenomenological aesthetics, such as that of Mikel Dufrenne, which remains faithful to Husserl and subsequently to the Kantian programme of securing consciousness as the ultimate ground for presence.\textsuperscript{103} According to Vattimo, all these approaches display foundationalist undertones, which make them unable to consider the ontological difference, enclosing them within the sphere of metaphysics, which informs in an \textit{a priori} fashion how art and aesthetic experience are taken as themes of thought.

The tradition casts its shadow over 20\textsuperscript{th}-century thinking also in other, more subtle ways. In my narrative, I have been closely following the different ways philosophy takes hold of art and determines what is or is not art by using philosophy’s own tools and standards. I have shown how different philosophical approaches clothe art with a “garb of ideas” (\textit{Ideenkleid}),\textsuperscript{104} as Husserl might have put it, with notions and frameworks that do not stem from art itself but from the external interests and presuppositions of philosophy. Art is not studied for its own sake, precisely because philosophy needs it for its own project – be it the demonstration of the absolute unity of reality, the completion of rational knowledge, or experiencing God or eternal Ideas. These ulterior motives and frameworks have delimited the ways art has been taken up as an object of inquiry.

The interesting thing at this point is that this tendency to use art as a tool in philosophy’s own projects carries well over the metaphysical tradition into the more contemporary approaches to art. Arnold Berleant has argued that “one of the principal difficulties with aesthetic theory has been its failure to respond sufficiently to the arts themselves.”\textsuperscript{105} According to Berleant, aesthetics has been unable to attend to art itself, because outside influences and implicit theories have guided in an \textit{a priori} fash-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Vattimo 2008, 17–18.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Vattimo 2008, 18–19.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Vattimo 2008, 20.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Husserl 1954, 51. In the context, Husserl speaks of the way the natural sciences impose an abstract framework upon the lifeworld and clothe the infinite possibilities of concrete experience in a “well-fitting garb of ideas” (\textit{ein wohlpassendes Ideenkleid}).
\item \textsuperscript{105} Berleant 2000, 9.
\end{itemize}
ion the way art has been conceptualised. For example, imitation theory, formalism, emotivism, and New Criticism are not, Berleant claims, motivated by art itself but by the theories themselves. These theories – which Berleant calls “surrogate theories” – pick out certain aspects of art, like emotional responses or formal qualities, and ignore others, and then formulate general theories based on this limited selection of characteristics. They choose aspects that are to be deemed essential in art and then proceed to theorise from these presuppositions. Such surrogate theories can, at best, offer only partial views about what art is or what happens in our encounters with it, and yet these theories are presented as if they provided the ultimate answer to the essence of art. Berleant suggests that instead of toying with theories, aesthetics should aim at art itself and see how art, of its own accord, gives itself to be thought. In other words, Berleant suggests that a proper account of art should start with a phenomenological description, where art is given the space to speak for itself, and not with the postulation of a principle that already from the start dictates how art is to be viewed.

Though in this study I am largely in agreement with Berleant’s starting point, the appeal to phenomenology must be taken with certain reservations. Namely, phenomenology too, though in subtler ways, can also be guilty of delimiting a prioriistically how art is to be taken as a theme in philosophy. As Heidegger pointed out, the way we question phenomena already dictates what kind of answers we get from them. Rüdiger Bubner has argued in his discussion of the “substitute function” (Ersatzfunktion) of aesthetics – by which he means the way aesthetics approaches art by placing it within some larger philosophical context and handles it as a tool in some ulterior project – that phenomenological descriptions can also entail a priori presuppositions that delimit the way art is taken up. Bubner’s main example is Heidegger: his phenomenology of art is not motivated by art itself but the larger question of being’s retrieval. Phenomenological though they are, Heidegger’s descriptions of art – and the works he chooses to analyse – are guided by his interest

107 Berleant 2000, 32–43.
111 Bubner 1989, 99.
in finding new conceptions of being and truth that would disrupt the forgetfulness of being and instigate new, more authentic ways of historical existence. Art, then, is thought of in terms of its capacity to stage the “setting-itself-to-work of the truth of being” and show historical communities the fundamental structures of their worlds. This ulterior motive dictates the aspects of art that capture Heidegger’s interest. However, Heidegger does not make explicit the partiality of his own perspective; instead, he gives the impression that his description captures the essential characteristic of art – or “great” art, to say the least.114

Bubner discusses how the substitute function is at work in Heidegger’s *Origin* – and in Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (*Ästhetische Theorie*, 1970), which I will forgo debating here – but his argument could be extended to other major phenomenologists of the 20th century. For example, Gadamer’s ontology of art in *Truth and Method* (*Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960) is formulated in view of a mode of truth that would counter scientific truth and open up the possibility of validating the truth claims of the human sciences, and Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of paintings are motivated by a more substantial interest in perceptual, embodied contact between the self and the world.115 Though these accounts certainly contain valuable phenomenological insights – I will use many of them in what follows – their problem is that they approach art in the light of something ulterior to it, and inadvertently delimit how art is allowed to become a theme of thought. Like Berleant’s surrogate theories, phenomenological approaches can pick out certain perspectives that are motivated by philosophical interests and then make generalising claims about the essence of art. Of course, from a hermeneutic view, it is inevitable that every description begins with a specific pre-understanding that informs the description, so that there can be no wholly theory-neutral and presuppositionless approach to art. However, this can become a problem if the description of *some* works of art, approached from a specific perspective, is made to speak on behalf of *all* works of art – or, as Paul Crowther puts it, reductive approaches become problematic if they become *imperialistic, exclusionary, and authoritarian*.116 Reductive descriptions do not arise solely from “the things themselves”, but partly from the philosophical motives that delimit their descriptions.

114 Miguel de Beistegui (2003, Chapter 5) has pointed out that also Heidegger’s earlier, Aristotle-inspired discussions on art, which place art beneath philosophical discourse, and Heidegger’s later approach to art in terms of language, delimit Heidegger’s discussion in ways that might not be suitable to the whole category of art.


116 Crowther 2009, 33.
Here, then, one can see a continuation of the tradition’s habit of instrumentalising art within a horizon of ulterior motives, even if these theories are not strictly metaphysical in the technical sense. Thus, even if phenomenology is the method I employ in this study, a brief glance at previous accounts shows that not even phenomenology is immune to the subtle, yet problematic influence of the theoretical apparatus itself.

After this long and winding story, it is timely to ask what can one learn from all this. I suggest the following lesson. Throughout history, art – or, to be more precise, phenomena we nowadays include under the category of art\(^\text{117}\) – has puzzled philosophers, and the powerful claim art can exercise over us has led them to relegate art to all sorts of metaphysical functions within the overall economy of being. As my partial overview of modern aesthetics suggests, aesthetic experience and philosophy’s belief in the fundamental comprehensibility of reality have been recurrently at odds with each other. Most often this tension has been resolved by explaining art’s transgressive character as a representation of truth and consequently absorbing art within the purview of a philosophical system, as in the case of German Idealism, or, while admitting the impossibility of articulating aesthetic experience, by neutralising this resistance by way of reference to an over-rational ground, as in the case of Bouhours and the early Romantics. My narrative aims to outline how the tradition of modern aesthetics fails to articulate art and aesthetic experience without the influence of a theory that reduces the experience to the limits of comprehension. What has been left unexamined in these cases is the way theory itself dictates how aesthetic experience is taken as a theme of thought. In this study, I aim to show that especially in the phenomenology of aesthetic immersion one needs to be extremely careful about the way theories lying in the background of phenomenological descriptions can lead one to say more than what is justified by the experience itself. The whole of Chapter 2 of this study is dedicated to proposing a way of articulating experiences without thereby surrendering them to pre-existing explanatory theory.

\(^{117}\) In this study I will not take part in the discussion concerning the historical formation of the category of art. Paul Oskar Kristeller’s famous article “The Modern System of the Arts” (1951–52) dates the birth of the modern category to the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. Kristeller’s conclusion is sometimes cited as having become something of a dogma (Porter 2009, 2; Young 2015, 1), and a similar claim is repeated afterwards, for example, in Murdoch 1978 and Shiner 2001. However, this view has also been challenged, for example, in Halliwell 2002, 7–9; Martindale 2004, 31–33; Porter 2009; Young 2015; Porter 2016, 26–40.
§ 7. The problem of Erlebnis

The second lesson I wish to draw from phenomenological histories of aesthetics deals with the role of emotions and cognition in aesthetic experience. I will do so by outlining Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s claim that modern aesthetics has conceived of aesthetic experience as pure emotional immersion into sensuous enjoyment which is wholly cut off from the actualities of life and thereby devoid of any cognitive import.118 I then take a look at a contrary view according to which modern and contemporary aesthetics – Heidegger and Gadamer included – has become so suspicious of emotions that it has failed to take into appropriate account the peculiar phenomenology of aesthetic experience.

7.1 The excesses of Erlebnis

The first element in this lesson stems from Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s critique of modern aesthetics. Their primary target is the way aesthetic experience is conceptualised in the wake of the subjectivist turn, which begins with Descartes and is epitomised by Kant.

For Heidegger and Gadamer the central problem of modern aesthetics is not the shift to experience per se – indeed, their own phenomenological approaches to art, as I will suggest later, continue in many aspects this shift – but in the precise way it was carried out in modern aesthetics after Kant. According to Gadamer, the main issue lies in the way Kant effectively divorces aesthetic feeling from any cognitive value.119 In Gadamer’s reading, Kant’s third Critique realigns the relationship between aesthetic judgements and knowledge in such a way that a momentous shift occurs in the concept of knowledge in philosophy as such:

118 I will not discuss Heidegger’s critique of aesthetics here in any depth. The most sustained formulation of this critique, which considers the tradition from the pre-Socratics to Nietzsche, is presented in the section titled “Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics” in Heidegger’s Nietzsche: Will to Power as Art (Heidegger 1996b, 74–91). Passing references to the history of aesthetics are also made in Introduction to Metaphysics (Heidegger 1983c), The Origin of the Work of Art (Heidegger 1977b) and its earlier versions (Heidegger 1985a and 1989b), and in personal notes regarding The Origin (Heidegger 1990). For commentaries on Heidegger’s critique of aesthetics, see Faden 1986 and Thomson 2011, Chapter 2.

119 Kant 1913, § 9.
[Kant’s] giving aesthetics a transcendental philosophical basis had major consequences and constituted a turning point. It was the end of a tradition but also the beginning of a new development. It restricted the idea of taste to an area in which, as a special principle of judgment, it could claim independent validity – and, by so doing, limited the concept of knowledge to the theoretical and practical use of reason. The limited phenomenon of judgment restricted to the beautiful (and sublime), was sufficient for his transcendental purpose; but it shifted the more general concept of taste, and the activity of aesthetic judgment in law and morality, out of the center of philosophy.120

In other words, Kant associates knowledge with conceptuality, which, by definition, aesthetic judgements lack. This shift denies that aesthetic experiences could have cognitive value – thus divorcing art from knowledge – and therefore treats art as the excitation of pleasure. Gadamer’s interpretation of Kant certainly has problems, which I will discuss in a moment, but here it suffices to point out that the main issue for Gadamer is Kant’s subjectivisation of aesthetics, where aesthetic experience is taken to concern solely the subject and his or her affective states rather than truth concerning the world.121

For Gadamer, this development leads to the birth of what he calls “aesthetic consciousness” (die ästhetische Bewußtsein).122 This means that aesthetic phenomena are separated from epistemic and moral issues and are regarded as merely “aesthetic”, that is, as pure objects of experience devoid of any relation to the actualities of the world. According to Gadamer, this essentially modern approach transforms


121 The title of the section where Gadamer lays out his critique of modern aesthetics is “The Subjectivisation of Aesthetics through the Kantian Critique” (Subjektivierung der Ästhetik durch die Kantische Kritik); see Gadamer 2004, 37; Gadamer 2010, 48.

the way art had been regarded from ancient Greece to the Baroque: art is disengaged from the world and turned into a mere object of pure sensory perception and the feeling of pleasure.\footnote{Gadamer 2010, 76–77.}

This move is what Gadamer calls “aesthetic differentiation” (ästhetische Unterscheidung). Because aesthetic experience is no longer seen as having epistemic or moral value, it becomes a matter of pure “lived experience”, or Erlebnis – a concept, which was popularised as late as the 1870s by Wilhelm Dilthey, but which has its roots in the Romantic critique of Enlightenment rationality.\footnote{Gadamer 2010, 66–70.} This concept, which lacks a precise translation in English, refers to a type of experience which is, in Gadamer’s words, “something unforgettable and irreplaceable, something whose meaning cannot be exhausted by conceptual determination”.\footnote{Gadamer 2004, 59; Gadamer 2010, 73: “Was wir emphatisch ein Erlebnis nennen, meint also etwas Unvergeßliches, und Unersetzbare, das für die begreifende Bestimmung seiner Bedeutung grundsätzlich unerschöpflich ist.”} In other words, Erlebnis denotes a moment of intense feeling, an ecstasy of sorts, one that lifts subjects from their subjectivity and immerses them into the depths of pure feeling. Aesthetic experience is not understood as an Erfahrung, that is, as an experience that challenges subjects and changes them; instead, it is seen as being completely separate from the actualities of the world. Following this aesthetic differentiation, art becomes essentially what Heidegger calls “an arouser of Erlebnis” (Erlebniserreger) and what Gadamer calls Erlebniskunst: its aim was considered to be nothing other than the production of such experiences\footnote{Heidegger 1977a, 85; Gadamer 2010, 76.} Heidegger characterises this domination of Erlebnis as “the increasingly aesthetic posture taken toward art as a whole – it is the conception and estimation of art in terms of the unalloyed state of feeling and the growing barbarisation of the very state to the point where it becomes the sheer bubbling and boiling of feeling abandoned to itself”\footnote{Heidegger 1979, 88; Heidegger 1996b, 103: “Es ist die Auffassung und Schätzung derselben aus dem bloßen Gefühlzustand und die zunehmenden Barbarisierung des Gefühlzustandes selbst zum bloßen Brodeln und Wallen des sich selbst überlassenen Gefühls.”}.

This subjectivisation of art has, as both Heidegger and Gadamer argue, crucial effects on the way art’s role in the world was conceived: it loses the remaining historical, religious, and social function it still had in earlier ages. As the role of art changes from the embodiment of cultural paradigms to pleasing the cultivated
tastes of the rising bourgeoisie, art becomes trivial and it, as Heidegger quips in the *Introduction to Metaphysics (Einführung in die Metaphysik, 1935)*, “moves to the area of the pastry chef,”¹²⁸ that is, becomes something as easily consumed and easily forgotten as a nice piece of cake. Here art loses the relation it once had to the self-understanding of a historical community and becomes a matter of mere enjoyment.

According to Heidegger, this emphasis on *Erlebnis* is one of the symptoms of modern man’s estrangement from the world. In the *Contributions*, Heidegger connects the rise of *Erlebnis* thinking to the establishment of the modern scientific-technological worldview, which he calls *machination* (*Machenschaft*).¹²⁹ As the world is conceptualised as something that can be thoroughly grasped and taken under control through measuring and technical implementation, humans position themselves as masters over and above the world. The configuration of art as *Erlebniskunst* is a manifestation of this self-aggrandisement in the domain of aesthetics: when aesthetic experience is understood in terms of mere enjoyment, it becomes something that does not challenge the sovereignty of subjects or expose them to something beyond their control. On the contrary, aesthetic experience is understood as the subject’s turning within him- or herself and comfortably wallowing in pleasure, instead of openness or exposure to what is new and strange. Art is removed from its existential-historical function so that “art comes under the subjection of cultural utility, and its essence is mistaken; blindness to its essential core, to its way of grounding truth.”¹³⁰ The neutering of aesthetic experience is, according to Heidegger, symptomatic of modern man’s incapacity to face exposure to a reality that he cannot wholly control, and thus “perhaps *Erlebnis* is the element in which art dies.”¹³¹

It is in this context that Heidegger understands Hegel’s notorious claim in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, where Hegel says that “in its highest determination art is and remains for us something past.”¹³² This does not mean the blatantly erroneous claim that the production of art would have ceased or that art would not develop further, but instead that art has ceased to be “great” in the sense that it would hold

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¹²⁸ Heidegger 1983c, 140: “Kunst gehört dann im Bereich des Zuckerbäckers.”


¹³² Hegel 1986, 25: “In allen diesen Beziehungen ist und bleibt die Kunst nach der Seite ihrer höchsten Bestimmung für uns ein Vergangenes.”

**PART I: PREPARATIONS**
a central place in the lives of historical communities. Instead, it has been separated from the actualities of the world and relegated to the function of mere pleasing. The key question for Heidegger, as he suggests in the epilogue of The Origin of the Work of Art, is whether Hegel’s claim has become conclusive, or whether there is still a historical possibility for art to have a relationship with truth.

This narrative has, of course, many weaknesses. First of all, as Paul Guyer notes, it is a misinterpretation of Kant to claim that he totally separates art and aesthetic experience from any epistemic or moral value; indeed, Kant himself points out in the third Critique that the very occupation of poets is to “make sensible rational ideals”, and that art has the function of serving as a symbol of morality. As Guyer notes, “Kant’s conception of the full range of aesthetic experience is this much richer than the simple model of concept-free play with natural forms [...]”, pointing to Gadamer as a prime example of the over-simplification of Kant. Furthermore, even if it is true that a non-cognitivist interpretation of Kant’s aesthetics began to spread quickly after the publication of the third Critique, it was not universally accepted; on the contrary, as Guyer points out, already Friedrich Schiller and J.G. Herder aimed to re-establish the cognitive and moral value of art, and cognitivist approaches to aesthetic experience become a recurrent trend in aesthetics after Kant’s third Critique. In addition, as I will argue shortly, the apotheosis of powerful feelings was just one, and by no means the dominant, thread of aesthetic thinking from the late 18th century onwards, mainly exemplified by Strum und Drang, Romanticism, and aestheticism; in many other aspects some 19th-century thinkers were as sceptical toward emotions as Heidegger and Gadamer. Hence the claim that Kant gave birth to non-cognitivist aesthetics and the unbounded feelings that dominate 19th-century theorising is clearly a simplification. Hans Robert Jauß suggests that, in the end, the critique of “aesthetic consciousness” only applies to “the decadent forms of nineteenth-century aesthetic education” and cannot be taken as a comprehensive description of aesthetics as such after Kant. Finally, Andrew Bowie has argued that many aspects of modern aesthetics exemplify a counter-re-

133 Heidegger 1977b, 68.
134 Guyer 2014a, 422.
135 Guyer 2014a, 422, 452.
136 Guyer 2014a, 423.
dert [...].”
action to the growing dominance of science and technology rather than stem from this ideology of domination.\(^{138}\)

But, again, regardless of the historical accuracy of Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s narratives, I am mainly interested in the lessons they draw from these historical reconstructions. Heidegger derives from this narrative the task of what he calls in the *Contributions* “the overcoming of aesthetics” (*die Überwindung der Ästhetik*)\(^{139}\) – a task which he substantiates in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, where he aims to establish that a work of art is not a question of feeling but an ontological event of truth. In an unpublished personal note from 1934, Heidegger formulates the aim of the *Origin* essay as follows:

> Our question concerning the work, not concerning an object for a subject, but concerning an event of truth (*Wahrheitsgeschelnis*), through which we ourselves (subjects) are transformed. Grounding of *Da-sein*.\(^{140}\)

In a letter to Rudolf Krämer-Badoni, Heidegger positions his account in *The Origin* as an attack on *Erlebnis* aesthetics, as “the entire treatise opposes the interpretation of art in terms of the ‘mere enjoyment of art’ (*bloßer Kunstgenuss*)”.\(^{141}\) Instead, the essay aims to salvage art from Hegel’s conclusion and turn art again into something “question-worthy” (*frag-würdig*).\(^{142}\) In *The Origin*, this mission is substantiated by inquiring how we can conserve (*bewahren*) the radical truth claim a work of art imposes upon us by holding back (*verhalten*) our circumspective grasp of the work and letting ourselves be exposed to its strangeness.\(^{143}\) Only by doing so do we open ourselves up to the shock (*Stoß*) of the work, whereby it ruptures our ordinary relations to the world and lets it shine in ways that challenge our mastery, thus compelling us to reconsider our belongingness to world and earth beyond cal-

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139 Heidegger 1989a, § 277.
142 Bast 1986, 179.
143 Heidegger 1977b, 54.
culative circumspection. Interestingly, Heidegger articulates this rupture in terms of “displacement” (*Verrückung*):

To submit to this displacement means: to transform our accustomed ties to world and earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the world. Only the restraint of this staying lets what is created be the work that it is.

Here the work of art is no longer seen as a moment of pleasure which is easily assimilated into the existing world-order, but as a displacement in which the perceiver’s relation to the world is fundamentally altered.

Gadamer’s conception of *Erlebnis* aesthetics leads him to embark upon the task of “transcending the aesthetic realm” (*die Transzendierung der ästhetische Dimension*). In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains this as “the task of preserving the hermeneutic continuity which constitutes our being, despite the discontinuity intrinsic to aesthetic being and aesthetic experience”. For Gadamer, the problem with *Erlebnis* thinking is that it insulates aesthetic experience from the context of life within which it occurs. This produces an overtly abstract conception of aesthetic experience as pure perception, which does not carry knowledge over to the *Erlebnis* itself. Thus, aesthetic experience is denied the possibility of being a true *Erfahrung* which can change us, and which therefore could be held as an event of truth. Gadamer labours to show that *Erlebnis* thinking is based on a dogmatic abstraction that cannot withstand phenomenological scrutiny. Gadamer’s hermeneutics shows that human experience is inherently always characterised by meaningfulness, and even aesthetic experience is a carrier of meaning and therefore not separable from

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144 Heidegger 1977b, 53–54.


146 “Die Transzendierung der ästhetischen Dimension” is the title of the first chapter in the first part of *Wahrheit und Methode*.

147 Gadamer 2004, 83; Gadamer 2010, 102: “[...] die Aufgabe formuliert, angesichts solcher Diskontinuität des ästhetischen Seins und der ästhetischen Erfahrung die hermeneutische Kontinuität zu bewahren, die unser Sein ausmacht.”

the continuity of experience. Consequently, “in order to do justice to art, aesthetics must go beyond itself and surrender the ‘purity’ of the aesthetic”, Gadamer writes.149

In the end, for both the overcoming of aesthetics comes down to establishing the continuity between the work-experience and the world in which it occurs, showing that a work of art can be a catalyst of change, growth, and learning. But what is the lesson to be learned here? It seems at the outset that Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s critique discredits the value of any phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. From Heidegger’s texts one finds only a passing remark alluding to immersion (“in the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than where we usually tend to be”)150 and occasional references to “displacement”, and even if Gadamer does give immersion an explicit role in the play-character of the work, he is quick to emphasise that the work-experience is nevertheless continuous with the flux of experiences. There is very little room – and very little motivation – to be found for a comprehensive phenomenology of aesthetic immersion in their accounts. On the contrary, their arguments seem to have a devastating effect on any claim regarding an interest in aesthetic immersion: valuing immersion instead of the cognitive import of the experience is in danger of falling back into philosophical philistinism. Against the backdrop of their claims, concentrating on aesthetic immersion seems to be tantamount to looking in the wrong place, seeking value in art from something that bypasses its real significance.

This is why I consider their critiques to be a fundamental starting point for a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. I am in agreement with them in that aesthetic Erlebnis and the immersion it entails, when formulated in this simplistic way, are phenomenologically highly untenable. Yet I also think that there are valid reasons for recognising the immersive power art – the fact that in the throes of aesthetic immersion one seems to lose one’s sense of time, place and selfhood, and sink into the experience. My intention here is by no means to argue that such an experience would be the sole value of art, but rather to claim that such immersion does occur and that its phenomenology is worth delving into in its own right. Thus, what I aim to do in this study is tantamount to having one’s cake and eating it too: I wish to concentrate on the immersive aspect of aesthetic experience without

149 Gadamer 2004, 80; Gadamer 2010, 98: “Um der Kunst gerecht zu werden, muß die Ästhetik über sich selbst hinausgehen und die ‘Reinheit’ des Ästhetischen preisgeben.”

thereby falling into the sort of Erlebnis thinking Heidegger and Gadamer abhor. The lesson, or perhaps better said, the task to be found from their critique is one of finding a phenomenological articulation of aesthetic immersion that recognises its rupture-character without thereby compromising the continuity of experience and the cognitive import of art.

7.2 The emotional arthritis of (post)modernity

But that is only half the lesson. A contrary story of modern aesthetics can also be told. In *Pictures & Tears* (2001), a historiography of the relationship between art and crying, James Elkins argues that it was precisely before Kant’s aesthetics of disinterestedness that strong emotions held reign, and after the Kantian turn emotive responses to art began to be marginalised. During the 18th century, intense emotional reactions were the expected reaction to an artwork. The results were something a contemporary art lover might find bizarre. Some readers of Rousseau’s *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) reported being unable to finish the book because their eyes were full of tears, whereas in Germany the *Sturm und Drang* movement excited audiences with strongly emotional novels like Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Paintings, like Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s *Young Woman Who Weeps over Her Dead Bird* (1765) – which nowadays might be judged too sentimental and ridiculous to touch us – made even Diderot weep. One story tells of how Beethoven’s piano recitals caused such a stir in Berlin that instead of applauding, the audience thanked the composer by waving their tear-sodden handkerchiefs.

Tear ducts started to dry up by the end of the 18th century due to the influence of Enlightenment sobriety – Elkins pinpoints, via David Freedberg, especially the effect of the Kantian doctrine of disinterestedness. One can connect this to the discourse of alienation, which begins around the time of the Kantian revolution and culminates in Max Weber’s articulation of the disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world. Schelling, for example, remarks in his lectures on art that the respon-

151 Elkins 2001, 120.
154 Freedberg 1989, 74.
sive capacities of modern audiences were on the decline and that the whole culture was turning into “an age of petty resolve and crippled sensibility”, which was part of the modern condition Schelling calls Entzweiung, “estrangement”. The Romanticism of the early 19th century, as well as aestheticism later on in the century, were among the last attempts to enflame the emotions – this was the time of the Erlebniskunst Heidegger and Gadamer so disliked – but the flame soon died, and strong reactions to art started to seem dubious. Elkins writes:

The nineteenth century began to look awry at emotions. Sensibility became sentimentality, and sentimentality became saccharinity. “Sentimentalism” meant the tendency to indulge in displays of emotion, rather than follow the strict lines of reason. Still there were holdouts, old-fashioned followers of the cult of Romantic sensibility. Tears were redemptive and sweet as late as Dickens and Thackeray. [...] By the opening of the twentieth century, tears were hemmed in by mistrust.157

The contemporary situation is, Elkins claims, the progeny of this development. We do not treat, contrary to what Heidegger claims, art solely as a source of wild Erlebnisse; the hold of Romantic emotions have waned long ago. Instead, our responses to art have become more sober than that, more reserved and intellectual; we have started to treat artworks, as Elkins argues in another book, as intellectual puzzles and bearers of messages, which need to be decoded in detached contemplation.158 David Freedberg has described how contemporary art history reflects this cooling down: it has begun to look with dismay at the strong reactions of previous centuries and consider them irrational, philistine, and bourgeois.159 Similar observations have been made, for example, by Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag.160 Jauß observes that

156 Schelling 1989, 87; Schelling 1907, 112: “[…] das Zeitalter der Kleinlichkeit der Gesinnung und Verkrüppelung des Sinns.” Instead of Entzauberung, which Weber later took up, Schelling speaks of Entzweiung, “enstrangement” as the symptomatic feature of modernity (Schelling 1989, xvi).


158 For a more detailed history of this development, see James Elkins’s Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles? (1999).


“[…] there are many today who consider aesthetic experience genuine only when it has left all enjoyment behind and risen to the level of aesthetic reflection.”

Elkins does not hold back when he describes the contemporary condition: he claims we are living in “such a dry century”, that “the emotional temperature of our responses to pictures is plummeting toward absolute zero”, and we have started to suffer from “emotional arthritis”. Our responses to art have become so parsimonious and controlled, that we have become akin to Nietzschean ascetics, for whom “the object of appreciating art is indeed to feel something, but feelings have to managed, so they do not get out of hand”.

Elkins argues that this anti-emotionalism shows itself both in (post)modern art and theory. Twentieth-century art – with some exceptions, of course – wanted to overcome the old assumption that art is solely the object of Erlebnis and seek new vistas of creative enterprise. Speaking of the visual arts, Elkins voices a shift that applies to other arts as well:

From cubism to neoexpressionism, from fauvism to minimalism, twentieth-century movements didn’t ask for the kind of extreme reactions [as previous centuries]. Instead, twentieth-century painting is very much concerned with itself as art: it is intellectual, meaning that it is intended to raise all sorts of issues that don’t have to do with brute emotions.

This intellectualism is reflected in the way art is taken up as an object of theoretical inquiry. Art becomes a puzzle to be solved, and “what was once an astonishing object, thick with the capacity to mesmerize, becomes a topic for a quiz show, or a one-liner at a party, or the object of the scholar’s myopic experience”. Strong reactions to art are treated with suspicion; they are not considered to be serious matters but peculiar curiosities. As the art historian Robert Rosenblum writes in a

161 Jauß 1982a, 27; Jauß 1982b, 79: “[...] so wird heute weithin ästhetische Erfahrung erst dann als genuine angesehen, wenn sie allen Genuß hinter sich gelassen und sich auf die Stufe ästhetischer Reflexion erhoben hat.”
162 Elkins 2001, 151, 127, 128, respectively.
164 Elkins 2001, 163.
letter to Elkins, scholars have started to wear “armours” against emotions. Theory becomes so concerned to defend the dignity of the work of art that it is ready to dismiss part of the concrete ways it can touch us.

In sympathy with Elkins’s analyses, I also wish to argue that many 20th-century philosophies of art also show symptoms of this “emotional arthritis”. Speaking of “analytic” philosophy, Richard Rorty writes:

> Logical positivists such as [Carnap] trained students to brush past romance and to spot nonsense. In the space of two generations, […] dryness won out over […] romance. Philosophy in the English-speaking world became “analytic” – antimetaphysical, unromantic, highly professional, and a cultural backwater.167

Something similar could be said of continental thinking, even though it hasn’t been as averse to obscurity and romanticism as the analytic side. The whole point of Heidegger’s *Origin* is to show that a genuine work of art is not an object of subjective pleasure but a historical phenomenon whose real meaning lies in the way it opens up the world and the earth as a dwelling, and not in the way it pleases us like a piece of cake. Similarly, Gadamer’s descriptions of aesthetic experiences are, for all their phenomenological insight, remarkably unemotional. Here, one could argue, their attempts to avoid one pitfall of aesthetics – the alienation of art from truth – leads them to fall into another: their exclusion of strong affective responses from the focus of philosophising art continues Enlightenment’s distrust of feelings.

The bottom line in this story is that even if reactions to art have cooled down since the Romantic period, the theoretical aversion of emotions stems more from the intellectual tradition than from the way we actually deal with art. Elkins’s survey of crying shows that people still feel strongly about art, even if these reactions do not get into the textbooks. Though contemporary theories are correct in showing the cognitive import of artistic encounters, the aversion to Romantic excesses has led to the suppression of affectivity that no longer reflects genuine encounters with art. Recovering the role of affectivity in art remains a task in the

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contemporary theorising of art, since, as Elkins has pointed out, emotions “might have a place within modernism and postmodernism – as a part of their secret history”.\textsuperscript{168} Thus, even if one does not wish to altogether replace the “hermeneutics of art” with the “erotics of art”, as Susan Sontag famously suggests,\textsuperscript{169} I believe there are sound reasons for leaving room for strong affective responses in our accounts of aesthetic experience.

So, the lesson I wish to draw from all this is the following. If a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion faces the challenge of mediating between the continuity and discontinuity of experience, I believe there are two other extremes one needs to be wary of: the Scylla of excessive emotionalism, which isolates aesthetic experience from cognitive import, and the Charybdis of intellectualism, where the defence of art’s cognitive dignity becomes blind to the profoundly emotive and immersive ways art can affect us.

\textsuperscript{168} Elkins 2001, 201.
\textsuperscript{169} Sontag 1966, 14.
§ 8. Beyond detachment

The third lesson I wish to outline is mostly a corollary to the previous interpretation of modern aesthetics. Though it needs little reiteration, it is so important in its own right that I think it is useful to separate it from the previous one. This lesson pertains to the way modern aesthetics configures the constituent participants in the aesthetic situation. On a couple of occasions I have already made passing reference to how the tradition of modern aesthetics can be seen as being structured by the general philosophical subject-object distinction: aesthetic experience becomes a question of explaining the correlation between the subject and the object in aesthetic contemplation, be it in terms of emotional response or intellectual reflection. According to many phenomenologists, this subject-object divide imposes upon aesthetic experience a dichotomy that separates the subject and the object in a way that makes it difficult to faithfully articulate the complex interaction between the work and the perceiver. Though these problems have been known for a long time, it is Arnold Berleant who has most vocally raised them in Art and Engagement (1991).

According to Berleant, modern aesthetics can be seen to follow three basic axioms: first, a work of art is an object; two, these objects have a special status with respect to other objects; and three, they consequently require a unique form of attention from the subject. In this way aesthetic experience becomes a question of determining how the subject relates to the art object in and through aesthetic experience. Instead of highlighting the status of an emotional response, as Heidegger and Gadamer do, Berleant argues that the notion of disinterestedness, first developed by British philosophers and canonised by Kant, conceptualises aesthetic experience as a detached and distanced intellectual contemplation of the object. The subject is not seen as a participant in the event, but is instead seen as someone who perceives it from the outside. This static separation cannot, according to Berleant, faithfully articulate the interaction between the perceiver and the artwork.

Though I somewhat disagree with Berleant with regard to the notion of disinterestedness (I will discuss this further in § 22), what I find crucial here is a deeper assumption upon which Berleant’s critique builds. Berleant himself emphasises, like Gadamer and Heidegger, the problematic separation of the aesthetic object from its surroundings. There is, however, another assumption at work in the traditional

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conceptualisation, one that Berleant registers as he claims that modern aesthetics views the aesthetic object as “independent and integral”. The subject-object divide leads to the assumption that the object is a fixed entity that exists independently before its encounter with the subject, and that aesthetic experience is merely a response to the contemplation of a completed and whole object which exists separately from the act of contemplation. Though Berleant does not quote him, we can find this point elegantly summarised by Karl Philipp Moritz in an essay from 1785: “In the contemplation of the beautiful I roll the end from myself back into the object itself: I consider it, as something that is complete not in me but rather in itself, that thus comprises a whole in itself, and that affords me pleasure on its own accord.”

Hence, I do not contribute from my own resources to the formation of the aesthetic object but instead merely contemplate it from an intellectual, disinterested distance.

According to Berleant, this detached relationship between the subject and the object does not correspond to the reality of aesthetic experience – a fact Berleant sees as epitomised in contemporary practices of art which preclude the assumption of a contemplative distance. Instead of the aesthetics of detachment, Berleant suggests we should look for an aesthetics of engagement, which registers the way an aesthetic experience is the outcome of a complex, reciprocal process of actualisation between a work of art and its perceiver. This, of course, has been a standard approach in 20th-century aesthetics, as Berleant himself notes: before him, thinkers ranging from John Dewey, Roman Ingarden, Mikel Dufrenne, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Wolfgang Iser, among others, have developed aesthetic theories that take into account how the subject’s engagement in the formation of the workundermines the strict distinction between the aesthetic object and the subject of experience. Here the claim goes that the object is not a self-enclosed whole, which allows one merely to contemplate it from afar: instead, it is a schema that invites the subject to actualise it by filling it with his or her own imaginative projections, understanding, emotions, and so forth. The aesthetic experience is not achieved outside the hermeneutic continuity of experience in some neutral, detached space,

but instead, it is at least partially a product of the subject’s participation in the actualisation of the work.

I would like to add that the same assumption largely holds for the subject as well. Though the aesthetic object might demand that subjects momentarily stop their daily business with the world and adopt a particular attitude toward the object, the subject’s modality of selfhood is often seen as remaining fundamentally the same: the aesthetic object might afford intellectual pleasure or deep emotional responses, but on the whole, the experience does not put the subjectivity of the perceiver at stake. By and large, the tradition has denied the aesthetic object the possibility of questioning the sovereignty and self-possession of the subject. Behind this is the assumption that subjectivity is a fixed, autonomous entity whose mode of being is not susceptible to external influences. Later on, I will suggest that while the artwork requires the perceiver’s engagement in its actualisation, in some situations this engagement changes the perceiver’s mode of subjectivity as well.

On the whole, the corollary lesson I wish to draw from this discussion is that the strict division between a fixed subject and the self-enclosed and integral object does not pay heed to the complex interaction between the perceiver and the work. Aesthetic experience is neither a passive and straightforward reaction to stimuli coming one-directionally from the object to the subject nor a simple matter of actively attending to an object that passively succumbs to contemplation. Instead, the lesson to be had from Berleant’s critique is that aesthetic experience is better approached outside the strict subject-object or passive-active division, thus paying heed to the complex ways both sides contribute to the actualisation of the aesthetic experience.
§ 9. Transcending the mimetic schema

The fourth lesson comes from Miguel de Beistegui’s recent narrative of metaphysical aesthetics. In *Aesthetics After Metaphysics* (2012), de Beistegui argues that the tradition of Western aesthetics, beginning with Plato and Aristotle and leading all the way to Hegel and Adorno, is characterised by an idealistic prevalence to subordinate the *event* of the work of art to a pre-given conception, or *truth*, regarding reality, so that the artwork can, at best, only *represent* an ultimately intelligible truth in a sensory form. This has already been intuited by Heidegger and many after him; for example, I believe Andrew Benjamin is aiming at the idealist approach to art when he writes:

There are important philosophical traditions delimited by the attempt to identify the specificity of art. However, within those traditions, art is often taken either to point to something other than art, or to stage that which is external to art and which comes to presence with it. The difficulty inherent in such approaches is that art is subservient to that which is other than art.\(^{175}\)

However, I believe it is de Beistegui who voices most articulately the problems and possibilities inherent to this tendency.

De Beistegui suggests that aesthetics has tended to insert the question of art within a broader philosophical conception of reality, which dictates the way art is to be approached. This entails positioning art within a philosophically derived ground, which enables thinking to take conceptual hold of what purportedly art is and does. In the idealist model, art is seen as transcending the sensible realm and opening up access to the super-sensible dimension. In this way art becomes a middle term in philosophy’s attempt to reach the super-sensuous, and in this process art’s own way of making sense is tamed and controlled by an overarching philosophical insight. This has the effect, de Beistegui suggests, of giving art a merely *mimetic* role in the overall economy of being: art can only represent truths the philosopher has already independently reached. Here *mimesis* does not refer to simple copying, in the sense that art would be merely a matter of copying outward appearances, but instead it refers to the sensuous *representation* of metaphysical, super-sensuous models behind outward appearances. In metaphysical aesthetics, reality is understood to have

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175 Benjamin 2004, 22.
a static, intelligible structure which art merely sensuously reproduces. The task of aesthetics is then to locate art within these structures of reality.

De Beistegui suggests that the history of aesthetics can be plotted as the history of the mimetic function of art. From Greek Antiquity to Neoclassicism, de Beistegui views aesthetics as moving neatly within Platonic and Aristotelian parameters: in Platonism, art’s mimetic function was to imitate the ideal, perfect, and ultimately intelligible forms of its subjects; in Aristotelian thought, which forms the other thread of aesthetics from Antiquity to the Renaissance and Neoclassical thought, art imitates the ultimate telos on nature and presents us nature as it would be in its perfection. Kant’s critique of aesthetic judgement gives, de Beistegui claims, art a mimetic role as the disinterested pleasure we draw from art exceeds mere sensuous pleasure as it symbolically represents for us the highest ideas of moral goodness. Then, in Romantic aesthetics, artistic mimesis becomes a way of sensuously intimating the fundamental unity of subject and object by effecting in the subject an experience of merging with reality. The German Idealists raised the mimetic function to an even higher metaphysical level, arguing that art imitates not only mere appearances but gives access to the ideas behind them. Though de Beistegui identifies the mimetic schema beginning to waver with Nietzsche and phenomenology, he claims it can still be seen in the 20th century in cases like Adorno, who, despite all his efforts to establish art as a space of non-identity that is superior to philosophy’s capacity to think it, ends up formulating art’s claim to truth by the standards of conceptual knowledge, whereby art’s mode of presentation is evaluated in terms of its capacity to present conceptual knowledge in sensuous terms.

Of course, it is clear that not all threads in the history of aesthetics fit into this idealistic model. Though he does not elaborate this very far, de Beistegui identifies

176 Here the wording needs to be carefully considered. In Book X of The Republic, Plato famously denies the mimetic arts any access to the Ideas, and the Platonic metaphysics of art cannot be straightforwardly identified with Plato’s own position. To complicate matters, Plato makes a distinction in The Sophist (Plat. Soph. 236b, 264c) between two types of images – likeness (eikōn) and appearance (phantasma) – where the former mediates access to what it imitates, whereas the latter deceives the viewer into thinking that the image is the original. This distinction opens the possibility that certain images can provide truthful access to what they imitate.

177 de Beistegui 2012, 11–23.
178 de Beistegui 2012, 30–34.
180 de Beistegui 2012, 34–42.
181 de Beistegui 2012, 42–57.
another option, namely the realistic interpretation of mimesis. One can assume he is pointing to cases such as 18\textsuperscript{th}-century British empiricism and the realist movements of the arts. In realistic mimesis, art is not seen as opening up access to some ideal realm, but instead as providing faithful repetitions of sensible reality. Art merely reproduces “the brute, immediate reality” we already deal with in our everyday dealings with it.\textsuperscript{182} Hence, de Beistegui seems to suggest, the history of aesthetics can be plotted in terms of two options, both which give art a mimetic role: either art imitates the ideal, super-sensible structure of reality or the direct, sensible appearance of things. The question arising from this dualism is, of course, whether there is a third option, which escapes the categories of idealist and realist mimesis.

De Beistegui’s narrative is admittedly somewhat selective, and he himself recognises that what he is offering cannot be taken as suggesting a unitary and homogenous history of aesthetics. I do not here wish to embark upon a critical scrutiny of his individual interpretations, though that would be a worthwhile endeavour. But what is essential at this point is de Beistegui’s claim that the tradition of aesthetics “never calls into question the idea that, when everything is said done [sic], it’s the philosophical concept, and not the artistic percept, which provides the complete and absolute form in which truth is expressed”.\textsuperscript{183} What is left unthought is the possibility that art might reveal something about reality to which philosophy has no prior access. In other words, the problem lies “in the way in which truth is formulated in advance of that event [of the work of art], and thus not allowing it to produce its own truth, or disrupt that of philosophy”.\textsuperscript{184} Herein lies the main problem – and the unthought possibility – of Western aesthetics.

According to de Beistegui, with the collapse of the metaphysical schema, as well as with the birth of modern art, the traditional mimetic schema has become outdated and untenable. Neither our contemporary philosophical views of reality nor contemporary artistic practices can accommodate the mimetic conception art and the static, universalistic metaphysics behind it. Philosophically, this poses the challenge of formulating a post-idealistic aesthetics which would neither allocate art the function of sensuously representing a fundamentally super-sensible idea nor

\textsuperscript{182} de Beistegui 2012, 3.

\textsuperscript{183} de Beistegui 2012, 2.

\textsuperscript{184} de Beistegui 2012, 2. Cf. Heidegger’s claim in his personal notes on the The Origin of the Work of Art, that in aesthetics “the subject-object relation as feeling is fundamental (decisions on truth and being and so on already made.)” (Heidegger 1990, 5: “Grundlegend ist die Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung als fühlende (über Wahrheit und Sein und dgl. ist schon entschieden).”)
view art as merely offering raw, immediate sense perceptions.\textsuperscript{185} Therefore, if in the previous sections I identified the problem of navigating, first, between the continuity of life and the discontinuity of immersion, and, second, between overt \textit{Erlebnis} thinking and emotionless intellectualism, de Beistegui suggests that there is also a third dualism that should be avoided: “The question, then, is one of knowing how to find a way between, or, better said perhaps, outside the Scylla of idealism and the Charybdis of realism.”\textsuperscript{186} His way of navigating through this dichotomy is the fundamental lesson I wish to draw from him.

The work of art, de Beistegui argues, is an event that disrupts ordinary ways of perceiving the world and reveals “a reality that is precisely different from the reality we observe as beings-in-the-world, without being the reality of another, transcendent, and superior world […].”\textsuperscript{187} The artwork has a \textit{metaphorical} function in the etymological sense (Gr. \textit{metaferein}, “to carry across”), in that the work takes us “farther than what is already here, not a beyond of the world or life, but in the still undamaged depth that the world and life might retain […].”\textsuperscript{188} This dimension of sense underneath the habitual world is what de Beistegui denotes by the term \textit{hypersensible}, by which he means the excess of sense uncovered by the work.\textsuperscript{189} The hypersensible does not point to a super-sensible realm over and above the sensible one, but instead to a plenitude of sense tucked away \textit{within} the sensible itself and covered over by our daily, customary dealings with the world. Here de Beistegui extrapolates Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of painting, according to which paintings have the capacity of revealing the invisibility belonging to visibility itself, covered over as it is in quotidian perception.\textsuperscript{190} The work of art, according to de Beistegui, elevates our contact with the world from the level of ordinary perception to that of “artistic vision”, which is “neither the immediate vision of phenomenological life, nor the intellectual vision of the mind, directed toward sense and essences.”\textsuperscript{191} In other words, our relationship with the world, when transformed by the metaphor, can be reduced neither to intelligibility (as the idealistic model would

\textsuperscript{185} de Beistegui 2012, 3, 62.
\textsuperscript{186} de Beistegui 2012, 3.
\textsuperscript{187} de Beistegui 2012, 3.
\textsuperscript{188} de Beistegui 2012, 110–111.
\textsuperscript{189} de Beistegui 2012, 4.
\textsuperscript{190} See Merleau-Ponty 1964.
\textsuperscript{191} de Beistegui 2012, 67.
have it) nor to immediate sense perception (as realism takes it). Instead, vision is about a change in the way we are in the world, “a certain loosening of perception, a certain distance from the manner in which the world is immediately given”. As such, the work of art does not reveal something about perception as such, but rather changes the very mode of perception itself: the world gives itself in a radically new manner in and through the metaphor and reveals itself in its “forgotten, overlooked, or exhausted intensity.” In this new manner of perception, the excess revealed by art has to be seen as a more comprehensive transformation of sense altogether.

The reason I find this important is that it provides a fruitful and viable space for formulating a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion. What enthrals us in a work of art is not that we turn, like Schopenhauer would have it, into a “pure subject of knowing”, into a detached tabula rasa who can contemplate the pure, ideal forms of reality. Yet, some kind of transformation does take place in aesthetic immersion, and it is no longer a case of the quotidian I relating to quotidian things in a quotidian manner. Instead, the immersive capacity of art stems from the way it turns the ordinary into something extraordinary and makes me see, if only for a moment, phenomena in their replete givenness, all the while changing the very way I inhabit the world. In keeping with this, I aim to formulate in the following a phenomenological account of aesthetic immersion that does not delegate it to a metaphysical function but at the same time does not bypass its out-of-the-ordinary way of transforming the sense of the world and my sense of selfhood.

192 de Beistegui 2012, 68.
193 de Beistegui 2012, 4.
194 Schopenhauer 1966a, 179.
§ 10. It’s not all that bad

The fifth and final lesson of history is much shorter than the previous four. This lesson amounts to a healthy dose of scepticism regarding post-metaphysical narratives of aesthetics. One can quickly get the impression that the post-metaphysical accounts regard the tradition to be problematic to its core and subject to total abandonment. Likewise, one could easily think that post-metaphysical thinkers propose accounts that are wholly divorced from the tradition. This by no means is the case, and there remains a lot to be learned from the tradition. That is the last lesson I wish to draw.

First of all, it would be, as de Beistegui himself notes, “the most naïve desire and indeed the most metaphysically overdetermined gesture” to assume that we have already broken off with metaphysics and left it behind.\(^\text{195}\) Post-metaphysical thinking need not be understood as something coming simply after metaphysics as if the Western tradition was over and done with and we were able to start with a blank slate. Contemporary philosophy cannot naively think that it can just leave the tradition behind tout court and embark on a voyage to unknown lands. On the contrary, I wish to argue that the tradition should not, and indeed cannot, be simply disregarded.

It cannot be simply disregarded, because contemporary thinking has its roots deep in its soil, and the possibilities of thought available to us are conditioned by the tradition in which we find ourselves embedded. Post-metaphysical thinking has to occur in intimate relation to the tradition, interacting with the very thing it attempts to overcome; otherwise, that thinking might fall prey to what it tries to elude. Like the shadow of Buddha, which lingered for centuries after his death, metaphysics too still casts its shadow on contemporary thinking.\(^\text{196}\) For example, despite their criticism of Kantian aesthetics, both Heidegger and Gadamer adopt, to use Quentin Meillassoux’s term,\(^\text{197}\) on a deeper level the very correlationalist

\(^{195}\) de Beistegui 2012, 1.


\(^{197}\) Meillassoux 2006, 18 & passim. Meillassoux’s definition (2008, 5) goes: “Such considerations reveal the extent to which the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of correlation. By ‘correlation’ we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call
paradigm that informs modern aesthetics, which approaches aesthetic problems in terms of the correlation between receptivity and givenness. Andrew Bowie points out how "Heidegger’s most notable arguments have themselves roots in the work of German Idealist and early Romantic thinkers [...]". Both Heidegger and Gadamer continue the cognitivist strand of aesthetics that has its roots deep in Antiquity, as they study the connection between art and truth; and Gadamer’s aesthetics can be seen as continuing the play-theoretical strand of modern aesthetics that also Kant exemplifies. Overall, it could be argued that many of the central claims of so-called postmodern or post-metaphysical thinking have their roots in previous eras, and pretending to break with the tradition amounts to belittling it rather than really engaging with it, as Bowie points out: “[…] the portentous announcements of the radically new era […] have more to do with repression of, than with a serious desire to engage with a past we cannot simply escape”. In many aspects, my study will also be a continuation of the main trends of modern aesthetics – correlationalism, cognitivism, emotivism, and play theory – and I wish to see this as a positive possibility rather than a negative sign of falling back into metaphysical speculation.

This leads me to the point that the tradition should not be simply replaced, because, as Bowie once again points out, "the conception of a pure break between metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinking creates the risk of blindness to resources from the ‘metaphysical’ past". This, of course, is not strictly speaking what the hermeneutic critiques of metaphysics aim at: they are not about a pure and definite break with the tradition but about assessing its heritage from the perspective of its end. However, such assessment runs the risk of missing the fact that the history of philosophy is ripe with observations that are still highly valid even after the purported closure of metaphysics. Throughout this study, I will be drawing phenomenologically acute insights from metaphysical thinkers, especially the Ger-

correlationalism any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined.” (Meillassoux 2006, 18: “De telles considérations nous permettent de saisir en quoi la notion centrale de la philosophie moderne depuis Kant semble être devenue celle de corrélation. Par ‘corrélation,’ nous entendons l’idée suivant laquelle nous n’avons accès qu’à la corrélation de la pensée et de l’être, et jamais à l’un de ces termes pris isolément. Nous appellerons donc désormais correlationalisme tout courant de pensée qui soutiendra le caractère indépassable de la corrélation ainsi entendue.”).

198 Bowie 2003, 8.
200 Bowie 1993, 17.
man Idealists. This also highlights the fact that many phenomenological observations have already been made before the inception of phenomenology as a distinct branch of philosophy. Ignoring this fact can lead one to overstate the novelty value of one's findings.

While the examples of history might lead the phenomenologist to speculate rather than describe experiences, it is also ripe with insights the phenomenologist can take heed of. One lesson to be had is that there is much to be learned from the tradition, and the problem is mainly one of distinguishing the baby from the bathwater.
§ 11. What to remember from the past

“There those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it” says George Santayana in the almost clichéd line from The Life of Reason (1905–1906). This is all too true in the case of thinking that attempts to overcome metaphysics. The confrontation with the tradition cannot be a simple abandonment of earlier patterns of thought and venturing into new vistas of thinking. Instead, in order to open up new possibilities of thinking, philosophy must take a definite stance with respect to its history and think through that which remains unthought in it. This does not mean that all contributions of metaphysical thinking should be rejected just because they are articulated in a metaphysical framework. Instead, the confrontation with the tradition entails interrogating what can be salvaged from the tradition which, on the whole, has ceased to correspond to the contemporary experience of reality. In this sense, the “overcoming of aesthetics” is as much a continuation of the tradition as it is an interruption of it.

In this chapter, I have outlined different ways phenomenological thinkers have traced dominant trends in the history of aesthetics. These narratives are, I wish to repeat, only partial and simplifying, and it is at least not my intention to claim any of them captures an underlying logic of history in toto. Instead, what they do offer are heuristic models from which specific phenomenological insights can be drawn. These insights afford specific lessons I wish to keep in mind when formulating my phenomenology of aesthetic immersion.

Firstly, a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion has to be reflective of the influence of theory on the phenomenon under description. Even if the history of metaphysical aesthetics cannot be forced into a neatly linear “from…to” pattern, one of its dominant traits has been to impose upon art a conceptual framework which delimits and determines beforehand how art is to be thought. This tendency stems from the same attempt to bring every aspect of reality under philosophy’s panoptic view and from the consequent repression of otherness. Modern aesthetics has from early on been ready to identify an element of indeterminateness or incommensurability in the presence of art, but this presence – call it the je-ne-sais-quoi, confused sense, or indeterminateness – has most often been neutralised and done away with by inserting it into a fundamentally rational substructure. Aesthetic experience is interrogated from the perspective of philosophy’s own interests, and theories do

201 Santayana 2011, 172.
not arise from encounters with art itself. Thus the “art” and “aesthetic experience” dealt with in these theories are, at least partially, a priori constructions arising from the theories themselves. As Hegel himself observes, aesthetics begins “lemmatically”, always already presupposing some kind of a philosophical background.\textsuperscript{202} As a result, what we get from them are only distorted, partial, and biased accounts that pretend to offer the whole truth. This problem, as I will suggest in the next chapter, is especially pertinent in relation to aesthetic immersion, since immersion precludes any reflective participation and is prone to being filled with philosophical speculation. The first task to be addressed is to inquire whether it would be possible to think immersion phenomenologically without dominating it.

Secondly, a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion has to navigate between the discontinuity of Erlebnis and the continuity of Erfahrung. It might be tempting to think that aesthetic immersion is a matter of leaving the ordinary world behind and dissolving into the world of artwork. To some extent this is true, but the picture is not that simple. As Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s critique of Erlebnis aesthetics shows, considering aesthetic experience as a pure rupture in the continuity of experience raises several problems. For Heidegger and Gadamer, the main problem lies in the way such thinking renders aesthetic experience separate from any cognitive value, denying it the possibility of becoming an Erfahrung that changes the one undergoing it. Since I am here interested in aesthetic immersion and not its posterior cognitive import, the problem lies in establishing the hermeneutic continuity of aesthetic immersion while at the time holding on to its character as a rupture in this very continuity.

Thirdly, aesthetic immersion needs to be thought outside the strict separation of subject and object, and of activity and passivity. Modern aesthetics shows a tendency to conceptualise aesthetic experience in terms of a strict subject-object divide, whereupon the subject is conceptually separated from the aesthetic object, and the “aesthetic consciousness” of the subject is conceived of as disengaged and distanced from the object. Furthermore, the aesthetic object is understood as being a closed and integral whole which the subject merely contemplates and does not add anything from his or her own resources. Several phenomenological critiques, most vocally that of Arnold Berleant, have undermined such a strict distinction and called for an aesthetics of engagement which pays heed to the complex processual nature

\textsuperscript{202} Hegel 1986, 42.
of aesthetic experiencing to which both the perceiver and the work participate in
to demarcate strict lines between subjectivity and objec-
tivity. It is to be admitted, though, that the following study remains within the
frame of the subject's experience and does not endeavour, as some post-humanist
branches of philosophy do, to leave behind the perspective of subjective experience.
Though this frame could certainly be seen as flirting with subjectivism or the prior-
itisation of subjective experience over more objective perspectives, it is important
to see that the notion of subjectivity that I employ later in this study undermines
classical notions of subjectivity and the subject-object dichotomy in a way that dis-
tances it from classical subjectivism.

Fourthly, a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion has to rethink the relation of
aesthetic experience, phenomenality, and being-in-the-world. Aesthetics can, on the
whole, be seen as being preoccupied with positioning art with regard to the met-
aphysical division of the sensible and the super-sensible – in other words, what is
seen as essential in art is not phenomenality itself but the access to that which is
beyond phenomenality. After the collapse of the metaphysical division, we are left
with the phenomenal realm, and art's relation to it has to be rethought. This shift
opens up the possibility of inquiring what art, when thought outside the idealist
logic, has to teach about phenomenality and being-in-the-world. As de Beistegui
suggests, this amounts to showing how art is neither a matter of merely imitating
the phenomenal world nor about pointing to a dimension beyond it, but of disclos-
ing a more profound, usually unnoticed richness of phenomenal reality itself.

Fifthly, and finally, not everything is wrong with the aesthetic tradition. Even if,
on the whole, the structures of metaphysics fail to correspond to contemporary
experiences of reality, the aesthetic tradition is replete with insights that remain
valid even if they are taken out of their metaphysical context. In the course of this
study, I will repeatedly return to the history of aesthetics and employ numerous
observations drawn from it. Underlying this practice is the conviction that our re-
lationship to tradition should not be categorically dismissive. Sometimes the right
way to confront tradition is not to go to the other extreme, but to inquire what can
be salvaged from it.
CHAPTER 2:
HOW TO SEE THE RIDDLE WITHOUT SOLVING IT

In order to catch the fleeting phenomenon, he [the philosopher] must enchain it in the fetters of rule, to tear its beautiful body into concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a meagre skeleton of words. Is it a wonder if natural feeling does not recognise itself in such a reproduction, and if the truth of the analyst’s report seems like a paradox?

Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man¹

¹ Schiller 2001, 310: "Um die flüchtige Erscheinung zu haschen, muß er sie in die Fesseln der Regel schlagen, ihren schöne Körper in Begriffe zerschneiden, und in einem dürftigen Wortgerippe ihren lebendigen Geist aufbewahren. Ist es ein Wunder, wenn sich das natürliche Gefühl in einem solchen Abbild nicht wieder findet, und die Wahrheit in dem Berichte des Analytens als ein Paradoxon erscheint?"
§ 12. Hunters and hounds

In the previous chapter, I investigated the problem of beginning. I argued that a beginning for a phenomenology of aesthetic immersion finds a viable starting point by inquiring into the ways art and aesthetic experience have been determined in philosophical theories throughout the history of philosophy. The next question is how to proceed from here. This chapter deals with another preparatory issue: how to think of aesthetic immersion and the work of art philosophically without totalising them? In the epilogue to The Origin of the Work of Art, Heidegger writes that the task of thinking “the riddle of art, the riddle that art itself is” should not aim to solve the riddle but instead should simply see it as a riddle.2 But how does philosophy do that? Would that even be possible? As my brief historical narrative suggests, philosophy’s attempt to see the riddle of art has often been tantamount to solving it – or at least to obliterating the riddle by constructing a rational substructure that explains away the artwork’s resistance to discursive articulation. Could philosophy approach the work of art on its own accord? How far can it go in articulating the riddle of art, redeeming what is possible, without going too far and trespassing its jurisdiction? Would it be possible to think of art in a way that would not compromise art’s alterity while at the time maintaining its non-indifference to thinking?

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My specific problem in this chapter is as follows. I am committed to the hermeneutic claim that there is no unmediated, theory-free access to phenomena solely "on their own accord", and that all understanding begins from a pre-given conceptual framework, which in one way or another informs how things are understood. Even phenomenological descriptions are not free from presupposed theoretical frameworks that guide the description. However, I argue that aesthetic immersion is one of those experiences that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of conceptual frameworks. Since it is by nature non-reflective and thus non-accessible to direct philosophical reflection, thinking runs the risk of projecting on it all sorts of explanations that do not necessarily stem from the experience itself but rather from the explanatory framework used to describe it. So how does one navigate between the necessity of having a philosophical framework and the risk of letting the framework feed unwarranted elements into the description?3

In this chapter, I will outline a strategy of phenomenological description that aims at minimizing the influence the philosophical framework has upon the description of aesthetic immersion by describing how immersion interrupts and destabilises this framework. In this way the experience of immersion can be brought into a phenomenological register without thereby turning the experience into a mirror in which philosophy reflects itself. Hence, what interests me here is outlining a phenomenological framework of some fundamental ways in which we human beings exist in the world, so that later on I can analyse how the work of art changes and disturbs these experiential structures in and through aesthetic immersion.

In order to do that, the following sections outline a phenomenological account of the constitution of the there – the process by which the self and the world co-originally determine each other. Then, in Part II, I will describe how the work of art can be seen as an event which modulates the very constitution of the there and in this way also modulates the sense of the world as well as the witness’s sense of selfhood. This approach is somewhat analogous to Emmanuel Levinas’s strategy in his ethical thinking. Levinas’s phenomenology presents pioneering work on how to bring the significance of otherness into phenomenological discourse without thereby eradicating that very otherness. Though in the following I will draw inspiration

3 Paul Crowther (1993, 10) notices this same problem. Like my approach in this study, Crowther’s solution is to study how our concrete encounters with art affect “the ontological reciprocity” of human existence and the world. However, Crowther does not emphasise the temporal disparity of aesthetic experience and our phenomenological access to this experience, and thus his phenomenology develops, perhaps somewhat unwarrantedly, in a more “direct” fashion than mine.
from Levinas’s way of thinking the other in terms of the other’s trace – that is, in terms of the very impossibility of capturing and synchronising the encounter with the other person in an intentional act, which thereby signifies “otherwise than being” – my contention is that the work of art is not wholly isomorphic with the ethical encounter with the other person and cannot thereby be described solely in the register offered by Levinas’s phenomenology. Consequently, my approach differs slightly from Levinasian phenomenology in that I will take as my starting point a Heidegger-inspired, though slightly modified, topological version of phenomenological ontology, which takes as its locus the there-place of human existence. This chapter is devoted to outlining the basic constitution of the there against which the following descriptions of aesthetic immersion in the art work will be worked out.

This strategy aims to pay heed to an issue inherent to philosophical thinking as such, namely the way philosophy itself stages the scene in which it takes something up as an object of inquiry. Philosophical approaches cannot do away with the discursive spaces in which they operate, and at times it is difficult to see how much of the inquired object is born of the chosen discourse itself. However, there is no taking leave of these discursive spaces, because they provide the necessary tools and platforms with which philosophy can operate. While commenting on Schlegel’s metaphilosophy, Frederick Beiser articulates this issue as follows:

On the one hand, it is dangerous to have a system, because it sets arbitrary limits to enquiry and imposes an artificial order on the facts. On the other hand, it is necessary to have a system, because unity and coherence are essential to all knowledge and it is only in the context of a system that a proposition is justifiable.\(^4\)

A self-reflective philosophy is faced with the issue of mediating between the necessities of providing discursive tools to bring the object of inquiry within philosophical reach, all the while keeping an eye on the ways these tools affect the phenomenon under inquiry. Without such self-reflectivity, philosophers can become what Schlegel, in referring to Fichte, calls “hunters” (Jäger), who end up killing the very thing they attempt to grasp.\(^5\) A self-reflective philosophy understands that it

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\(^4\) Beiser 2003, 126.

\(^5\) The fragment in question is from Philosophische Lehrjahre 1796–1806 (Schlegel 1963, 61), where Schlegel writes in Fragment 420: “Warum erkennt K.[ant] die coexistente Nullität d[er] Welt und
has no neutral, absolute access to reality, since its own methods necessarily par-
take in opening up this access. Admitting this amounts to a certain weakening of
philosophy’s traditional aspirations of gaining absolute knowledge – or, in another
perspective, to a sobering acceptance that philosophy, at best, is an endless striving
for knowledge it will never conclusively attain. Philosophy needs its methods, tools,
and discursive spaces, but it should not use these to suffocate the phenomena it
studies, but instead should use them in order get as near them as possible without
compromising their otherness. Such thinking would, following Schlegel’s simile,
turn the hunter into a tracker dog (*Spürhund*), who follows traces without killing
the prey. The fundamental aim of this chapter is to suggest a way of thinking like a
tracker dog.

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weiß oft, da ist was, aber nicht was es ist. Er ist d[er] *Spürhund* der ph [Philosophie] Fichte d[er]
Jäger. – Ahndung vom Realen im Gegensatz des Logischen; auch eine falsche Antithese. –"
§ 13. A brief topology of being

My fundamental philosophical starting point is offered by Heidegger’s later ontology. In the following, I will outline some central aspects of Heidegger’s ontology of the there and implement it with some elements taken from thinkers like Levinas, Nancy, Marion, and Romano. My overall reading of Heidegger is heavily influenced by Jeff Malpas’s topological interpretation of his oeuvre. As said earlier, the fundamental strategy of this exposition is to lay out a basic phenomenology of the way the world and the self relate to one another, so that I can begin to describe how the work of art can be approached in terms of its way of interrupting or modulating this process of constitution in and through aesthetic immersion.

13.1 Taking-place of the there

The project of metaphysics, as already mentioned in the first chapter, can be seen as the project of founding the meaningfulness of presence on some transcendent ground. By doing so, metaphysical thinking conceives of reality as a static structure, divided into bipolar categories of the sensory and the super-sensory, real and ideal, subject and object, thinking and being, mind and body, and so on. In “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” (“Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens”, 1964), Heidegger claims that after the end of metaphysics, thinking is faced with the task of inquiring what has remained unthought in the tradition, and what opens the possibility of thinking beyond metaphysics. Heidegger argues that the emphasis on presence in metaphysics ruled out the possibility of asking what makes possible that presence, that is, the clearing (Lichtung) in which appearing occurs. According to Heidegger, it is precisely the process of constitution, whereby a place for the encounter of the self and the world is opened up before their division into subject and object, which becomes a possible theme of thought after the end of metaphysics. It is a move from static essences to the taking-place of the world, to its ceaseless coming-into-presence and opening-up, which first allows thinking and being to come into contact and thereby constitute one another. This approach redirects the philosophical gaze from the essences of singular things to the event-character of

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7 Heidegger 2007, 74–79.
8 Heidegger 2007, 79–82.
being, that is, to the unfolding of the there (Da) in which things and human beings⁹ are carried to their place. De Beistegui summarises this conception as follows:

The being of what is, and which can never be confused with its beingness, its presence, is the “there is” prior to all present beings. Being unfolds as the “there” (da), or as the “there is” of everything that is: not as the “here” and “now” of a concrete being individuated in the world, but as the dimension, nowhere visible, never actual, yet always in place, virtually, whence beings emerge and tower up. Not a concrete hic et nunc, then, but the very opening up of the space and time, the unfolding of the Open as such, the happening of the clearing in which things take place and the world is born.¹⁰

This post-metaphysical notion of being as an event finds its first and one of its most intricate expressions in Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event). The name for this event, as alluded to in the book’s title, is Ereignis. This ambiguous word means “event”, “occurrence”, or “incident” in everyday German, but Heidegger plays with the etymological roots and semantic associations of the word. Etymologically, Ereignis stems from eröugen, “to show” or “to place before one’s eyes”.¹¹ However, it also makes strong associations with the adjective eigen (own) and the verb eignen (to be suitable).¹² What Heidegger is aiming at with his choice of words is a dynamic conception of being, where being is understood as an event, where the place of the coming-into-presence of beings is opened. Ereignis refers to the taking-place of the world, that is, to the way being takes place as the there (Da), as the time-space of the world, and where beings and humans are gathered in their place. This dense description can be seen as tying together several elements which, according to Heidegger, together constitute meaningful reality: 1) the event-character of being (denoted by the everyday meaning of Ereignis in German), 2) the reciprocal appropriation (alluded to through the association with eigen) of Dasein and the world, 3) the complicated process of concealment and unconcealment, 4) the

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⁹ It is of course a valid question whether humans are the only beings capable of being aware of their being-in-the-world, but in this study I will not venture further with this question.

¹⁰ de Beistegui 2004, 115.

¹¹ See Ereignis in Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache (Kluge 2011, 254).

¹² Malpas 2008, 215–216; Vallega-Neu 2010, 140–141. It is, however, important to bear in mind that Ereignis does not etymologically derive from eigen, and their similarity is merely incidental, even though Heidegger does make great use this allusion.
situated or “implaced” character of being, and 5) the finitude or limitation of being. These elements overlap each other and articulate the same event to the extent that they cannot be easily explained linearly, and yet something of the sort needs to be attempted to clarify the most complex notion I will be using in this study.

**The event-character of being.** Heidegger’s *Ereignis* is not an ontic happening or an occurrence which presupposes and supervenes on an opening in which it occurs, but rather it is the very opening of the Open, which makes ontic events possible. Such thinking shifts from seeing the world through universal and hierarchical structures – that is, as something already differentiated – to approaching it as an ongoing process of differentiation, where the meaningfulness of the world, as well as the selfhood of *Dasein*, is continuously re-arranged.13 Here, then, attention is given to the situated, unique and instantaneous nature of meaning, and the world is no longer seen as a prefixed object, as a hierarchical structure, but instead as the incessant upsurge of meaning, as the constant reconfiguration of meaningful presence. Similarly, the selfhood of *Dasein* is not seen as an isolated and fixed subject outside the world, but as a result of *Dasein*’s ongoing conversation with the world. Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis* attempts to capture being in its happening in the way that it opens up a region where it gathers beings together and holds them in their place.

** Appropriation.** Sometimes in English commentaries *Ereignis* is translated as “appropriation” or “event of appropriation”, emphasising the allusion to the word *eigen*, “own”. This translation has a definite force to it, since for Heidegger a crucial aspect of *Ereignis* is the complex, chiasmatic logic of appropriation between humans and the world. Indeed, in “The Principle of Identity” (“Der Satz der Identität”, 1957), Heidegger introduces *Ereignis* as “simply this owning (*Eignen*) in which man and Being are delivered over to each other”.14 Heidegger argues that in metaphysical thinking, the relationship between man and being has been thought of in terms of “belonging together” where “to belong’ means as much as: to be assigned and placed into the order of a ‘together’, established in the unity of a manifold, combined into the unity of a system, mediated by the unifying center of an authoritative synthesis”.15

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eignis thinking, this relationship is thought of as “belonging together”, so that man and being are not thought of as starting from their unity granted by a metaphysical ground, but instead starting from the way human awareness and meaningful presence co-originally determine each other in their unity-in-difference: neither can be thought without the other, but neither is reducible to the other. Dasein exists in such a way that it is open to the openness of being, capable of transcending its interiority toward the world and appropriating it as its own dwelling, taking it up as the place which sustains its existence and stages its possibilities — precisely this openness defines Dasein as Dasein. Conversely, this appropriation is possible only because Dasein itself is appropriated by the world and thrown into a specific situation which delimits its possibilities, and therefore Dasein is, in a sense, owned by the world.

This belongingness-together, or, to use Paul Crowther’s term, this “ontological reciprocity” undermines classical distinctions between the subject and the object as well as the ideal and the real. Dasein is not an isolated subject gazing on the world from an Archimedean point but is instead immersed in and tied to its world, irreducibly belonging together with things, which it can consider as objects existentially separate from it only in intellectual abstraction. On the same note, the meaningfulness of the world is not the result of an ideal, purely subject-dependent process — so as to make the world a mere projection of Dasein’s self-actualisation — but neither is the world a fixed set of meanings in which Dasein has nothing to say; instead, the way Dasein interprets the world as meaningful and appropriates it as its dwelling is a complex interplay of Dasein’s aspirations and ways of understanding inherited from Dasein’s historical and cultural context. All this aims merely to articulate the way Dasein’s appropriation of the world as a dwelling is conditioned by Dasein’s own belongingness to, and thus appropriated by, the world. My fundamental thesis in this study is that the working of an artwork is best understood when investigated in terms of the way it affects this ontological correlation between the self and the world.

Concealment and unconcealment. So far my characterisation has moved on to the level of meaningful presence and Dasein’s relation to it. However, what makes meaningful presence possible — that is, the disclosure of beings — is that the pro-

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16 Heidegger 2006, 38–42.
18 In this sense, I follow Paul Crowther (1993 and 2009), whose investigations regarding the ontological role of art begin from the same starting point, though our methods and perspectives somewhat differ from each other.
cess of disclosure itself conceals itself under that which it discloses. This process of
differentiation, according to Heidegger, is the very thing that remains unthought in
metaphysics. Ereignis is essentially this process of disclosure and withdrawal, com-
ing-into-presence and concealment, where meaningful presence is continuously
configured anew. Jussi Backman has developed a neat conceptual apparatus for illustrat-
ing Heidegger’s point. According to Backman, Heidegger’s thinking operates with
three interrelated dimensions of being: being\(_1\), which denotes the simple, meaningful
presence of singular beings; being\(_2\), which denotes the concealed and indeterminate
horizon against which meaningful presence first becomes possible (articulated by
the later Heidegger in terms of the fourfold); and being\(_3\), which denotes the process of
differentiation – or Ereignis – whereby meaningful presence is disclosed and un-
covered.\(^{19}\) Whereas metaphysics sees the concealed background context as something
universal, ahistorical and fixed, Heidegger sees it as an immanent hermeneutical ho-
rizon that comprises many overlapping dimensions of meaning – such as culture,
history, language, temporality, practical aims, the personal life story of the person
and so on – that together constitute the meaningfulness of the appearing world.
Backman has captured this by suggesting that with Heidegger, presence is no longer
understood as simple but as complicated\(^{20}\) – that is, compiled of many layers of mean-
ing that overlap and create in their focal point the meaningful presence of things:

Meaningful presence (being\(_3\)) is possible only as a differential, tensional,
disrupted, interrupted, or complicated presence on the basis of taking-place
(being\(_2\)) as a dimensional and differentiating, yet in itself simple, event of
interplay. The human being is distinguished precisely by her receptivity to
the complicated unity of relative and contextual presence.\(^{21}\)

Schematically, this could be summarised by saying that whereas metaphysics
approaches being\(_2\) from being\(_1\) – that is, attempts to infer from the plurality of in-
dividual things a universal unity that binds reality together – post-metaphysical
thinking reverses the direction of thinking by approaching meaningful presence

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stems from Latin complicare, “to fold together”. See the entries “complicate” and “complicated” in

21 Backman 2009, 556.
(being₁) as the product of a complex interplay between human awareness and the multi-dimensional background context that grants things their meaning (being₂). Backman summarises the correlation as follows:

Being₂ and Dasein mutually define one another in that the emergence of being, from being, – of presence from its background, of unconcealment from concealment – is an event that takes place (sich ereignen) by taking over (ereignen) the There (Da) of Da-sein to be its place. Conversely, the defining “property” (Eigentum) of Da-sein – its appropriateness or “authenticity” (Eigentlichkeit), in other words its proper selfhood – is precisely to be the “There” of the “There is”, the place in which meaningful presence can take place.

Meaningful presence requires Dasein as the place of its appearing from its non-present background, and Dasein, correlatively, requires meaningful presence in order to exist. They are two sides of the same coin. This interplay is Ereignis, the taking place of meaning.

Implacement. By now it has probably become clear that I consider that there is the central locus in Heidegger’s thinking of Ereignis. Indeed, Heidegger’s later thinking is as much a place-oriented ontology as it is an event-oriented ontology, so much so that Heidegger himself at times refers to his later thinking as the topology of being. Here topology does not refer to a branch of mathematics but to a way of thinking being as place disclosure, or, as Otto Pöggeler puts it, as “the Saying (logos) of the abode (topos) in which truth as occurring unconcealment gathers itself”.

From a topological perspective, Ereignis, as the opening of the world, is essentially

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22 Backman 2009, 460; Backman 2015, 133.
23 Backman 2009, 457.
24 Heidegger only uses the term “topology of being” (Topologie des Seyns) on a few occasions, for example in Seminar in Le Thor 1969 (Heidegger 1986, 335, 344) and in the poem The Thinker as Poet (Heidegger 1983a, 84). Despite the rarity of the title, Heidegger does indicate in the Seminar in Le Thor (1986, 344) that the notion of “place” has become a central focal point in his later thinking, as he claims that his thinking has traversed from “the question of the meaning of being” and the “question of the truth of being” to “the question concerning the place of being (Ortschaft des Seins)” of his later thinking (cf. Heidegger 1986, 344).
the event of clearing whereby a *place*, the *there*, for the encounter of receptivity and givenness is first opened up. In *Parmenides* (1942/43), Heidegger claims:

*Topos* is the Greek for “place,” although not as mere position in a manifold of points, everywhere homogeneous. The essence of the place consists in holding gathered, as the present “where,” the circumference of what is in its nexus, what pertains to it and is “of” it, of the place. The place is the originally gathering holding of what belongs together and is thus for the most part a manifold of places reciprocally related by belonging together, which we call a settlement or a district.\(^{26}\)

As Heidegger here insinuates – and as Edward S. Casey has shown in great detail – Western thinking has tended to abstract spatio-temporal situatedness into a matter of locating an object within a uniform, homogenous Euclidean space and a likewise uniform and homogenous succession of temporal moments.\(^{27}\) I will discuss spatio-temporality in more detail later on, but at this point the crucial matter is that in metaphysical thinking situatedness, or *implacement* as Casey calls it, is seen to be a secondary and derivative character of being.\(^{28}\) In contrast, *Ereignis* is essentially *the taking-place of place*, the clearing of the *there*, which stages and makes possible the disclosure of meaningful presence. Humans, things, and the world itself are not thinkable separately from the *there*, where they are gathered together in their difference. Indeed, for Heidegger, the very term *Ereignis*, despite its abstractness, attempts nothing else but to articulate and disclose the place where we always already find ourselves amidst the world, “the very nearness of that neighbourhood in which we already reside.”\(^{29}\)

The crucial point is that this very same situatedness applies to human existence as well: *Dasein* is literally *Da-sein*, a *there-being*, a being open to its *there*. Human

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\(^{26}\) Heidegger 1998, 117; Heidegger 1982, 174: “*Topos* bedeutet griechisch Ort, jedoch nicht als die bloße Stelle in einer überallhin gleichgültigen Punktmannigfaltigkeit. Das Wesen des Ortes liegt darin, daß er als jeweiliges Wo den Umkreis dessen gesammelt hält, was zusammenhörig zu ihm und ‚an‘ ihm, den Ort, gehört. Der Ort ist das ursprünglich sammelnde Innehaben des Zusammengehörigen und ist deshalb meist ein Mannigfaltiges durch die Gehörigkeit aufeinander bezogener Orte, was wir eine Ortschaft nennen.”

\(^{27}\) Cf. Casey 1997.

\(^{28}\) Casey 1997, xiii & passim. On human implacement, see also Malpas 1999.

\(^{29}\) Heidegger 1969, 37; Heidegger 2006, 46: “[…] was das Wort Er-eignis nennen möchte, nur das Nächste jenes Nahen unmittelbar zuspricht, darin wir uns schon aufhalten.”
beings are not separated from the world, gazing at it from a transcendent Archimedean point, but instead they are immersed in and intertwined with the network of meaning that forms their world: the meaningfulness of the world is precisely dependent on human belongingness to it. Heidegger formulates this openness in terms of transcendence: Dasein is not a being who is capsulated within its own being, but essentially a being that transcends itself toward the world. There is no existence prior to this transcendence, as if Dasein’s openness to the world was an addition to some layer of existence preceding it, but on the contrary, existence occurs as transcendence, as Dasein’s “being-placed” in the world – indeed, Malpas notes, “this ‘being-placed’ is identical with our existence”. In contrast to the modern metaphysical notion of subjectivity, which takes the subject as autonomous, self-sufficient, and somehow distanced from the world it apprehends, the new aspect of Heideggerian phenomenology lies in this recognition of the interdependence of meaningful presence and Dasein, that is, recognition of a correlation in which the openness of Dasein makes meaningful presence possible and, correlatively, meaningful presence allows Dasein to exist in its world. Heidegger writes in Being and Time:

The entity which is essentially constituted by Being-in-the-world is itself in every case its “there.” According to the familiar meaning of the word, the “there” points to a “here” and an “over there.” […] “Here” and “over there” are possible only in a “there” – that is to say, only if there is a being which has disclosed spatiality as the being of the there. This being bears in its ownmost being the character of not being closed. The expression “there” means this essential disclosedness. Through disclosedness this being (Dasein) is “there” for itself together with the Da-sein of the world. […] By its very nature, Da-sein brings its “there” along with it. If it lacks its there, it is not only factically not of this nature, but not at all a being. Da-sein is its disclosedness.

31 Malpas 2012, 15.
I will discuss the question of subjectivity shortly in more detail, but here I wish only to emphasise that the essential implacedness of human existence and its constitutive correlation with the constitution of the world will be the central crux in my phenomenological approach to aesthetic immersion.

Limitation. In opening the there, Ereignis also sets limits to it. This is because disclosure is never full and absolute, but always accompanied by the covering over of something else: every place has its own characteristics, which include certain qualities and exclude others. In keeping with the claim that unconcealment is always coupled with concealment – that when something comes out into the Open, something else withdraws – Heidegger thinks that the establishing of a place is tantamount to setting boundaries to that place. Thus Heidegger claims in “Building Dwelling Thinking” (“Bauen Wohnen Denken”, 1951):

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. […] Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds.33

Ereignis as a clearing-away of the Open is at the same time also a delimitation of the Open: it gathers the elements that constitute the world into configurations that are unique to each place. We never find ourselves everywhere at once, but are always located in a distinct place; and only because some elements have been ruled out can the elements that make that particular place the place it is come forth. Following Heidegger’s example in “Building Dwelling Thinking”, a quaint river valley with an old stone bridge opens up an altogether different place than a highway bridge that allows heavy traffic to cross a body of water.34 Each place has its own genius loci,

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which is due to the fact that each place is born as a gathering of a unique configuration of elements. This means that the there has a finite horizon which discloses the world in a certain way at a given moment and covers over other possibilities.

To sum up, the point of Heidegger’s post-metaphysical articulation of being as the taking-place of the there is to study how the world opens up as a meaningful place, the Da of Da-sein, through the interdependent correlation between receptivity and givenness. Ereignis is the dynamic process between human Dasein as receptivity to presence and the givenness of meaningful presence as mediated by its contextual background. Here, thinking shifts from the traditional subject-object division to the reciprocal correlation between receptivity and givenness, where thinking and the world constitute one another without one being reducible to the other. This is the central correlation upon which the whole of my phenomenology of aesthetic immersion is founded. However, before I get to that, a few more preparatory remarks need to be made about the topology of the there. In the following, I will briefly outline some of the main constitutive elements of the there – time-space, sense, and a force field of presence I call gravity – which play a crucial role in aesthetic immersion. I will discuss these elements further in the following chapters, and here it suffices to trace them to gain a bigger picture at the outset.
13.2 Time-space


There is the whole world. There is that there is. It is through this, or in this – there, here, down here, at the center, which is everywhere, at the confines, which are nowhere – that the world qualifies its being-a-world, or the making-up-a-world of all that there is: not, above all, as the gathering of things (what there is, whose totalization takes place nowhere: for the *pars totalis* excludes that there should be any “total part” than the others), but as their being-together in the “signifiable whole” of the fact that there are these things.

But – these things: there are things. All these things, all these bodies, their areas, their arealities. One cannot too strongly insist on it: the sense of the world cannot except a single atom, insofar as the fact-world is the resolution of sense. […] For the place of the “there is” is not a mysterious quality, a “spiritual dimension” that would add itself to material spatialization. Spatialization – space and time – first of all makes up, or entrances, existence qua liability to meaning.35

Packed into these dense paragraphs, one finds a neat summary of the preceding discussion as well as an indication of the next piece in the puzzle. Firstly, the world occurs as the *there* and only as the *there*: the *there* is the whole world. Secondly, what makes the *there* a world is that it is endowed with sense. The world is not just a collection of things but a network or a tissue of relations, which ties everything together into a gathering. Furthermore, as Nancy suggests in the last sentence, the *there* as the “signifiable whole” occurs through spatialization or spacing (*espacement*) in which both space and time unfold the world as a meaningful place. In other words,

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35 Nancy 1997a, 157; Nancy 1993, 237–328: “Y est le tout du monde. Il y a qu’il y a. C’est par lui, ou en lui – là, ici, là-bas, au centre qui est partout, aux confins qui ne sont nulle part –, que le monde qualifie son être-monde, ou le faire-monde de tout-ce-qu’il-y-a: non pas d’abord le rassemblement de toutes choses (ce qu’il y a, dont la totalisation n’a lieu nulle part: la *pars totalis* exclut qu’il y ait une ‘partie totale’, ou ‘plus totale’ qu’une autre), mais leur être-ensemble comme le ‘tout de significabilité’ du fait qu’il y a ces choses. Mais – ces choses: il y a quelque(s) chose(s). Toutes ces choses, tous ces corps, leurs aires, leurs arealités. On ne saurait trop y insister: le sens du monde ne peut excéper un seul atome, en tant que le fait-monde est la résolution du sens. […] Il s’agit de ceci, que le lieu de l’il y a n’est pas une qualité mystérieuse, une ‘dimension spirituelle’ qui viendrait s’ajouter à l’espacement matériel. L’espacement – espace et temps – fait ou transit tout d’abord l’existence en tant que passibilité de sens.”
Nancy ties together the occurrence of the *there*, space and time, and sense. This notion stems from Heidegger’s *Ereignis* thinking – though Nancy slightly departs from Heidegger in ways I cannot discuss here in detail – which forms the next part in the topology of the *there*.36

According to the *Contributions*, after the closure of metaphysics, when the belief in a stable ground that would universally and eternally secure the world is cast in doubt, the ground of meaningful reality gives itself as an *abyssal ground* (*Ab-grund*), which occurs in “hesitating self-refusal” (*zögerndes Sichversagen*).37 By these enigmatic formulations, Heidegger attempts to articulate the way *Ereignis* grounds the *there* by withdrawing, refusing to disclose itself as such, and exactly in its withdrawal opens up the “emptiness” in which the clearing of the *there* can occur. Heidegger conceptualises this through the twofold movement of *removal* (*Entrückung*) and *captivation* (*Berückung*): removal signifies the withdrawal that clears the opening of the *there*, whereas captivation denotes the rising of things into the gathering of the *there*.38 Briefly put, the unconcealment of the world is possible because the ground that sustains it conceals itself and precisely in this concealment clears an opening in which things can come into presence.

This clearing of the *there* occurs essentially as the temporalising-spatialising opening of *time-space* (*Zeit-Raum*).39 Heidegger writes: “Time and space, as be-

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36 The thinking of spatio-temporality in Heidegger’s later works as well as in Nancy’s ontology rely in some respects on Husserl’s analyses of space and time, as well as Heidegger’s notions of spatiality and temporality in *Being and Time*. Both have been extensively commented on, and I will forgo analysing them here extensively. For both Husserl and Heidegger, space is not first and foremost about the spatial extensions of things, nor is time reducible to the flow of singular “nows”. Instead, they both argue that there is a more primordial, lived layer of time and space beneath the ticking of the universal clock and the extensions of metric space. Husserl goes on to argue in *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness* (1928) that time occurs as consciousness synthesises the present moment with its protentions and retentions into a temporal flow, and, correspondingly, in *Thing and Space* (1907) he argues that spatiality is constituted along a synthesis of identification in which adumbrations (*Abschattung*), that is singular views on an object, are synthesised together so that the object remains the same despite changes in the point of view from which the I gazed at it. *Being and Time* argues that spatiality occurs as *Dasein* discloses the world as its leeway (*Spielraum*) in which it can encounter things in terms of an “in-order-to”, whereas temporality is regarded as the very condition of *Dasein’s* existence. Both Husserl and Heidegger argue that “universal” or “objective” senses of time and space are only derivative from this primordial spatio-temporality of intuition/existence. Time and space, then, are not objective features of reality but primordially inherent to the way consciousness/Dasein exists. See Husserl 1928; Husserl 1973; Heidegger 1976a, §§ 22–24, 61–83. On Nancy’s notion of space, see James 2006, Chapter 2.

37 Heidegger 1989a, § 242.

38 Heidegger 1989a, 385.

longing to the essence of truth, are originally united in time-space and are the abyssal grounding of the ‘there’. As such, they are co-original and have to be thought of with an intimate link to Ereignis. Heidegger stresses that they cannot be thought of separately, and yet there is an unbridgeable difference between them. This is because they correspond to the two opposing yet complementary movements of Ereignis (Entrückung and Berückung): temporalisation (Zeitigung) occurs through the self-refusal of the abyssal ground as the “removing into coming-to-be and thus at the same time breaking open what has been”, whereas spatialising (Räumung) occurs as the captivating gathering of things in the there. Nevertheless, in the same way as concealing and unconcealing, Entrückung and Berückung, also temporalisation and spatialisation are interdependent and chiasmatic in the difference that holds them together: “Spacing which is temporalizing – temporalizing which is spatializing […] as the most proximate configuring domain for the truth of being [Seyn], but not a relapse to the common, formal concepts of space and time; instead, resumption into the strife, world and earth – Ereignis.” This means to say that the there as the place, where things are gathered together and released to the ecstasies of time, unfolds through the time-space inherent to Ereignis. Time-space structures the openness of the there in which things can appear as meaningful.

With regard to the considerations ahead relating to the ontology of art, what is vital in such an existential understanding of time-space is that time is no longer seen as the uniform, objective ticking of a universal clock, nor is space any longer conceived of in terms of a homogenous Euclidian extension. Hence, they can admit multiple manifestations: our sense of time and space is malleable, admitting thickenings, flows, diastole and systole, hiatus and dilatation. We can sense this, for instance, when, during deepest concentration, time seems to quicken and lose its viscosity altogether, or, contrarily, slow down to almost standstill in insomnia, when the clock

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ticks but time does not flow. Similarly, our experiences of spatiality are very malleable, as Merleau-Ponty has argued in his analyses of the spatial experiences of people suffering from schizophrenia. The question, then, with regard to the ontology of art is whether works of art can modulate the spacing of the arrival of sense.

13.3 Meaningfulness

The wondrous thing about our access to the world is that it is always already articulated as a sensible whole prior to our taking an active or reflective stance towards it. Our way of contacting the world is not such that we would first receive mere unorganised sense data, which we would then reflectively organise into an intelligible configuration and onto which we thus attach meaning like a label – or, following Heidegger's charming metaphor, they do not run around naked, waiting for us to clothe them with significance. Instead we always already find ourselves in the midst of a meaningfully organised world before we take a theoretical stance towards it: I do not have to reflect in order to distinguish my computer from my tea cup, as they are already given to me as intelligible things prior to me thematically thinking about them. Meaningfulness, as Heidegger points out in Being and Time, is not a secondary feature of the world but something that “constitutes the structure of the world, of that in which Dasein as such always already is”. In other words, meaningfulness is an ontological structure of existence, a basic character of our contact with the world, and insofar as Dasein exists as Dasein, it is “imprisoned to meaning” (bedeutsamkeitsgefangen).

Using the term sense, Jean-Luc Nancy formulates this ontological status of meaning as follows:

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44 Merleau-Ponty 1945, 331–333.
45 The label metaphor comes from Heidegger's early lecture course Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie (Kriegsnotssemester 1919), where he describes the way the attendants recognise the lecture hall's rostrum immediately and not by inferring from its colour, material, etc. that it must be a rostrum, thus imposing a meaning on it like a label (Heidegger 1987, 71). The metaphor of naked objects comes from another early lecture course, Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles (Winter semester 1921/22) (Heidegger 1985b, 91).
46 Heidegger 1996a, 81; Heidegger 1976a, 116–117: "Sie [Bedeutsamkeit] ist das, was die Struktur der Welt, dessen, worin Dasein als solches je schon ist, ausmacht.”
47 Heidegger 1992, 104.
Thus, “being-toward-the-world”, if it takes place (and it does take place), is caught up in sense well before all signification. It makes, demands, or proposes sense this side of or beyond all signification. If we are toward the world, if there is being-toward-the-world in general, that is, if there is world, there is sense. The *there* is makes sense by itself and as such. […] Thus, *world* is not merely the correlative of *sense*, it is structured as *sense*, and reciprocally, *sense* is structured as *world*.48

Meaningfulness is co-original with the very opening of the *there* – in taking place, the *there* also makes sense in a pre-predicative and pre-theoretical manner. Earlier I pointed out how the meaningfulness of presence can be understood as being *complicated*, consisting of unique configurations of overlapping dimensions of meaning. Using the later Heidegger’s thinking of the *fourfold* (*das Geviert*), being occurs as the gathering of these complicated world-constituting dimensions that arranges them into a complicated unity in difference.49 As Jeff Malpas has noted, this gathering does not occur “nowhere” but in and as a distinct place: this gathering of the meaning-dimensions is tantamount to the opening up of a place.50 This is a central insight for my own inquiries into the ways in which the work of art makes sense – or, put another way, taps into the ways the *there* is disclosed as a meaningful place. I will have more to say about the relationship between understanding and the work of art in Chapter 4, but here it suffices to sketch the phenomenology of meaning I employ in this study.

In Heidegger’s thinking, this meaningfulness is mostly thought of in intellectual or hermeneutic terms, even if his ontology could have accommodated a more embodied and perceptual interpretation. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that the “in-being” of Dasein’s being-in-the-world, that is, the structure which maintains

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48 Nancy 1997a, 7–8; Nancy 1993, 17–18: “Ainsi, ‘être au monde’, si cela a lieu (mais cela a lieu) est pris dans le sens bien avant toute signification. Cela fait sens, cela demande ou propose sens en deçà ou au-delà de toute signification. Si nous sommes au monde, s’il y a de l’être-au-monde en général, c’est-à-dire s’il y a du monde, il y a du sens. Le *il y a* fait sens par lui-même et comme tel. […] Ainsi, *monde* n’est pas seulement corrélatif de *sens*, il est structuré comme *sens*, et réciproquement, *sens* est structuré comme *monde*.”

49 See Heidegger’s essays “Das Ding” (1950) und “Bauen Wohnen Denken” (1951) in Heidegger 2000a. Following Thomas Sheehan (2014a & 2014b), I interpret Heidegger to have remained a thinker of meaningful presence in his later thinking, albeit the terminology of *meaning* and *meaningfulness* is changed to that of *truth*, *clearing*, *fourfold*, etc.

50 Malpas 21012, 89.
the meaningful relation of *Dasein* and its world, is structured by *understanding* (Verstehen), *attunement* (Befindlichkeit), and *discourse* (Rede).\(^{51}\) This group of *existentials\(^ {52}\) points to the way *Dasein*’s interaction with the world is mediated by hermeneutic processes, affective dispositions, and discursivity, which together condition the overall meaningfulness of the situation to which *Dasein* finds itself thrown. However, despite the presence of the affective dimension, Heidegger’s thinking is directed towards the question of comprehension to the extent that, as Vattimo notes, “it would not be difficult to give a purely intellectualist reading of *Sein und Zeit* that would confine itself to the plane of understanding”.\(^ {53}\) Furthermore, Vattimo continues, “in his latest works, the event of being always principally constitutes an event of meaning, the instituting of an intellectual web of significations, more intellectual than emotional”\(^ {54}\) – even if Heidegger’s later thinking on concealment and unconcealment recognises that there is an inherent dimension of ungraspability embedded within meaningful presence. Indeed, many post-Heideggerian thinkers have – justifiably or not – claimed that Heidegger’s approach to the question of being reduces the *there* to a monistic-holistic horizon, which returns all multiplic-ity and alterity back into unity.\(^ {55}\) Marion argues that Heidegger – along with Husserl – truncates phenomenality by delimiting it within the horizon of intelligibility. He claims that this thinking delegates the responsibility of meaning-formation to the human consciousness or *Dasein* and gives pure givenness only secondary importance.\(^ {56}\) As such, Marion sees Heidegger as continuing the totalising project of Western thinking.

Working out the precise aptness of post-Heideggerian critiques, however, is beyond the scope of this study. What interests me here are the post-Heideggeri-an reactions to Heidegger’s purported intellectualism regarding meaning. First of all, in order to highlight the fact that this meaningfulness is not simply something

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51 Heidegger 1976a, §§ 28–34.
52 In Heideggerian terminology, existentials are the fundamental constituents of *Dasein*’s existence, that is, the existential structures that constitute *Dasein as Dasein*. See Heidegger 1976a, § 9.
54 Vattimo 2008, 62.
55 Backman (2009, 328–333) collects a long list of such critiques, including those of Jacques Derrida, Wolfgang Welsch, and Jürgen Habermas.
56 This is Marion’s main argument in *Reduction and Givenness* (*Réduction et donation*, 1989).
intelligible, but is instead something inextricably intertwined with the perceptual capacities of an embodied being – as Merleau-Ponty has shown, perception is our primary access to the world – I will be following Nancy’s example of using the term “sense” as the primary term for articulating the meaningfulness of the world. The polysemic word sense expresses the essential interconnectedness of meaning as intelligibility, the physiological capacity of perception, and the directional character of meaning, the fact that meaningfulness depends on the way in which I am oriented towards phenomena.\(^57\) Sense, for Nancy, is our primary connection to a world which is not only meaningfully articulated but also material, concrete, and perceptual in a way which makes it difficult to demarcate the traditional line between intelligibility and sensibility. Throughout this study, I will use this notion of sense, and even in cases where I use the terms “meaning” or “meaningfulness”, they should be read against a background where human being-in-the-world is not merely hermeneutic by nature, but also embodied and perceptual. Secondly, what I wish to take up from this discussion is the claim held by, for example, Levinas, Nancy, and Marion, that the field of sensible givenness cannot be reduced to the horizon of Dasein’s comprehension of being. Understanding is not the sole correlate of appearing, and the world can intimate itself, touch us, in modes that elude our intellectual grasp. These claims will be of utmost importance to my analysis, since I will suggest that the phenomenological register opened up by post-Heideggerian thinkers offers the most viable way of attesting to the artwork’s phenomenality.

In Emmanuel Levinas’s idiom, there is a dimension of sense that is otherwise-than-being (autrement-quétre), which signifies in a register that cannot be reduced to an object of knowledge.\(^58\) Levinas’s paradigmatic example is that of the face (le visage) of the other, which does not appear as a thing within the world, but instead as an absence of appearing, as a disturbance in the phenomenal field, which inverts the subject’s intentional grasp and exposes them to ethical responsibility. The face signifies, but not in the same way as intramundane things by positioning itself in the contextual network of the world, but precisely by rupturing the equilibrium of the world in which the subject has found a secure place:

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58 The expression “otherwise-than-being” stems from the title of Levinas’s book Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence, 1974).
The face enters into our world from an absolutely foreign sphere, that is, precisely from an ab-solute, which in fact is the very name for ultimate strangeness. The signifyingness of a face in its abstractness is in the literal sense of the term extra-ordinary, outside every order, every world. 59

The face signifies by itself outside the horizon of the world – which, for Levinas, is the horizon of the comprehension of being. In other words, the face exemplifies the possibility of signification that would signify otherwise than in appearing, non-horizontally and without mediation as “in an irreducible disturbance” (un dérangement irréductible). 60 Levinas writes:

[T]he epiphany of the Other involves a signifyingness of its own, independent of this meaning received from the world. The Other comes to us not only out of the context but also without mediation; he signifies by himself. The cultural meaning which is revealed – and reveals – as it were horizontally, which is revealed from the historical world to which it belongs, and which, according to the phenomenological expression, reveals the horizons of this world – this mundane meaning is disturbed and jostled by another presence that is abstract (or, more exactly, absolute) and not integrated into the world. This presence consists in coming toward us, in making an entry. […] [T]he epiphany of a face is a visitation. 61

By visitation Levinas describes the peculiar mode of appearance of the Other: it seems to come from elsewhere, from a place that does not belong to the order of my world; it comes, approaches, but does not stay; it remains ungraspable. Paradoxi-

59 Levinas 1996, 53; Levinas 1964, 146: "Le visage entre dans notre monde à partir d’une sphère ab-solument étrangère, c’est-à-dire précisément à partir d’un ab-solu qui est, d’ailleurs, le nom même de l’étrangeté foncière. La signification du visage, dans son abstraction, est, au sens littéral du terme, extra-ordinaire, extérieur à tout ordre, à tout monde.”

60 Levinas 1996, 67; Levinas 2016, 286.

61 Levinas 1996, 53; Levinas 1964, 144: “Mais l’épiphanie d’Autrui comporte une signification propre, indépendante de cette signification reçue du monde. Autrui ne nous vient pas seulement à partir du contexte, mais, sans cette méditation, signifie par lui-même. La signification culturelle qui se révèle – et qui révèle horizontalement, en quelque façon, qui se révèle à partir du monde historique auquel elle appartient – qui révèle, selon l’expression phénoménologue, les horizons de ce monde – cette signification mondaine, se trouvé dérangée et bousculée par une autre présence abstraite (ou, plus exactement, absolue), non intégrée au monde. Cette présence consiste à venir à nous, à faire une entrée. […] [L’épiphanie du visage est visitation.”
cally, the Other both offers itself to our intentional grasp of it and at the same time eludes that very grasp, resisting all our attempts to penetrate its otherness. What Levinas is proposing then is that meaningfulness cannot be limited to the order of phenomenality or equated with intelligibility. There are phenomena, or, strictly speaking, quasi-phenomena, whose mode of appearance is that of withdrawal, of a trace, which appears as a hole in the texture of the world. These phenomena Levinas designates by the name enigma:62

What is essential here is the way a meaning that is beyond meaning is inserted in the meaning that remains in an order, the way it advances while retreating. An enigma is not a simple ambiguity in which two significations have equal chances and the same light. In an enigma the exorbitant meaning is already effaced in its apparition.63

Here Levinas approaches the limit of phenomenology, where phenomenology opens onto the appearance of the non-appearance of the Other, that is, to phenomena which appear in and through absence. Admitting an order that exceeds the limits of Dasein’s comprehension of being does not mean succumbing to mysticism or reverting back to Platonism, but instead means affirming the finitude and factual situatedness of human existence, where, instead of being masters in our own house, we are exposed to ungraspable exteriority.

Similarly, Jean-Luc Marion argues that there is a mode of givenness, which challenges the claim that intuition cannot reach higher than perfect adequation with its intention. This category comprises what Marion calls saturated phenomena (phénomènes saturés), in which he includes, for example, historical events, paintings, one’s own body, other persons, and the revelation of Christ.64 According to Marion, these are phenomena that overflow consciousness’s intentional grasp: they give more than consciousness can receive and fulfil its intentions in exces-

62 Levinas 2016, 291.
63 Levinas 1996, 70–71; Levinas 2016, 291: “L’essentiel, ici, est dans la façon dont un sens qui est au-delà du sens s’insère dans le sens qui reste dans l’ordre, la façon dont l’un luit comme déjà éteint dans l’autre; la façon dont il avance tout en battant en retraite. L’énigme n’est pas une simple équivoque où les deux significations ont des chances égales et la même lumière. Dans l’énigme, le sens exorbitant s’est déjà effacé dans son apparition.”
64 Marion 2013b, §§ 23–24.
Marion notes that this possibility has already been suggested on numerous occasions in the history of philosophy, for example, by Descartes in his discussion on infinity, by Kant with his ideas on aesthetics and the notion of the sublime, and by Husserl with the theory of internal time-consciousness, though all of them left the possibility unelaborated. For Marion, saturated phenomena are not exceptional, out-of-the-ordinary phenomena at the fringes of givenness, but rather the paradigmatic model of phenomenality. This is so because a saturated phenomenon, unfettered as it is from the horizons of objectivity and being posited by the I, gives itself from itself and points to a dimension of pure givenness free of the constitutive operations of consciousness or the projective existence of Dasein. This is a jab directed not only at metaphysics and Husserl but at Heidegger as well. Namely, these phenomena escape reduction both to objectivity (Husserl) and the horizon of being (Heidegger), which Marion associates—like Levinas and Romano—with Dasein’s comprehension of being. In other words, these phenomena give themselves in such an excessive measure that their givenness exceeds consciousness’s receptive capacities to master them, puncturing a hole in the fabric that holds the subject’s world intact. The saturated phenomenon signifies otherwise than through its position within a context; on the contrary, the saturated phenomenon comes from outside the horizon, punctures it, and refuses to be totalised in it. It is an absolutely singular, unrepeatable, and ungraspable event. Here Marion comes close to Nancy’s account: in the same way as Nancy claims sense exceeds any gathering into unity in its dislocated and fragmentary arrival, Marion claims that the givenness of phenomena exceeds the receptive capabilities of the self. Similarly, his account of saturated phenomena comes close to Claude Romano’s notion of evential (événemental) events, by which Romano denotes events that, contrary to everyday evental (événentiels) events, refuse to be incorporated within the established world-order. As such, Marion’s saturated phenomena are, to borrow

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67 In Reduction and Givenness, Marion argues that givenness as such precedes objectivity and the horizon of being. He continues this in Being Given (Étant donné, 1997) and takes saturated phenomena to be exemplary in this matter. Cf. Marion 2013b, book I and §§ 21–22; Marion 2015.
68 Marion 2013b, §§ 16–18.
an expression from Levinas, *extra-ordinary* in the etymological sense, that is, they arrive from outside every order.\(^{70}\)

Another issue in Heidegger’s phenomenology of meaning is the question of unity. The world is in constant flux, and we at each moment experience only a fragment of the world. The question is, does the multiplicity of these fragmentary meaning-configurations return into a unitary whole? Again, Heidegger himself has been seen to give ambiguous answers.\(^{71}\) Nancy claims that Heidegger’s *Ereignis* thinking betrays the multiplicity of sense, which Heidegger himself attests. The Heideggerian *Ereignis* appropriates or gathers the world into a unity, into gathering where all things have their place within the horizon limited by the fourfold. This gathering is the place humans appropriate as their dwelling. In Nancy’s view, the language of belongingness covers the fact that the opening of the world as sense is in a constant state of differing from itself, in constant dispersal and dislocation, and it cannot be completely appropriated by *Dasein*.\(^{72}\) Sense does not provide a ground and occurs as a passage, as the constant reconfiguration of sense that never returns to itself or reaches a fixed state. Sense opens the world as a “pars-totalitarian, nontotalizable totality”, a “constellation whose compossibility is identical with its fragmentation […].”\(^{73}\) At this point I consider it important to heed Nancy’s emphatic way of thinking of the arrival of sense prior to its inscription within immanence or a comprehensible gathering that I could perfectly appropriate: sense, as Nancy puts it, “infinitely precedes consciousness and the signifying appropriation of sense, that is, to that which precedes and surprises the phenomenon in the phenomenon itself.”\(^{74}\)

\(^{70}\) Levinas 1964, 145.

\(^{71}\) For example, Miguel de Beistegui (2012, 93–94) has argued that Heidegger gives priority to fragmentation over ultimate unity: “The sense of being that progressively emerges is precisely that of an originary and irreducible movement of ex- and dis-propiation, an uncanniness at the heart of the familiar, an experience of disowning and unfamiliarity that is ‘older’ than ownness and familiar-ity. Being is irreducibly adrift, withdrawing as it approaches, absent-in-presence.” In contrast, Jussi Backman (2009 and 2015) has argued that Heidegger is fundamentally a thinker on unity. This is an exegetical issue I will not be discussing here any further.

\(^{72}\) As Ian James (2006, 100–102) has noted, Nancy sees that this holding on to the appropriable nature of the world returns Heidegger to subjectivism, since Heidegger keeps viewing the world as something *Dasein* can “own” or “appropriate”.

\(^{73}\) Nancy 1997a, 155; Nancy 1993, 234: “[…] la totalité parstotalitaire, intotalisable […] constellation dont la compossibilité est identique à l’éclatement […].” Translation modified.

\(^{74}\) Nancy 1997a, 17; Nancy 1993, 32: “[…] la phénoménologie n’ouvre pas à ce qui, du sens et par conséquent du monde, précède infiniment la conscience et l’appropriation signifiante du sens, c’est-à-dire à ce qui précède et surprend le phénomène dans le phénomène lui-même […].”
This theme of fragmentation and non-totalisability of sense will be central in the following discussions on art.

In sum, I would like to claim that we get a fuller picture of phenomenality by combining Heidegger’s hermeneutic event ontology with a post-Heideggerian emphasis on the finitude of human comprehension (leaving aside the question whether this emphasis is genuinely post-Heideggerian). Hence I can argue that even though most phenomena conform to a hermeneutic horizon due to our objectifying, instrumentalising, or otherwise comprehending grasp of them, phenomenality is not limited to such a horizon: some phenomena challenge it and finally overflow it altogether, escaping it indefinitely. The world occurs as Ereignis, but, borrowing terms from Romano, there are two sorts of Ereignisse: evental and evential – the ones that conform to the comprehension of being and ones that puncture it and organise it anew. Marion’s thinking offers an example of a phenomenological model that accommodates a range of phenomena appearing in different degrees of intensity and comprehensibility. In this way, I wish to forge an event ontology, which is sensitive to the complex interplay between givenness and receptivity, taking into account the way we accommodate phenomena within our horizons, while admitting that some phenomena escape such accommodation. As such, this sort on ontology would push beyond the fringes of ontology – understood as the study of the intelligible structure of reality – and include phenomena which signify otherwise than in terms of intelligibility.

13.4 Gravity

Thus far I have characterised the there as a spatio-temporal and inherently meaningful place, where receptivity and givenness encounter and determine each other. This, however, does not exhaust the coming-into-presence of sense. Traditional ontology has operated with the distinction between subject and object, implicitly holding that reality can be analysed exhaustively in terms of these two entities. Gernot Böhme has argued that ontology, when thinking about the structure of external reality, has given prevalence to objects: the subject is opposed by a world, which is, first and foremost, the totality of objects. Even in Heidegger, one could argue following Böhme, the thing (Ding) is a prototypical being, and the question of being becomes a question of describing the relationship between Dasein, things,

75 Böhme 1995, 158–164.
and the world that gathers them together. What remains unthought in this type of ontology is, according to Böhme, the way the atmosphere of particular situations – their gloominess, tranquillity, joyfulness, sublimity – configures in the way humans experience their surroundings. Atmospheres are ontological aspects of the there, which cannot be reduced to the affective state of the subject or the qualities of the object; instead, they occur “in-between” these two and articulate a qualitative aspect of presence.76 The task of “new aesthetics”, Böhme suggests, is to go beyond the traditional analysis of subjective states and objective qualities which play a role in aesthetic experience, and describe the way atmospheres take part in aesthetic perception.77

Though I am sympathetic to Böhme’s thinking, I would like to develop a more dynamic notion of presence which also occurs in the “in-between” of persons and phenomena. For Böhme, an atmosphere is the overall qualitative state of a situation. Following Alphonso Lingis’s insight that phenomena do not passively submit themselves to our handlings and projections but impose directives and imperatives upon us, ordering us to approach them in certain ways, 78 what I wish to emphasise is that phenomena do not merely appear to me as meaningful and endowed with a certain atmosphere, they also impose themselves upon me in varying degrees of intensity. Phenomena can weigh on me, pull me towards them, attract me, grab my attention, draw my eye, push me away, fixate me before them, force themselves upon me, or fill space with their presence. As the word “sense” suggests, their meaningfulness is endowed with a directive that aligns me with them in ways that do not arise solely from my intentions. The presence of phenomena has its own weight or density which accompanies them and articulates their appearing. A religious site or a place of historical importance can impose its presence as forcefully upon me as a work of art, and the haunting presence of a Nazi concentration camp can creep underneath my skin with the sheer horror of its history. A personal item, like a family heirloom or a childhood toy, can exude significance, and even the smallest of things, like the Venus of Willendorf, can have as much or even more presence than the largest of buildings. Speaking of artworks, Fichte remarks: “One thing leaves us

76 Böhme 1995, the chapter “Atmosphäre als Grundbegriff einer neuen Ästhetik.”
77 Böhme 1995, 7–12.
78 See Lingis 1998.
cold and disinterested, or even repels us; another attracts, invites us to linger awhile in contemplation and lose ourselves in it.”79 This varying degree of “pull” inherent to presence is what I call gravity. What this notion aims to capture is the fact that the phenomenal field is not merely an empty expanse, where singular phenomena are endowed with equal intensities of presence, since each has its own dynamic field of forces. This element of meaningful presence is what I mean by gravity. Like Böhme’s atmosphere, gravity is not a quality of an object or a mere affective state of the subject, but is instead a qualification of presence constituted in the configuration of the particular situation. As I will argue further in Chapter 3, I consider the gravity of presence to be a critical factor in the complex situation which, in the right circumstances, amounts to aesthetic immersion in and through the artwork.

I propose that this dimension of presence can be integrated into the topological model in the following manner. I have argued, following Heidegger and his successors, that the meaningful presence of things is not a simple or singular attribute but is instead complicated – that is, folded together from many layers of meaning that overlap and create in their crossings the sensible presence of things. Phenomena become meaningful when they are positioned in a complicated, multidimensional hermeneutic horizon that constitutes the world. Humans exist as factual, historically and culturally situated beings, who occupy a certain world, living certain lives with certain histories, aspirations, and problems. Things receive their meaningfulness when they are situated within the nodal points or overlappings of these different dimensions of meaning. The fact that different things have different meanings can be accounted for by claiming that different things are situated differently within the manifolds of our hermeneutic horizons. As an expansion of the Heideggerian account, I suggest that the complicatedness of a phenomenon’s sense is accompanied by a peculiar weight or gravity in the presence of this phenomenon. Here I follow Nancy, who in “The Weight of a Thought” (“Le poids d’une pensée”, 1991) claims that the excess belonging to sense, which prevents sense from ever being completely fixated, endows things with a weight of presence that pulls thinking instead of letting thinking take hold of the phenomenon:

79 Fichte 1984, 76; Fichte 1981, 335: “Das eine lässt uns kalt und ohne Interesse, oder stößt uns wohl gar zurück; ein anderes zieht uns an, ladet uns ein, bei seiner Betrachtung zu verweilen, und uns selbst in ihm zu vergessen.”
In finitude, therefore, a thought does not complete the meaning (of what) it thinks, and thus lets this “object” – the thing in itself – have the weight that carries it away from the completed, presentified, or signified meaning. The weight of thought is then the weight of the thing insofar as that thing weighs outside of thought, insofar as it punctures and overflows the thought that it is, but that it can be only by being open to the thing, and to its heaviness.80

Combining Heidegger’s and Nancy’s thoughts, the gravity of phenomena could be conceptualised as an affective element of presence, which correlates with the complicatedness of a phenomenon. In other words, phenomena curve my phenomenal field to different degrees, producing different fields of gravity. The more complication there is and the more entangled the phenomenon is in the matrix of sense, the more gravity there is. This gravity is experienced as the peculiar weight or density of the phenomenon’s manifestation. In other words, things are not only endowed with a sense but also with a gravity that accompanies it.

This entails that phenomena can have varying degrees of gravity. For example, when walking around an art museum, I pass by some works without hardly looking at them, some I notice but soon move on to the next, while some hold my gaze and hardly let go of it. As I will argue later, I consider a high degree of gravity to be crucial in turning an encounter with art into aesthetic immersion. What I will argue is that the work of art, as well as a range of other intense phenomena – those that could, in Marion’s vein, be called saturated – can be characterised as phenomenological equivalents of black holes: they curve our horizon to such a degree that they puncture a hole in it, from which even light cannot escape. This describes the characteristic ungraspability of the saturated phenomenon as well as the peculiar gravity produced by it. Instead of penetrating the enigmatic phenomenon, the gaze can only touch upon its ontic fringe, like the eyes and mouth of the other’s face or the surface of the painting, but not enclose the depth opened up in this surface within its grasp. This fringe is the event-horizon of the saturated phenomenon, the appearance that attests only to the fact that something overflows appearance.

Let me push the analogy with general relativity a bit further – though it should not be taken too literally. According to the theory of general relativity, time and gravity are tied together: time ticks more slowly near a massive object than farther away. This phenomenon is called gravitational time dilation. Similarly, one could

80 Nancy 1997b, 79.
argue that phenomena with enough gravitational pull can alter the way time-space is experienced. However, this alteration is not solely a matter of dilation, since it can be a matter of expansion, quickening, hiatus, and so forth. Think, for example, of an engrossing piece of drama: one can be sucked into the performance and lose track of time – actual world time – and live, momentarily, in the temporality of the work. Likewise, in the deep of the night, when insomnia robs one of sleep, time seems to stop altogether. I will later argue more systematically in § 19 that this sort of gravitational time-space modulation is one of the key elements in the eventuation of the work of art.

Furthermore, according to general relativity, if an object is massive enough, it can even curve light going past it. Hence, if the light coming from a distant galaxy passes through the gravitational field of another, nearer galaxy, the more distant galaxy appears distorted when observed from Earth. This effect is called gravitational lensing. An analogous aspect can be found from the interaction between phenomena within the phenomenal field. The manifestation of some phenomena can distort the way others are given. I am continuously faced with an abundance of phenomena, which all want to claim my gaze to some degree. In some cases, things can interfere with each other: the gravity of Mona Lisa is greatly diminished by the buzzing crowd around it, and the gravitational pull of Géricault’s The Raft of the Medusa can eclipse the presence of Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People (1830) hanging next to it. Again, I will later argue how the encounter with works of art is conditioned by this sort of gravitational lensing, which, in its part, explains why some works speak to us more than others.

What I wish to have accomplished with the preceding discussion is twofold: first, by way of analogy with the theory of general relativity, I want to present an interpretation of the way the different ontological aspects I have discussed – time-space and sense – tie in together and form the meaningful place, the there, from which we find ourselves. Secondly, I want to introduce an aspect of phenomenality heretofore little discussed – that of gravity, by which I mean the peculiar weight of presence associated particularly with saturated phenomena. I also wish to have shown how different configurations of phenomenality, such as saturation, modulations of spatial and temporal experiences, and phenomenal interferences can be understood within the same phenomenological model. This notion will play an essential role in my analysis of aesthetic immersion.
§ 14. Traces of art

I have now outlined the phenomenological frame I will be employing in the following analyses. The main point was to articulate a topological framework, according to which being is essentially situated: it occurs as an opening of the there, which gathers beings together into a spatio-temporal, meaningfully organised place.

The next question – the question that will occupy me for the rest of this study – is how all this relates to aesthetic immersion. My guiding idea is to view the work of art – work understood here as a verb – as an ontological event, which modulates the process of the opening of the there, thereby manifesting itself in and through aesthetic immersion. Such an approach operates outside the traditional aesthetic terms of representation and non-conceptual pleasure and thus avoids the mimetic paradigm of art and the “aesthetic consciousness” related to it. I approach artworks as events that momentarily transform the way the world reveals itself as meaningful and, conversely, the way the perceiver’s selfhood is constituted in this process. As Heidegger contended, “in the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than where we usually tend to be”.81 The task is to understand what this elsewhere in an ontological sense is. The topological model briefly outlined above – and which I will elaborate on further in due course – aims to provide the framework for this inquiry.

Approaching art in terms of its event-character is by no means new. Heidegger’s notion of the work as a “setting-itself-to-work” and Gadamer’s analysis of the work as a play, shift the register from object-based ontology to one emphasising the dynamic situation in an encounter with an artwork. Subsequent conceptualisations of art, like Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of art as fragmentation, Jeffrey Maitland’s performative presence, Miguel de Beistegui’s metaphor, Andrew Benjamin’s self-staging of the work – just to name a few – signal the way this shift has become a staple perspective in the phenomenology of art.82 Jeffrey Maitland argues that attempts to formulate an ontology of art by seeking necessary qualities from art objects or pondering the relationship between types and tokens miss what is essential in art:


82 Nancy 1993, chapter “L’art, fragment”; Maitland 1975; de Beistegui 2012; Benjamin 2015, 11.
The ontological question must not be abandoned. Rather, it must be asked in a new way, in a way that will not prejudice us into thinking that the work of art is some sort of an object. Indeed, as long as we persist in viewing art as an object, we will fail to understand the nature of art. [...] To tell me that what I appreciated on these occasions was some sort of object would be like telling a lover that what he loved was a skin bag.83

Maitland continues:

Just as a lover does not love skin and bones and just as a house dweller does not live in metal, wood, and bricks, so, too, one who appreciates a work of art does not appreciate an object – he appreciates a work of art. When we appreciate the work of art we are interested in art's performative presence or work-being rather than its object-being. Art's center, its proximal reality, the place from which it opens out for appreciation, is how art works and performs.84

The point, then, is to understand the “work” of art as a verb instead of a noun. The work does something to us instead of merely remaining a static object of contemplation – it works on us. The question regarding the precise nature of this working and its effects have motivated various answers – too numerous to be covered at this point – and it is also the question animating this study.

As a point of departure, however, I would like to point out a general tendency of existing event ontologies of art. As I claimed before, some phenomenologists have criticised the tradition of modern aesthetics for separating aesthetic experience from the continuity of life: aesthetic experience has been treated, according to this argument, as a self-enclosed Erlebnis without cognitive value instead of a proper Erfahrung which could be integrated into the texture of the world. Hence, art is divorced from truth. A guiding motive, clearly visible in Heidegger's and Gadamer's ontologies of art and, though in different way, in Merleau-Ponty, is to reverse the perspective and emphasise the way the experience of the work is continuous with the lifeworld in that the work discloses the structures of the world and enables us to contemplate that which in everyday life remains unnoticed in our daily concerns.

83 Maitland 1975, 189.
84 Maitland 1975, 193.
In other words, the work of art is not seen as a solitary moment of pleasure but as an event in which our daily immersion in the world is momentarily interrupted, and in which we learn to see that world in a new and deeper way. The event of art is the disclosure of the world in which we already find ourselves, and not a magical transportation to some otherworld. Consequently we find, for example, Gadamer arguing that “we learn to understand ourselves in and through [the work of art], and this means that we sublate the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our existence.”

This way the discourse on art is brought back to level of truth, as J.M. Bernstein observes: “Post-aesthetic philosophies of art […] tend to move in an opposite direction to post-positivist philosophies of science, locating the meaning and being of art in its cognitive dimension, thus connecting or reconnecting art and truth.”

Though I am sympathetic to this notion of world disclosure in and through art – the claim that we learn to see our world anew through art – I am wary of correlating the experience of art with the continuity of the world in a too straightforward fashion. Undoubtedly, the ontologies of art offered by, say, Heidegger and Gadamer are not so intellectualist as to deny the disruptive otherness inherent to the work. Here, however, I would like to make it a more thematic thread in the description of the work-event. As I have recurrently noted, I follow Levinas’s concern that philosophical thinking all too easily assimilates the Other into the Same, thereby eradicating that very otherness. In art, the discourse of truth is at risk of delimiting the perspective of description to the ways the work illuminates the world anew, thereby integrating the work within a system of knowledge instead of taking heed of the ways the work disrupts and exceeds that very system. The risk is to explain art’s working in a way that leaves the subject’s sovereignty intact, quite in the same way as in metaphysical thinking of art.

So, how does one see a riddle without solving it? The framework I have outlined might suggest that what I am about to do is to insert the experience of aesthetic immersion within this independently formulated philosophical frame and explain the experience through it, thereby doing the exact opposite of what I have been preach-

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ing. This reservation is warranted, and it brings out the problems of the methodological balancing act I attempt in this study. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that one needs a philosophical framework to approach any phenomenon in the first place. However, especially in the case of experiences like aesthetic immersion, this framework can feed into the description elements that do not rise from the experience itself. So how does one mediate between this requirement for a philosophical framework and the requirement to not let it dominate its object?

In answering this crucial methodological question, I am following a thought pattern presented by Levinas in his essay “Meaning and Sense” (“La signification et le sens”, 1964). Levinas argues, following the basic insight of hermeneutic phenomenology, that phenomena do not possess identity on their own accord and only become meaningful within a gathering of being, which makes up the whole world: “To be given to consciousness, to sparkle for it, would require that the given first be placed in an illuminated horizon – like a word, which gets the gift of being understood from the context to which it refers.” Phenomena signify only by being positioned within an articulated world. Though this insight has validity, Levinas notes that it also carries the risk of thinking that this articulated world is thoroughly accessible to thought, as contemporary thinking in Levinas’s view claims:

For contemporary philosophy, meaning is not only correlative with thought, and thought is not only correlative with a language that would make meaning haplē diegesis [simple narration]. To this intellectual structure of correlation between intellect and intelligible, which maintains the separation of the planes, is superposed a nearness and a side-by-sideness, an alliance, a belongingness which unites the intellect and the intelligible on the one plane of the world, forming that ‘fundamental historicity” which Merleau-Ponty speaks of.88

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87 Levinas 1996, 36; Levinas 1964, 127: “Se donner à la conscience scintiller pour elle, demanderait que la donnée, au préalable, se place à un horizon éclairé; semblablement au mot qui reçoit le don d'être entendu à partir d'un contexte auquel il se réfère.”

88 Levinas 1996, 43; Levinas 1964, 134: “Pour la philosophie contemporaine, la signification n'est pas seulement correlative de la pensée et la pensée n'est pas seulement correlative d'un langage qui ferait de la signification une haplē diegēsis. A cette structure intellectualiste de corrélation entre intelligence et intelligible, qui maintient la séparation de plans, – se superposent un voisinage et une côté-à-côte, un apparentement qui unit l'intelligence et l'intelligible sur le plan unique du monde formant cette 'historicité fondamentale' dont parle Merleau-Ponty.”
Levinas argues that contemporary philosophy – phenomenology included – is prone to think that intellectual reflection can exhaust the meaningfulness of the world and, on top of it, *synchronise* itself with phenomena as they give themselves. This, however, in Levinas’s view holds the risk of becoming blind to the way the human other is given in experience and reduces the encounter with another human to something accessible and transparent to consciousness. But this is fundamentally not the case, as Levinas argues that the contact with the other is something that consciousness cannot wholly contain in an intentional act, position within the horizon of the world, or synchronise with its own present moment. According to Levinas, the other's face makes an entry “prior to” consciousness's capacity to take hold of it and integrate it into a system of meaning: “the abstractness of the face is a visitation and a coming which *disturbs* immanence without settling into the horizon of the World”.

Therefore, the other's appearing is a non-appearing that interrupts the side-by-sideness of receptivity and givenness, being present only as a trace left by a withdrawal, which resists being converted into a content of consciousness. Put in temporal terms, there is a fundamental *diachrony* between the other’s visitation and the present “now” of consciousness: the other signifies as an “utterly bygone past” (*passé absolument révolu*), which consciousness can never catch up with and synchronise with itself. The other as other has always already withdrawn as thinking attempts to take it up as a theme, and hence otherness becomes thinkable – and available to phenomenological description – only in terms of its *traces*, that is, of the ways it disturbs immanence in its diachrony: “if […] the trace does not belong to phenomenology, to the comprehension of *appearing* and *dissimulating*, we can at least approach this signifying in another way by situating it with respect to the phenomenology it interrupts.”

In this study, I will suggest that the work of art makes an entry in somewhat similar fashion as the other’s face. This is a delicate point and needs to be understood correctly. Interestingly, in “Meaning and Sense”, Levinas echoes Heidegger...
and Gadamer in claiming that works of art – and "cultural objects" in general – “assemble into totalities the dispersion or accumulation of beings; […] they express or illuminate an epoch […]”, thus disclosing the gathering of being which informs the meaningfulness of phenomena. Though I do follow this characterisation to some extent, one of my main aims in the following descriptions is to establish that the way the work of art makes claim upon its witnesses. The way it unfolds in aesthetic immersion, is a complex temporal event in which the work does not merely succumb to contemplation from the start, so as to allow the witness to master and take hold of it at very beginning. Instead, I argue that a work's initial appearing, its way of imposing itself as it seizes us, is something that interrupts the ordinary course of the world and my way of inhabiting it in such a way that its happening cannot be synchronised and held side-by-side with reflection. It is only afterwards, when consciousness has managed to gather itself, that the work can be taken as illuminating the world anew and be integrated into the continuity of life – but at that point, the immersion into the work has already dissipated. In other words, I argue that the work of art is akin to what Romano calls evential events – events like accidents or unforeseen news – which upend the existing system of meaning in such a way that reflection cannot keep up with them and only take hold of their meaning retrospectively. Because reflection cannot occur simultaneously with a work's taking-place, a phenomenological description can only approach them indirectly, after the fact, following the traces they leave on the order they disturb. In this way their availability to phenomenological description is somewhat similar to the other's face in Levinas.

The somewhat is here essential. Even if I consider it crucial for my approach to hold on to Levinas's insight that there are events which do not signify within an order but by precisely disturbing this order, it is important to note that the trace of art I am aiming at here is fundamentally different from Levinas's trace of the other at least in two respects. First, for Levinas the trace of the other signifies in terms of ethical responsibility: the visitation of the other is "a summons to answer" (une summation de répondre) for one's infinite responsibility for the other's mortality. In the case of an artwork, the summons is of another type in which the witness's

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92 Levinas 1996, 40; Levinas 1964, 131: "Ces 'objets' culturels ramassent en des totalités la dispersion des êtres ou leur amoncellement. Ils luissent et éclairent; ils expriment ou illuminent une époque […].”

93 Levinas 1964, 142–148. This is also the main argument of Otherwise than Being and Levinas's later thinking as a whole.
way of inhabiting the there is momentarily disturbed. Secondly, and perhaps more crucially, the trace of the other in Levinas’s view signifies a “presence of that which properly speaking has never been there, of what is always past”, that is, a past which has never been the present of consciousness. In Levinas’s spatial metaphor, the other makes an entry from “the elsewhere from which it comes and into which it already withdraws”, never occupying the there side-by-side with consciousness. In the case of the artwork, the diachrony is not as radical as in the case of the other’s face: the work is very much present to consciousness, and the momentary absorption into the work upends merely consciousness’s capacity to distance itself from the event and take it up simultaneously as a theme of reflection.

Despite these differences, the crucial point here is that in order to prevent philosophical reflection reducing aesthetic immersion into something that is wholly explicable in terms of an established order, I wish to adopt an approach akin to Levinas’s indirect phenomenology in which the other is approached in terms of the traces it leaves in the order it disturbs. My intention is not to mystify the event of the artwork, nor to claim that it is wholly beyond comprehension; on the contrary, there is a lot to be retrieved from aesthetic immersion, even if one remains sensitive to the way it eludes straightforward reflection. The topological framework I briefly sketched aims to provide an overall picture of the way the there unfolds as an order of meaning, within which human existence takes place, so as to provide the “soil” in which the work leaves its traces. The function of the framework is not to exhaust the phenomenon, but instead to be a philosophical counterpart of the physicist’s cloud chamber, which is used to make visible the traces of otherwise unobservable particles. The following description of the work of art aims to trace how the work of art disturbs this order by turning the there from the everyday lifeworld into an elsewhere, where the subject’s way of inhabiting and making sense of the world is momentarily changed in a radical manner.

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94 Levinas 1996, 63; Levinas 1964, 154: “La trace est la présence de ce qui, à proprement parler, n’a jamais été là, de ce qui est toujours passé.”

95 Levinas 1996, 60; Levinas 1964, 151: “Sa merveille tient à l’ailleurs dont elle vient et où déjà elle se retire.”
PART II

Phenomenology of the Elsewhere
CHAPTER 3

THE ELSEWHERE

[...] in the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than where we usually tend to be.

Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*¹

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§ 15. Being somewhere else

The two previous chapters have been, if anything, an extended preparation for the central question of this study, the deceptively simple question: what happens in an experience of aesthetic immersion? Why is it that some pieces of art can have a strong effect on us while others leave us completely cold? And what exactly happens in those rare and fleeting, yet so powerful moments, when one stands before a painting, sits in a concert hall, or watches a movie and are taken away by a spectacle that one can only marvel at?

In the following, I will propose an answer by developing and systematising accounts given in contemporary phenomenology. I will show in this chapter that a valid starting point for a systematic description of immersion can be found by replacing the conceptual space of metaphysics with the topological model outlined in Chapter 2, so that immersion is approached in terms of the way it modulates the constitution of the there, the existential place which stages our existence. In other words, I will propose here that aesthetic immersion should be understood as an ontological event which implicates both the selfhood of the artwork’s witness and the sense of the world qua the artwork. Hence, the question “what happens in an immersive encounter with a work of art?” becomes “where do we go in and through a work of art?” By taking up this question in this manner, I can begin to rephrase aesthetic immersion in terms of “the taking-place of the elsewhere”, which more closely attends to the phenomenology of the experience and attests to its ontological position.

In the previous chapter, I outlined some central aspects of the topological model within which this question can be answered. The main paradigm shifts in rela-
tion to the tradition of aesthetics are 1) that an account of aesthetic experience can be sought from the level of the unfolding of reality as a sensible, spatio-temporal place through the taking-place, or Ereignis, of sense, and 2) that this taking-place can be further treated from two, interrelated perspectives: that of givenness, that is, the sensible unfolding of reality, and that of receptivity, that is, the constitution of selfhood as the correlate of the unfolding. In this model, the work of art is not approached as an object, but as an event that modulates both the way the world makes sense and the way selfhood is constituted in this event. The rest of this study concentrates on elaborating these claims.

In this chapter, I will examine the other side of the correlation, that is, the way works of art modulate the givenness of sense in and through aesthetic immersion. The other side of the correlation – the constitution of the self, or the witness, as I call it – will be examined in the following chapter. However, this separation is an artificial one and should not be taken as a description of two, separate events or as maintaining the subject-object divide. A work is an event that involves and implicates both the piece of art in question and the audience. As such, this distinction between the elsewhere and its witness aims at entering the work of art as an event from two different perspectives, articulating the same thing both times, yet from slightly different angles. The artificiality of this distinction shows itself as the difficulty of maintaining the distinction itself: it is almost impossible to speak about the work of art without frequently referring to questions of selfhood.

To put it in the simplest of terms, my aim here is to describe an experience in which a piece of art absorbs my attention to such an extent that I forget my surroundings and myself and thereby go “somewhere else”. The precise problem is to understand the nature of this “somewhere else”. Dufrenne observes that in some sense the perceiver goes somewhere in and through aesthetic experience: “the witness, without leaving his post in physical space, penetrates into the world of the work. […] In front of a figurative painting, I am with the characters represented: I am in Canaletto’s city or under Ruysdael’s oak.”

Dufrenne 1973, 57; Dufrenne 1953, 94: “Ainsi le témoin, sans quitter son poste dans l’espace physique, pénètre-t-il dans le monde de l’œuvre […] Devant un tableau figuratif, je suis avec le personnages représenté, dans la ville de Canaletto, à l’ombre de chêne de Ruysdael.”
keeping with these intuitions, I will argue that instead of approaching our encounters with art in terms of aesthetic experiences, this encounter is better understood by way of the place that the work opens up. I will call this place the elsewhere. Here we need to be very careful: I am not suggesting that the work of art magically whisks me into another world. It is clear that when I am immersed in the happening of the work, I am not taken to another world, which I could inhabit as my own; instead, I am brought to a threshold, to a peculiar in-between of the piece’s poetic world and my lifeworld, where I am capable of seeing a glimpse of the other world without thereby being able to dwell in it. The problem is to understand the nature of this in-between. Thus, instead of arguing that the work of art provides access to a wholly other location, my main point is to describe how the work taps into the constitution of the there, where my existence takes place – or, in other words, changes the way I occupy my there by transforming it into the elsewhere. The work of art is not here understood simply as enabling transportation from one world to another, but instead as a modulation of the process whereby the there is constituted.

I have already referred to the conviction I share with thinkers like Jauß that experiences with art consist of at least two stages – a non-reflective and a reflective one – which entail fundamentally different relationships with the piece in question. It is my contention here that these two aspects are not simultaneous; rather, a work-experience can be an oscillation between these two ways of engagement. The problem with some phenomenological accounts, such as Heidegger’s, is that these two stages are not explicitly taken into account, so that the description gives the impression that we are simultaneously both engaged in the world disclosure offered by the work and reflective of this disclosure. Though this is surely possible on some occasions, there are also those cases in which this can happen only afterwards. When we are immersed in the world of the work, we do not reflect upon the structure of reality, but instead we are taken by the plot of the drama, the flow of the music, the image of a painting. While the work has me under its control, I am lost in it, forgetting my place in the world – and once I muster a reflective attitude, the elsewhere is gone like a dream. Having dissipated what it tried to capture, reflection can retrospectively seize only fragmentarily the pre-reflective unity of the experience, whose fullness cannot be later reconstructed and repeated in conceptual discourse.³

As I suggested in Chapter 1, the reflective stage and its cognitive import have been extensively discussed in the history of aesthetics as well as in contemporary

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³ Cf. Heidegger 1977b, 56; Crowther 1993, 3.
phenomenology, whereas the pre-reflective stage has been either disparaged or given little attention. In the following phenomenological description, I aim to formulate an account of the way the work of art occurs prior to its becoming a theme of reflection. The event I am seeking is a spectacle most rare, and it should not be taken as describing something that necessarily occurs every time we encounter a piece of art – on the contrary, it refers to a specific ”peak experience” that occurs only in the most optimal of conditions. Neither should it be taken as implying that the pre-reflective character of the experience at issue makes it a non-cognitive and purely affective affair. Instead, I aim to argue here and in the next chapter that the taking-place of the elsewhere requires a complex engagement from the witness that eludes simple categorisation into cognitive and non-cognitive experience. This chapter, then, is decidedly a phenomenology of immersion, staged in terms of “going elsewhere”. The questions regarding the reflective phase of the work-experience – and all the philosophical implications one might draw from it – are not the theme of this chapter, or of this study as a whole; I believe existing literature has already covered a lot of ground on that matter. What I seek here is an appraisal of the rare event in which a work of art knocks us off our feet before we turn it into philosophical fodder.

The following sections will present a systematic phenomenology of this modality of the there. The argument will be built in three stages, following the model developed in Chapter 2. First I will take a look at the overall topography of what I call the poetic complex, of which the elsewhere is merely a part. This topography entails discussing the relationship between the quotidian lifeworld, the poetic world, and the elsewhere. Then in § 18, I will move on to discuss the dynamics that constitute the taking-place of the elsewhere. This entails discussing the relationship between works of art and gravity, and the way gravity transports the witness to the elsewhere through the work of art. In the subsequent sections, I will describe the elsewhere in terms of its spatio-temporal features. This will be done in § 19. Then, in § 20, I will take a look at how sense is modulated in and through this event.
§ 16. Piece of art, work of art

Let me begin with a crucial conceptual distinction. As I have already remarked, the term work of art denotes in Heideggerian-inspired phenomenology an event where the “work” is understood as a verb: the work of art works on us in a specific way. Heidegger himself, however, does not make a clear distinction between that which works and the work-event itself in the third and final version of The Origin of the Work of Art. Speaking of Heidegger’s use of the term “work”, Andrew Benjamin notes:

The term “work” opens up in two interrelated directions. On the one hand it announces the presence of the object – the object of interpretation or the object of criticism. The object is the work. Equally, however, there is the work’s activity. Its self-effectuations as an object.4

The first version of The Origin, in contrast, avoids this ambiguity by making a conceptual differentiation between a piece of art (Kunststück) and a work of art (Kunstwerk), which I would like to develop here further.5 A piece of art is the foundation – like paintings, dramas, musical pieces, performances, films, and novels – which underlies and makes possible the experience of the work as an event. It is important to note here that “piece” does not here denote a mere physical object, a lump of matter, as the connotation of the word might suggest, but instead points to the things, events, states of affairs, and entities that we include in the category of art. The term “piece of art” names the particulars belonging to a socially, historically, and culturally determined artworld – the particulars which in Schelling’s and Dewey’s vein could also be called “art products”.6 Pieces of art can in the right

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4 Benjamin 2004, 36, n3.
5 Heidegger 1989b, 6, 9. Henri Maldiney (2003, 10) makes the same differentiation between morceau d’art and œuvre d’art. However, Maldiney’s distinction comes from Wilhelm Worringer’s essay Problematik der Gegenwartskunst (Worringer 1948, 9) and not from Heidegger. In Worringer’s usage, an artwork becomes a Kunststück when contemplated solely in terms of its likeness to nature, from which “the perceiver gains only trivial fun from the immediate recognition of the natural object”, and not as a unique form of expression.
6 Schelling 2005, 316. John Dewey (2005, 168) differentiates between an art product and a work of art: “[…] there is a difference between the art product (statue, painting or whatever), and the work of art. The first is physical and potential; the latter is active and experienced. It is what the product does, its working.” Later he writes: “The product of art – temple, painting, statue, poem – is not the work of art. The work takes place when a human being co-operates [sic] with the product so that the
conditions become works of art when encountered by the witness. The reason for this division is that I want to maintain, even on the verbal level, that an encounter with a piece of art is not reducible to a static opposition of subject and object, since it is an event in which the constitution of both is at stake. As Heidegger emphasises, the work-being (Werksein) of the work – its event-character – is irreducible to the being-produced (Erzeugtsein) of the piece: the work is something over and above the produced object through which the work occurs. I want to emphasise the event-character by using the term work of art as a verb instead of a noun, so that the work refers to the way the pieces work on us. So, instead of speaking of aesthetic objects that effectuate aesthetic experiences, like Dufrenne, I will here talk about the way pieces of art modify our mode of being-in-the-world by setting-into-work as we encounter them.

With this distinction I wish to underline the fact that experiences with art – traditionally called aesthetic experience – occur in interaction with some perceptual object, occurrence or states of affairs – or “material objectivity”, as Malpas calls it – without thereby being reducible to this foundation or the one encountering it. Unlike, say, philosophical thinking, which can occur in immediate reflection, an experience with art is mediated by an external circumstance. In other words, the work of art requires that an interruption is brought about by an external, ontic support such as a painting or a dance performance, which, using Jeffrey Maitland’s terminology, performs its presence and thereby catalyses the work of art, which is not identical or reducible to the material presence of the ontic support. Andrew Benjamin has expressed this point in a materialist framework by claiming that the “work occurs within and as the work’s material presence”, which Benjamin also calls

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7 Heidegger 1985a, 26; Heidegger 1989b, 7.
8 Interestingly, in The Phenomenology of Painting (2004, Chapter 4), Nigel Wentworth interprets the “working” of paintings as a formal aspect of painting, in that a painting can be said to “work” when its pictorial elements have been configured in such a way that the viewer can find no reason to alter anything.
9 Dufrenne 1953, 4–10. Dufrenne’s usage of the terms “work of art” corresponds to my usage of “piece of art”.
10 Malpas 2011, 54; Malpas 2012, 237.
According to Benjamin, “meaning is only ever the after-effect of the work’s mattering,” by which he means that the meaningful experience of art is the result of an encounter with a particular material thing.

Different genres of art perform their presence differently: music by announcing itself in sound, sculpture by taking up space, and so forth. The crucial thing here is that the piece of art is not taken as a passive object of contemplation, but as something that actively protrudes its presence and demands to be attended in a manner that differs from theoretical or practical engagements. In La correspondance des arts (1969), Étienne Souriau makes the following rather lovely description:

One of my friends is at the piano. I wait. Here are the three first measures of [Beethoven’s] Pathétique. Although the door did not open, someone entered. There are three of us here: my friend, me, and the Pathétique.

Souriau’s description captures the way Beethoven’s sonata is not present in the room in a similar fashion as the other objects mentioned, namely the piano or the door. Whereas these two, one could imagine, recede into the background, taking part in the constitution of the room where Souriau meets his friend, the Pathétique enters and claims their attention as a third presence. This is what I take performative presence essentially to mean.

In his Aesthetics of Appearing (Ästhetik des Erscheinens, 2000), Martin Seel develops a conceptual distinction that clarifies this point further. According to Seel, we can engage with phenomena either in their being-so (Sosein) or in their appearing. The former denotes phenomena as they are taken in theoretical or practical engagements and fixed within the purview of epistemic and purposeful treatment – this is clearly reminiscent of Heidegger’s notion of being-present-at-hand (Zuhandensein). When taken as a being-so, the phenomenon’s own appearance is
delimited to the particular perspective dictated by exterior conditions, so that the phenomenon can either altogether vanish in its being used or be taken as a theme of consciousness only in terms of the aspects related to the interest at hand. In Souriau’s example, the piano as an instrument gives way to the sonata being played instead of claiming its presence over the sound. This brings us to the latter part of Seel’s distinction, namely *appearing*. When taken as a being-so, a phenomenon is always already taken within a fixed purview, but when we attend to phenomena in their appearing, such conceptual fixations are momentarily put on hold.\(^\text{18}\) Seel emphasises that that does not mean that attending to appearing in itself corresponds to non-conceptual perception, since perception is always already conceptually organised, but instead that the appearing is not fixed under some over-imposed aims.\(^\text{19}\) In Seel’s view, “artistic appearing” demands this sort of engagement from us: artworks are not “mere real things” or “mere representations” but “*presentations in the medium of appearing*” (*Darbietungen im Medium des Erscheinens*), which offer (*bieten*) themselves to our attention as articulated presence.\(^\text{20}\) If we did not attend to the unique claim of the piece’s presence and instead took it up as a mere thing or a tool towards some end, we would miss the piece’s way of coming-into-presence on its own accord. Henri Maldiney has captured this point when he writes:

> If, in a work of art, we aim at an object, we disempower it of what is its own, as we de-face – removing his face – the other whom our gaze objects and fixes into a closed identity: we arrogate to ourselves, by projection, the measure of not being able to endure the expression of its incommensurable being-there. A work of art is the *there* of its own opening; otherwise, no entry.\(^\text{21}\)

Though this recognition gives a crucial role to the piece of art in the overall happening of the work, I am not concerned with the definition or the ontology of *pieces* of art, that is, with the question of why some entities are categorised as pieces

\(\text{\textsuperscript{18} Seel 2016, 56–57, 82–83.}\)
\(\text{\textsuperscript{19} Seel 2016, 86.}\)
\(\text{\textsuperscript{20} Seel 2016, 157.}\)
\(\text{\textsuperscript{21} Maldiney 2003, 7: “Si, dans une œuvre d’art, nous vison d’abord un objet, nous la désapproprions de son propre, comme nous dé-visageons – lui ôtant son visage – l’autre que notre regard s’objet et fixe dans une identité close: nous nous en arrogons, par projection, la mesure pour n’avoir pas à endurer l’expression de son incommensurable être-là. Or une œuvre d’art est le là de sa propre ouverture ; par ailleurs, nulle entrée.”}\)

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of art and other are not, and how these entities exist. This would take me too far afield, and here I wish merely to stipulate that by a piece of art I denote those objects and events we are willing to include under the category of art. What I am concerned with in this study is the ontology of the work of art, the way the work works on its witness in and through aesthetic immersion, which employs another, event-oriented register than questions concerning the ontology of art pieces. My concern here restricts itself to examining a specific mode of the taking-place of sense related to pieces of art, a specific event that can – but does not have to – occur in the presence of a piece of art, namely aesthetic immersion. Here it suffices to stress two things: first, this study limits itself to examining the ontological and phenomenological status of aesthetic immersion, and, secondly, this examination must not be taken as an all-encompassing account of the ontology and phenomenology of art, since I limit myself to the description of the non-reflective, immersive phase of aesthetic experience. On the same note, neither is the following model a comprehensive account of the work-event of art, as art can be seen to work on us in many different ways. For instance, what I mean by the work of art is decidedly different from, for example, what Heidegger means by it. The fact that I use the term “the work of art” as a shorthand for the immersive effects of some encounters with art should not be taken as suggesting that immersion is the only way art can work.

Furthermore, I want to insist here that this distinction is not a normative or evaluative one, even though it could surely be used to such ends. The identity of an entity as a piece of art is independent of the fact whether or not the piece elicits aesthetic immersion; that is, an entity can be a piece of art whether or not it works in an immersive way. An immersive piece of art is not necessarily better than a piece that does not, and, vice versa, a piece of art that does not elicit aesthetic immersion is not necessarily a failed piece. This is because a piece of art can engage with the world and have value in several other ways than by opening up the elsewhere. For instance, a piece of art can be engaged in ideological debates, it can disseminate knowledge, it can alter the shape of artistic practices and change the history of art, it can offer new perspectives on the world, it can help face personal issues – all these without the piece becoming a work in the sense I am using the term here. And, in the same vein, a piece of art can be immersive even though it does not have any of

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22 Dufrenne (1953, 14–19) observes that an object’s status of an artwork (or piece of art in my terminology) depends on the social context in which it is, and thus an object’s capacity to elicit aesthetic experiences should not be taken as a criterion of its status as art.
the above-mentioned values. As such, “good” or “successful” pieces of art cannot be straightforwardly identified with the pieces that have immersive effects, and immersion can be approached only as one of the several factors that contribute to the value of art.

Before finally getting to the phenomenology of the elsewhere, let me make one final remark. In talking about the ontology of art, we run the risk of forgetting that art occurs in the plural, as several different arts. As Jean-Luc Nancy has sharply noted, this plurality has often been either ignored in the philosophical tradition or bypassed by reducing the plurality of the arts to a question regarding the essence of art, thereby abstracting the plural arts into a general category, which evens out all their differences.23 Both ways leave unthought the ontological significance of the plurality itself. The description presented in the following discussion might give the impression that I am here falling into these mistakes.

I will argue that the work of art is an event in which the witness is carried over to a modality of there, which I denote by the term elsewhere. This event is one particular way in which an encounter with a piece of art can unfold, but by no means does it aim to be a general account of all possible experiences with art. However, I do venture into generalising to the extent of claiming that the experience of the elsewhere is not limited to specific types of art but is possible regardless of the genre, medium, or style of a particular piece of art. The experience of the elsewhere is multiply realisable, and it can be triggered by a variety of media. This is so because the experience occurs in a complex situational setting in which an overflow of sense manages to halt the reflective capacity of the witness, and this overflow can be achieved through many different means. Yet, I argue, the experience itself remains structurally the same regardless of its source, and this is why I think it is valid to speak of the elsewhere-experience in general and not just in relation to one particular genre of art. This, of course, raises the thorny question of whether non-artistic events, like religious or natural experiences, can trigger an experience of the elsewhere, and if so, do these experiences differ from those related to different genres of art. Unfortunately, I am unable to pursue this question in any great depth, and I must remain content in repeating the old argument that even if we do have aesthet-

23 Nancy 1994, 12–16. More recently, Andrew Benjamin has broadly discussed the possibility of approaching art forms, genres, and individual artworks in their particularity and relationality without reducing them to an abstract universality. See, for example, Benjamin 2001, “Painting, Technique, and Criticism” in Benjamin 2004, and “Mattering, Particularity and the Work of Art” in Benjamin 2015.
ic experiences from sources beyond art, the context of art offers the most fruitful starting point for the inquiry.

Lastly, this study is not a poetics of the elsewhere. I will not venture here into inquiring how different arts in their particular instances can bring about aesthetic immersion. Further analysis would surely clarify how, for example, music, visual arts, or dance “perform” their presence and produce their effect, and it would also give additional tools for describing the difference or non-difference between the arts and other modes of sense-making. However, what suffices here is to note that the account allows one to approach the arts in their difference without reducing them to an overarching philosophical determination that evens out their heterogeneity.
§ 17. Topography of the poetic complex

A work of art never occurs in a vacuum. One problem with traditional theories of aesthetic experience is the tendency to abstract the subject’s encounter with a piece of art from the total context in which this encounter occurs. This, however, does not correspond to the real complexity of the situation. For instance, in a museum an encounter with a painting can occur amid a horde of tourists, in the polyvocal presence of a multitude of other paintings, accompanied by my particular interests and background knowledge as well as my particular physiological state – hunger, headache, sore feet –, interrupted by the comments of my companions, and so on. A piece of art is never present to me in a total void, but instead occurs in the midst of my lifeworld and fights for attention therein. Arnold Berleant has called this overall situation “the aesthetic field”. Though I will be developing this notion in a slightly different way than Berleant, who focuses on the “aesthetic transaction” between the audience, the artists, and the performers within the aesthetic field, whereas I am interested in the encounter of the witness and the piece’s poetic world within a complex hermeneutic situation, which I will call the poetic complex, I still find Berleant’s emphasis on the contextuality of aesthetic encounters to be of utmost importance. Berleant points out how our engagement with pieces of art never occurs simply between a pure subject and a pure object, since it is mediated by a complex contextual field constituted by the artist, the performer, artistic traditions, religious beliefs, moral values, historical influences as well as the perceiver’s biological and psychological characteristics and social background, among other things. What this highlights is that a multitude of factors take part in the encounter and either aid the happening of the work or hinder it. There is little use in trying to identify, say, certain properties of objects as the sole prerequisites for an aesthetic experience, since the whole experience is a product of a complex dynamic situation in which the circumstances have to be just right for the work to occur. I will be fleshing out

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some conditions for these “right circumstances” throughout this study, and here it suffices to note that the work of art, if it does occur, occurs precisely within and against this world, and not independently of it.

Before the phenomenological description of the event itself, let me briefly outline a situation where it can occur. What kind of relationship must I have with the piece for the work to move me? What kind of situation is needed for me to be taken somewhere else?

17.1. A meeting of worlds

Let me propose an answer by arguing that the work-event is not a meeting of a subject and an object but more importantly a meeting of two worlds. Human existence is inherently characterised by being-in-the-world: it cannot be articulated separate from the world it inhabits. In other words, human existence as Da-sein, as being-there, is equal to having a world as its there. The world from which I proximally find myself is what I call, borrowing Husserl’s term, the lifeworld.27 It is the horizon of experience within and against which singular phenomena become meaningful and from which I draw my possibilities of existence. I am embedded in this socially, culturally, and historically formed context that informs and sustains my way of conducting my life. Speaking merely of the “world”, Romano articulates the hermeneutic usage I adopt here:

“World” refers to the horizon of meaning for all understanding, the totality of possibilities articulated among themselves from which an interpretation is possible, the totality of interpretative possibilities that prescribe a horizon in advance for understanding, from which alone it can be put into action and brought about. It is itself a hermeneutic structure and thus refers to the totality of possibilities from which a meaning can come to light as such.28

27 See Husserl 1954, Part III, section A.

28 Romano 2009, 35; Romano 1998, 51: "Le monde désigne, en effet, l’horizon de sens de toute compréhension, c’est-à-dire la totalité des possibilités articulées entre elles à partir desquelles une interprétation est possible, la totalité possibilités interprétatives qui prescrivent d’avance au comprendre l’horizon à partir duquel, seulement, il se déploie et s’accomplit. Cet ‘horizon’ est lui-même une structure herméneutique et désigne la totalité des possibilités à partir desquelles un sens, comme tel, peut donc venir au jour.”
The phenomenology of worldhood is too complex to take up here in any great
detail. I merely wish to point out the following aspects which play a crucial part in
the following description of the elsewhere. The lifeworld is the *wherein* a factual hu-
man being lives; it is the “homeworld” of my existence.\(^{29}\) It is the pre-given region of
familiarity against which the sense of everything new is measured. It offers the usu-
ally non-thematised context of quotidian experience: it is the domestic environment
that I do not call into question in the hustle and bustle of my daily pursuits. Impor-
tantly, the lifeworld as a hermeneutic structure is neither fixed nor all-encompassing:
it is a finite, person-specific horizon of sense outside of which lies all sorts of new
possibilities and meanings. When something new and foreign comes up, it can be
integrated within the lifeworld, whose structure thereby changes and widens. What
is important here is that my identity cannot be abstracted from my lifeworld, and I,
in a sense, carry my lifeworld with me wherever I go and whatever I do.\(^{30}\)

Here I adopt the Husserlian term *lifeworld* – instead of using the term *world* like
Heidegger and Romano – for a specific reason, namely because it can be contrasted
with another modality of “worldhood”. It is a commonplace in phenomenology of
art to claim that the work of art opens up a world of its own – for instance, the world
of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* or Tolkien’s *Middle Earth* – that surges forth and presents
itself as if superimposed upon the lifeworld, and that when we are dealing with
pieces of art, we are essentially dealing with presentations of worlds. This stance
is taken, for instance, by Dufrenne.\(^{31}\) This world is what I will here call the *poetic
world*. Every piece of art has a specific poetic world of its own, be it as rich and
nuanced as, say, worlds in high fantasy novels, or as simple and abstract as in min-
imalist paintings. Here, the poetic world denotes the set of rules, themes, events,
melodies, colour schemes, atmospheres, and so on, inherent in every individual
piece of art – the combination of elements that constitute it as that particular piece.
As such, the poetic world should not be taken as a world in the same sense as the
lifeworld – as Roman Ingarden points out with respect to literary works, the world
of the piece is more like a *schematic* or *stratified* structure, a constellation of states
of affairs rather than a liveable world.\(^{32}\) This is underlined by the fact that there is a

\(^{29}\) Husserl 1954, 303.

\(^{30}\) For Heidegger’s discussion of world and worldhood, see Heidegger 1976a, §§ 11, 13, 14, 18–21, 69,
and Heidegger 1983b, §§ 64–68; for Romano’s notion of the world, see Romano 1998, § 6.

\(^{31}\) See Dufrenne 1953, Part I, Chapter V.

\(^{32}\) Ingarden 1960, § 8.
multitude of poetic worlds, some of which we would be hesitant to call a world at all. The poetic worlds can be – as has been traditionally the case – *representational worlds*, which imitate the structure of the lifeworld and are made up of a limited set of places, people, events, things, and also the spatio-temporal structure of the lifeworld. They can also be *abstract worlds* in which certain elements, like sensations or forms, are abstracted from the lifeworld and presented singularly, separated from their lifeworld background, as is the case with abstract paintings, minimalist music, Dadaist poetry, and so forth. Or, as is often the case with contemporary performances, a poetic world can amount to *a poetised lifeworld*, which blurs the line between life and art by turning the piece into a social experiment, so that real life and art become entangled in ways that make it difficult to distinguish where the piece ends and real life begins. In all three cases, the poetic world is a constructed (and hence *poetic* in the etymological sense) world that obeys certain rules unique to that particular world.

My claim is that if a work of art is to occur, it occurs as the piece’s poetic world makes an entry into my lifeworld. Here it becomes a question of understanding the meeting of these two worlds. Since my existence cannot be articulated outside the lifeworld within which I exist, my sense of things is bound to the lifeworld and the system of meanings that it sustains. This, in turn, implies that the poetic world cannot be entirely heterogeneous with the lifeworld, a total alien coming from some realm beyond my horizon. On the contrary, the poetic world is made of the same elements as the lifeworld, borrowing from it, altering it, but never wholly severing itself from its source. The poetic world is a fragment of the lifeworld: it constitutes itself from possibilities inherent in the lifeworld. But in isolating certain aspects of the lifeworld and severing them from their quotidian context, the poetic world gives them a life of their own. Paradoxically, then, the poetic world is both a part of the lifeworld but separate from it; is feeds itself from the lifeworld and, in turn, refuses to be digested by it. Dufrenne captures this paradoxical relationship when he writes that “there is nothing but the world, and yet the aesthetic object is pregnant with a world of its own.”

One issue regarding the notion of the poetic world concerns the question whether it is a *closed* world. Oskar Becker has argued that a piece of art is an “aesthetic microcosm”, which “has allowed the totality of all its possibilities to mature

33 Dufrenne 1973, 149; Dufrenne 1953, 200: “[…] il n’y a que *le* monde, et pourtant cet objet est gros d’*un* monde à lui.”
into reality”.34 The young Georg Lukács calls the piece’s world a “windowless monad” (eine fensterlose Monade),35 which is a “closed, complete and self-sufficient totality, which owes its immanent self-circling (Selbstabrudung) to its purely internal limits”.36 Similarly, Gadamer holds that the poetic world is a closed one.37 What is meant here is that a poetic world is a constellation of specific elements to which one cannot add or from which one cannot remove any of the central elements without the piece turning into something else – the story of Macbeth needs its characters and its events in order to be what it is, and Malevich’s Black Square would not be same if the square were blue. There have to be specific essential elements that constitute the poetic world – elements that the piece requires to be the piece it is. Though theoretically possible, it is difficult to conceive of a piece which includes no rules whatsoever and which is wholly open to constant rearrangement. Every rule which limits even one event or state of affairs outside a piece is enough to constitute a poetic world. Therefore, the poetic world closes and determines one in the sense that the audience is offered a certain constellation of elements without the option of freely tampering with that constellation.

The poetic world is closed in yet another, more existential sense, namely, in that strictly speaking I can never enter that world. My gaze can only linger on the surface of a painting or a movie screen; I can never step from the auditorium into the world of a play; I can occupy the same physical space as a statue but never belong to its world; a musical piece can fill my ears but never lift me from my lifeworld; the world of a novel can unfold in front my mind’s eye, yet I remain an outsider who follows the events without ever leaving my sofa. The poetic world enters my lifeworld as a foreign sphere, bringing me to its limits, to its threshold, letting me only peek inside, linger on its surface, but never allowing me to step inside, leaving me as the perpetual outsider, as Jean-Luc Nancy notes in the essay “On the Threshold” (“Sur le seuil” in the collection Les Muses, 1994) when looking at Caravaggio’s Death of the Virgin (1606):

34 Becker 1929, 50: “Denn der ästhetische ’Mikro-kosmos’ ist vor allem Kosmos, für sich selbst ist er keineswegs ’klein’, sondern er hat die Totalität aller seiner Möglichkeiten in sich ‘zur Wirklichkeit reifen’ lassen.”

35 Lukács 1917, 37.

36 Lukács 1917, 19: “Wenn das Kunstwerk ein Mikrokosmos genannt wird, so ist damit sein Kosmos-Charakter gemeint: daß es eine in sich abgeschlossene, vollendete und selbstgenügsame Totalität ist, die diese immanente Selbstabrudung ihren rein von innen gesetzten Grenzen verdankt.”

37 Gadamer 2010, 115.

C H A P T E R  3:  T H E  E L S E W H E R E
We can’t exactly say that we have penetrated there, but neither can we say that we are outside. We are there in a manner older and simpler than by any movement, displacement, or penetration. We are there without leaving the threshold, on the threshold, neither inside nor outside […].38

Using a term borrowed from Bernhard Waldenfels, one could say that there is a specific distant nearness (Fernnähe)39 in the poetic world – it is there, so close, and yet too far to enter. At best, my place can be at the threshold of this world. In the same sense as the face of the other person makes an entrance into my world in such a way that my gaze can never penetrate its otherness and thus is doomed to linger on its surface, I can never enter the world of Macbeth or the Black Square, but at best only stand at the threshold where they enter my lifeworld. The place at the proximity of the threshold, as I will here argue, is experienced as the elsewhere. I will return to this in a moment, and here it suffices to note that the poetic world is, in this phenomenological sense, a closed, unalterable unity. It is not open to rearrangement in the same sense as the lifeworld is.

However, it would be mistaken to take the poetic world as a windowless monad, as Lukács does. This would amount to falling back into the sort of thinking Berleant criticises, as I argued in § 8. One has to note that there is a certain amount of openness in the poetic world at least in two ways: first of all, there is usually some flexibility with regard to some elements (such as setting, clothing, or tempo) of the world that do not compromise the singularity and unity of the world – this flexibility concerns the accidental, non-essential elements of the piece. Following Ingarden, one can argue that a poetic world is a schematic structure that most often includes “places of indeterminacy” (Unbestimmtheitsstelle) – details, which are not explicitly brought up but whose existence needs to be assumed, such as, for example, the colour of the protagonist’s eyes – which the perceiver needs to fill in with their imaginative projections.40 Secondly, every poetic world is subject to a certain osmosis, where the perceiver’s lifeworld can leak into the poetic world and contrib-

38 Nancy 1996, 57; Nancy 1994, 103: “On ne saurait dire que nous y avons pénétré, mais on ne pourrait pas dire non plus que nous sommes en dehors. Nous y sommes d’une manière plus ancienne et plus simple que par aucun mouvement, déplacement ou pénétration. Nous y sommes sans quitter le seuil, sur le seuil, ni dedans ni dehors […]”


40 Ingarden 1960, § 38.
ute to its overall effect. For example, every so often, when I arrive at my office by metro, there are street musicians at the metro station, where it is impossible to listen “purely” to their playing – instead, elements external to the piece itself, such as the noise of people going to work, the tired atmosphere of early mornings, the rhythm of walking amid a crowd, colour the way the music makes an entry, so that, say, a Bach cello sonata can become a theme tune for a grey Monday morning’s trudge to work. Similarly, the perceiver’s interpretation can add elements to the poetic world that are not necessarily intended by the artist, as Heidegger’s response to Van Gogh’s shoe painting shows. Interpretation is concerned with integrating the piece with the spectator’s hermeneutic horizon by appropriating it to signifying discourse and in this way making sense of the poetic world – or making sense of the lifeworld through it. However, neither the contingent elements of the piece nor the osmotic elements brought about by the overall context affect the rule that constitutes the piece, but instead they are both, in their own ways, concerned with the integration of the poetic world within the lifeworld. Consequently, this allows the conclusion that the poetic world is both open and closed at the same time: it is closed in the sense that its constitutive elements are governed by a rule decided by the artist (plot, harmonic schema, colours, etc.), but open in the sense that this poetic world can be both realised (put on display, performed, staged, etc.) and experienced in multiple ways.

Having established this distinction, the next step is to inquire how the poetic world should relate to the lifeworld in order for aesthetic immersion to occur. I will claim here that the lifeworld and the poetic world have to be positioned in a specific way with regard to each other for this to happen; indeed, the poetic world can make an entrance into my lifeworld in many ways, but not all of them trigger the experience of immersion. Sometimes, for example, a piece of art can be so dull, so obscure, or so distant from my personal interests that it hardly touches me in any way whatsoever: I register that it is there, but nothing happens – indeed, in a museum it often

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41 On a similar note, Joseph Margolis (1995, 252) has spoken of the “permeable” and “porous” character of cultural entities, by which he means that such things as artworks are capable of acquiring and losing properties depending on the context in which they are encountered and interpreted. However, it should be noted that Margolis understands the permeability of cultural entities in terms of the collective accumulation of interpretations that colour the reception of artworks (in Margolis’s example, Shakespeare’s Hamlet can nowadays be interpreted in psychoanalytic terms, and such interpretations are valid despite the fact that they were unavailable in Shakespeare’s own time). Hence, Margolis claims (1995, 137–144), artworks acquire “careers” that consist of the sedimentation of their interpretative histories. Though I do not wish to deny such permeability, I would also like to take into account the ways individual situations can affect the reception of the artwork.

happens that my gaze merely slides over most of the pictures displayed, while only a few can hold my attention for an extended period. My central claim is that there needs to be something captivating in a piece, something that undermines my position as an active subject, for the work of art to properly take place. The work of art is a mode of coming-into-presence of sense in such a way that this coming unsettles my synchronous mastery of it, thereby disturbing the hermeneutic order by which I make sense of events and their significance to me. This element is what I will call, using a term borrowed from Levinas, the extraordinary – that is, an entry of something that comes outside the established order of the lifeworld and unsettles it.43 For this to happen, the piece and its poetic world tap into my world in a certain way.

Schematically, the lifeworld and the poetic world can relate to each other in four different ways, which are here illustrated by Figures 1.1–1.4.44 Here, L stands for the hermeneutic horizon which makes up my lifeworld and P for the poetic world. Two of these situations are mainly theoretical possibilities, namely the situations illustrated by Figures 1.1 and 1.4. The former situation is the one where there is no overlap between the lifeworld and the poetic world. This would be the case with pieces that are so strange and bizarre that they have nothing in common with my lifeworld, nothing that conforms to my hermeneutic horizon, nothing that I can grasp. In keeping with the general hermeneutic notion of sense proposed in the previous chapter, such poetic worlds – if such worlds are even conceivable – would not make sense to me and as such could not make an entrance as a threshold. If there is no way for the poetic world to enter the lifeworld, it will remain incomprehensible to me. In other words, the entrance of the threshold requires that the poetic world at least to some degree conforms to the hermeneutic horizons that constitute the sense of my lifeworld, since otherwise I would have no way to get to grips with the foreign world. Consequently, such a piece could neither elicit the taking-place of the elsewhere. Therefore, the situation in Figure 1.1 can be ruled out in this case.

43 Levinas 1964, 145. Incidentally, the English translation of Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art* renders the term “das Ungeheuer”, which qualifies the presence of the artwork, as “the extraordinary” (Heidegger 2001, 64, 65, 66). Similarly, on a par with Heidegger, Paul Crowther (1993, 99) claims that only what strikes us as “unique and extraordinary” and what amounts to “a source of awe through the very fact of its existence” can draw our attention to the working of the artwork.

44 In the figures, closed lines represent horizons, not closed worlds. There is also the possibility of several poetic worlds making an entrance at the same time, merging into one another (for example, listening to music while reading), but I forgo presenting such situations here in a schematic manner.
The latter situation, illustrated by Fig. 1.4, is the converse of the former. In this case the poetic world has engulfed the whole of the lifeworld and turned it into a piece of art. This case is, even in theory, only possible in the case of the artist – one can hardly conceive of a piece of art from which the audience could not disengage itself. In such cases, the lifeworld and the poetic world would at least seem to be entirely commensurate – or, in other words, the piece turns the artist’s life into a non-stop performance. Such a situation creates a host of questions regarding not only the actual possibility of such a poetic world, but also whether it could unfold the elsewhere without bordering on psychosis. Because this option is, at best, a marginal case, I will leave it unexamined here.

Instead, let me turn to situations within which most of our encounters with pieces of art fall. In these cases, the poetic world either completely conforms to the lifeworld (Fig. 1.3) or to some degree overlaps it (Fig. 1.2). I will look at these separately.

The scenario in Fig. 1.3 occurs in cases in which the poetic world of the piece introduces nothing new into the lifeworld but instead conforms perfectly to my pre-existing comprehension. This could be the case with pieces that are “used-up”, that is, encountered many times before so that their sense of newness has worn off.
As Gadamer points out, kitsch and bad art rise from the fact that they give us nothing new to think about. Similarly, even a new piece can be so unchallenging and boring that it hardly touches us in any way. In these cases, the poetic world does bring about its threshold, but there is nothing captivating in it to pull us toward it and hold us there. These pieces lack the element of the extraordinary that aesthetic immersion requires. As such, this scenario holds no interest for the following discussion.

This leaves us with the scenario illustrated in Fig. 1.2. This refers to situations where there is some overlap between the lifeworld and the poetic world, so that the perceiver can get to grips with the poetic world. Such an overlapping of horizons is the precondition of understanding, as Gadamer has shown, but also exhibits a certain amount of difference. The poetic world introduces an element of strangeness, that is, it unfolds the extraordinary in the midst of the lifeworld, and consequently transfigures it. Such an extraordinary entrance of the threshold can – if the situation is also otherwise favourable, as seen in the following – have the captivation that the taking-place of the elsewhere requires. This sounds technical, but the point is rather simple, as Schopenhauer explains with his characteristic eloquence:

> Therefore everyone who reads the poem or contemplates the work of art must of course contribute from his own resources towards bringing that wisdom to light. Consequently, he grasps only so much of the work as his capacity and culture allow, just as every sailor in a deep sea lets down the sounding-lead as far as the length of its line will reach.46

In other words, the poetic world has to have a depth I cannot wholly measure, and yet it must be something I can measure with the tools given me by my pre-existing experience. Arnold Berleant has noted that aesthetic experiences occur only in situations that are akin to going into Alice’s Wonderland – a foreign world only partially comprehensible by the standards of the known world.47 I will here claim that aesthetic immersion can occur only in cases where the lifeworld and the poetic world overlap but are not commensurate with one another; the lifeworld, as Jauß

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46 Schopenhauer 1966b, 407; Schopenhauer 1991b, 472–473: “Deshalb muß aber freilich auch Jeder, der das Gedicht liest, oder das Kunstwerk betrachtet, aus eigenen Mitteln beitragen, jene Weisheit zu Tage zu fördern: folglich faßt er nur so viel davon, als seine Fähigkeit und seine Bildung zuläßt; wie ins tiefe Meer jeder Schiffer sein Senkblei so tief hinabläßt, als dessen Länge reicht.”
remains per negationem as the horizon of experience before which the fiction develops”.\textsuperscript{48} This is not to say that the work of art always occurs when the lifeworld and the poetic world are positioned this way, because many other conditions have to be met for it to occur. This, however, is one central prerequisite for the elsewhere to take place.

This tripartite distinction between the lifeworld, the poetic world, and the elsewhere allows me to further define the scope of this study. Here I shall neither concentrate on the ontology of the lifeworld – that would steer me too far away from the problematics of art – nor on the ontology of the poetic world – for instance, on questions about how fictionalised worlds and characters exist or whether the piece itself exists as a type or a token. Instead, the remainder of this study concentrates on the ontology of the elsewhere, of this peculiar place at the limit, and considers its ontological status. As such, this study is not an ontology of the piece of art but rather a phenomenological ontology of the work of art with regard to aesthetic immersion.

\subsection*{17.2 The elsewhere}

I argued above that the poetic world can overlap with the lifeworld in many ways. The most captivating poetic worlds are those that do not wholly fit into the horizon of my pre-existing lifeworld. Paraphrasing Dufrenne, the poetic world “appears in the world as something not of the world”.\textsuperscript{49} This foreignness resists complete integration in the pre-existing hermeneutic horizon, a foreign element that slips away from all attempts to grasp it. This foreign element is what I call the extraordinary. It names that which, in the unfolding of the work, remains outside the comprehension of being, that is, outside order, de-stabilising it. Paraphrasing Nancy, the extraordinary could be said to be that which “precedes and surprises the phenomenon in the phenomenon itself”;\textsuperscript{50} it is the excess inherent to sense as such, the excess that makes impossible the total reduction of the sense of phenomena to signification and discourse.

\textsuperscript{48} Jauß 1982a, 122; Jauß 1982b, 205: “[…] die derart verabschiedete Alltagswirklichkeit bleibt aber per negationem als der Erfahrungshorizont im Spiel, vor dem die Fiktion ihr Thema entfaltet und den Sinn der suspendierten Welt enthüllt.”

\textsuperscript{49} Dufrenne 1973, 148; Dufrenne 1953, 199: “Cependant, l’objet esthétique apparaît dans le monde comme n’étant pas du monde.”

\textsuperscript{50} Nancy 1997a, 17; Nancy 1993, 32: “[…] ce qui précède et surprend le phénomène dans le phénomène lui-même […].”
This dimension of sense, which cannot be readily returned to discourse, has been touched upon several times in different registers during the history of aesthetics, for instance, in terms of the Bouhoursian *je-ne-sais-quoi*, the Kantian *aesthetic idea*, the Schellingian *infinity*, and the Adornian *Mehr.*\(^{51}\) Charles Baudelaire talks about the *strangeness* of beauty, Dufrenne about the *depth* of the aesthetic object, whereas Nancy speaks of the *plus-de-sens*, the more-of-sense, of art, Marion of the *super-visibility* of paintings, and de Beistegui of the *hypersensible* nested in art.\(^{52}\) All these terms, though by no means synonymous, aim at an element of otherness often inherent in experiences with art – an otherness which the poetic world brings forth by lifting sense from its quotidian confines. The *extraordinary* points in the same direction. The choice of the term wants to emphasise the hermeneutic peculiarity of this otherness in that it manifests itself not by positioning itself within the order of the pre-established hermeneutic horizon but precisely by upending this structure and gaining sense that cannot be reduced to order. What is new in this notion, especially when compared to traditional aesthetics, where the encounter with art’s otherness is taken as an engagement that operates neatly within an established order without seriously disturbing it, is that here the coming-into-presence of indeterminate sense is taken as an ontological event which interrupts the very order that sustains the quotidian world. In other words, the work hollows out its own place and constitutes its own opening, thereby simultaneously disturbing my way of being-in-the-world.

The extraordinary is not a necessary element of the piece for it to be categorised as art – indeed, most art could be claimed to be rather non-extraordinary. However, I will here argue that it is of utmost importance in the taking-place of the elsewhere, that is, it is necessary to the immersive *work* of art. In the following, I will argue that if there is no element of foreignness, nothing intriguing or disturbing in its presence, the piece will not *work* on us and as such bring about aesthetic immersion. Arguing this will take up a significant part of the following argument.

First, however, it is necessary to specify what I mean by the term *elsewhere*. The elsewhere names the place at the point of contact, at the *threshold* in which the life-world and the poetic world touch each other. I cannot enter the world of the piece; I can only linger at its threshold as it enters or, indeed, irrupts into my lifeworld. The notion of the *threshold* I employ here is much the same as the one introduced by

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52 Baudelaire 1998, 487; Dufrenne 1953, 505; Nancy 1993, 210; Marion 2013b, 80; de Beistegui 2012, 4.
Jean-Luc Nancy, who argues that when we look at a painting – such as Caravaggio’s *Death of the Virgin* – our position is neither inside nor outside the painting, but is *in-between* interiority and exteriority.\(^5\) We are always positioned at the threshold of the painting, being able to see inside but never being allowed to step beyond the surface of the canvas.

Nancy’s text only deals with paintings. I, however, would like to argue that a similar threshold occurs with other genres of art as well. In the same way as the surface of the painting unfolds a world which I can gaze at only from the outside, movies, plays, and novels, all in their own ways, give themselves up as thresholds that allow no trespassing; sculptures inhabit the same physical space as I do, but their poetic world remains different; theatrical performances enter the lifeworld, yet their rules are beyond my control; music can surround and engulf me, and, even if it fills my world, I do not strictly speaking occupy it. A poetic world hollows out a place for itself in the lifeworld precisely by manifesting itself as the threshold – as a semi-permeable membrane that allows the poetic world to shine through but blocks me from wholly entering that world.

The elsewhere is a place in the proximity of the threshold. When the threshold erupts into my world, it has a specific event-horizon within which the witness must enter in order to be dislocated from its usual way of being-in-the-world. The event-horizon names that “area” around the threshold in which the elsewhere can occur. The witness must be situated at a right “distance” from the threshold so that the piece can elicit immersion: if the witness is too close to the threshold, he or she might fail to distinguish between the lifeworld and the poetic world, and think, for example, that the murder occurring on the stage is real. On the other hand, if the witness is too distanced from the threshold, it fails to dislocate the witness from his or her usual way of inhabiting the world. An analogous argument has already been established by Edward Bullough’s classical notion of “psychical distance”:\(^5\) Here I modify Bullough’s argument in that I think of the distance in terms of the threshold and the event-horizon. In the sections to follow, I will further discuss the elements that take part in the determination of this distance.

The elsewhere is precisely the place at the threshold of which I am positioned as the work of art – the entrance of the threshold – dislocates me from my usual way of being-in-the-world. It is the *in-between* of the lifeworld and the poetic world; it

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\(^5\) Bullough 1912.
is that caesura in the flux of quotidian experience that occurs as the poetic world enters my world and manifests itself as the threshold between these two worlds. As such, the elsewhere names the peculiar mode of being-in-the-world that I enter through the work of art. By the gravitational effect of the work, my sense of time and place, of myself, of sense itself, is momentarily dis- and re-located. The location, where the unfolding of sense is set in a new light, is the elsewhere. It is not another there somewhere beyond my quotidian there, not some otherworld where I am magically transported, but precisely a transformation of the way I occupy the there to which I am existentially bound. Arguing this is the main point of this chapter – in other words, the following sections will elaborate the elsewhere as a unique mode of being-in-the-world.

This description, however, requires a further remark: the threshold and the elsewhere are not wholly correlative or commensurate. The threshold can make an entrance without thereby constituting the elsewhere. Take, for instance, a poorly acted play: I can clearly follow the unfolding of the poetic world in front of my eyes without being dislocated from the usual way of being-in-the-world – or, similarly, take a plain, generic landscape painting, the kind museums are full of: it brings me to its threshold, opens its world to my gaze but does not move me anywhere. Or, to take a slightly different example, take a highly conceptual and abstract performance, which is so self-enclosed that one can hardly grasp what is happening: the piece introduces its world and its rules to my lifeworld, but these rules remain so vague that I can't comprehend what I'm witnessing, and, as such, immersion does not occur.

In these cases, the threshold enters my world, but I remain too distanced from it for the elsewhere to take place. Should I be at the right distance from the threshold, at its event-horizon, I could no longer escape its pull. Analogously, I have to be at the right “distance” from the threshold of the piece for it to become a work of art. I will return to the factors that influence the distance I take from the threshold at a later stage. Here it suffices to say that the elsewhere is the place at the event-horizon of the threshold, the place at the brink of the poetic world, one step away from entering that world, held in place by the gravity of the threshold. It is the in-between of the two worlds. In other words, the elsewhere is not another world beyond the lifeworld but a modality of the lifeworld, a place at the limit, where the threshold of the poetic world has upended my usual way of dwelling in my lifeworld.

All this can be rephrased by attending to the meaning of the “else” in the elsewhere. I have chosen the term because it aptly captures the difficulty of a positive localisation of the experience. The term elsewhere aims to position the “locality” of aesthetic immersion in terms of a double negation, which articulates the limi-
nal character of aesthetic immersion: the elsewhere is a position that is somewhere “else” than in the lifeworld or in the poetic world. Its existential “location” is best articulated in terms of where it is not situated. The first “else” – the elsewhere’s relation to the lifeworld – is the more complex negation of the two. There is no severing my essential being-in-the-world such that I could leap from one world to another, and thus transcend the limits of the world into which I have been thrown. Rather than understanding the “else” of the elsewhere by locating it beyond the lifeworld, it should be understood as a certain way of relating to the lifeworld within the lifeworld itself. Being-in-the-world is, as Heidegger teaches, essentially being-among-beings: I find myself situated within the same plane with other beings, side by side with them, capable of maintaining a living relationship with them. In my daily immersion in the lifeworld, there is an essential unilaterality between me and things – the world is given to me as a practical field in which things are at hand, offered to my grasp. But, as Levinas acutely observes, an artwork neutralises this living relationship with things. In and through art, the given is present from a distance that no approach can do away with, and thus the unilaterality that characterises quotidian being-in-the-world is doubled by an order that does not belong to the same plane with me: I am not among the things presented by the work in the same way I am among things in my lifeworld. I am no longer able to take hold of them, and indeed they take hold of me. What happens in and through a work of art is a peculiar transcendence, a surpassing of the lifeworld, but in such a way that I do arrive in another world, where I could be among the presented things; it is a transcendence to a threshold I can never cross. If I attend to a piece of art as art, I do not perceive it as an object that I can localise among other objects; rather, the piece of art functions as a portal through which and according to which I perceive what the piece makes manifest. It opens up to me a space of manifestation that is heterogeneous to the ordinary lifeworld and thus not reducible to it. Hence Merleau-Ponty writes of painting in *Eye and Mind* (*L’Œil et l’Esprit*, 1964):

> I would be hard pressed to say *where* the painting is I am looking at. For I do not look at it as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it.56

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55 Levinas 1948, 774.

56 Merleau-Ponty 1993, 126; Merleau-Ponty 1964, 23: “Je serais bien en peine de dire où est le tableau
The work of art is not a manifestation of an object but of an opening up of a place, in which things are located at a distance I can never reach. This neutralisation of the living relationship endows the presented things with a fascination that exceeds any pragmatic interest. I am thus disengaged from or turned away from the plane, in which I am among things, toward another plane, which is out of my reach and thus holding my attention. The “else” of the elsewhere aims to capture the sense of situatedness inherent to this experience: without leaving the lifeworld, I “am” no longer there, as my consciousness is turned away from it towards the poetic world. Thus, on an experiential level, I am somewhere else than in the lifeworld, despite the fact that I never leave it in a physical or concrete sense.

On the same note, the elsewhere is also an “else” with respect to the poetic world. When I am immersed in an artwork, I am not in the poetic world in the same way I am in my lifeworld. Precisely because I am unable to dwell in the world presented by the artwork in the same way I can dwell in the lifeworld – because I can never penetrate a painting and find myself in the depicted scene, or because I cannot run into the world of a play by running on the stage – my transcendence towards it has the peculiar character of falling short, of arriving at a threshold but never crossing it. The “going” of “going elsewhere” is not a movement outside the world – I do not, so to speak, need to leave the house in order to see through the window – but rather a turning within the lifeworld away from the lifeworld. Thus, the common parlance of aesthetic experience as transportation to another world is somewhat misleading: I am not transported into the midst of another world but to its boundary, where I can see inside but not step in. The “where” of the elsewhere is thus not situated in another there but at a limit of the there, where the manifestation of the work eclipses and covers over my quotidian lifeworld by bringing me to the limit of the poetic world.

Thus, aesthetic immersion can be seen as an experiential correlate in the event of the artwork which momentarily reorients the way I occupy my there. The artwork covers over, or eclipses, the quotidian lifeworld with its manifestation, so that I am turned away from the things that are closest to me and turned towards things that are present at a peculiar distance. If being occurs as an event of disclosure that gathers and delimits – that is, brings some beings into a complicated and instantaneous unity while covering over others – then the artwork is an event of being in which my im-

que je regarde. Car je ne regarde pas comme on regarde une chose, je ne le fixe pas en son lieu, mon regard erre en lui comme dans les nimbés de l’Être, je vois selon ou avec lui plutôt que je ne le vois.”
mediate surroundings are covered over and closed outside the horizon of attention, so that the nearness of the poetic world fully occupies the opening of the there and consumes me. Not being there in the lifeworld, not being there in the poetic world – the term “elsewhere” as the existential location of aesthetic immersion names the ambiguity of this way of being-there: to be there in an in-between, in the boundary that interrupts my dwelling in the everyday as I encounter a captivating piece of art.

17.3 Continuity

One last thing before moving on. The preceding description of the elsewhere might seem to fall into the trap of Erlebnis aesthetics in which the work-experience is understood to be removed from the continuity of everyday life, enclosed as it is within its own aesthetic bubble. Indeed, I will argue that the immersion inherent to the elsewhere-experience entails non-reflective bracketing of one’s immediate surroundings. However, a complete aesthetic differentiation, as Gadamer has it, would remove the experience of the work from any claim to cognitive value. Here I would like to ward off such an interpretation.

Technically, this question boils down to explaining how there can be continuity between the non-reflective and the reflective phases of the work-experience. This is, in fact, a slightly more complex issue than what I can at this point tackle, and I will return to this later on in § 26 after I have covered more ground; answering this question satisfactorily requires some remarks on the functioning of understanding, and that can only be taken up later on. At this point I merely wish to point out that even if the experience of the elsewhere is a rupture in the flow of everydayness, this rupture does not mean that the witness enters into some sort of somnambulist trance that would be wholly inaccessible afterwards. As I will argue more fully later, the claim that the experience entails self-forgetfulness does not necessarily imply that the event completely halts the process of understanding. Instead, the witness does understand what the poetic world presents in and through the work on a non-reflective level – the events of a play, the scene depicted by a painting, the sequence of movements in dance – even if he or she cannot wholly master the work and make out its significance on the spot. Furthermore, this non-reflective understanding is not forgotten like a dream after the witness gains self-possession; instead, the content of the presentation can be recollected afterwards, even if the experience itself cannot be re-enacted. In this sense, the work of art is not a self-enclosed, monadic experience but more like a momentary desynchronising of the unfolding of events and the witness’s capacity of appropriating them.
Gadamer argues something similar in *Truth and Method* when he labours to demonstrate that even if the “players” lose themselves in the play of the artwork, there is still a continuity between the work-experience and the lifeworld. There Gadamer argues:

> Since we meet the artwork in the world and encounter a world in the individual artwork, the work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it, and this means that we sublate (*aufheben*) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence. For this reason, we must adopt a standpoint in relation to art and the beautiful that does not pretend to immediacy but corresponds to the historical nature of the human condition. The appeal to immediacy, to the instantaneous flash of genius, to the significance of “experiences” (*Erlebnisse*), cannot withstand the claim of human existence to continuity and unity of self-understanding. The binding quality of the experience (*Erfahrung*) of art must not be disintegrated by aesthetic consciousness.

This negative insight, positively expressed, is that art is knowledge and experiencing an artwork means sharing in that knowledge.57

According to Gadamer, the work of art is not a mere *Erlebnis* but a proper *Erfahrung*, which changes the course of our lives as we go (*fahren*) through it.58 Upon this claim hangs the whole thrust of Gadamer’s reorientation of aesthetics: instead of being a matter of mere feeling, the work of art is for Gadamer a possibility of learning to...

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58 Gadamer 2004, 113; Gadamer 2010, 119: “In der Wiedererkenntnis tritt das, was wir kennen, gleichsam wie durch eine Erleuchtung aus all ihrer Zufälligkeit und Variabilität der Umstände, die es bedingen, heraus und wird in seinem Wesen erfaßt.”
see the world anew. This is what Gadamer terms recognition (Wiedererkenntnis): “In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence.”59 Recognition is not a mode of “aesthetic consciousness” in the traditional sense, since it does not maintain the aesthetic differentiation inherent to it; instead, it is a mode of aesthetic non-differentiation, where the continuity of the lifeworld is maintained and yet raised to a higher, more authentic level.60 Here I wish to concur with Gadamer on the point that the content of the poetic world, which is mediated in the work-experience, does carry over to the lifeworld, and that thereby there is a continuity between the experience of the elsewhere and the normal flow of experience that returns after it, seeing that the elsewhere is precisely a disturbance in this flow. In this study, however, I am interested in the moment of disturbance itself, and not so much in the cognitive import it might offer afterwards; it is the immersion that interests me and not its retrospective sublation into a widened world-horizon. The preceding remarks are solely meant to ward off the misunderstanding that I wish to disconnect aesthetic experience completely from the lifeworld.

59 Gadamer 2004, 113; Gadamer 2010, 119: “In Wiedererkenntnis tritt das, was wir kennen, gleichsam wie durch eine Erleuchtung aus der Zufälligkeit und Variabilität der Umstände, die es bedingen, heraus und wird in seinem Wesen erfaßt.”

60 Gadamer 2010, 122.
§ 18. Making an entry

Having established the central topography of the poetic complex, I want to move on to discussing the dynamics that brings forth the elsewhere. So let us assume that a poetic world has brought its extraordinary threshold into the midst of my lifeworld. What happens next? What sets the work of art into motion?

18.1 Work and gravity

Let me begin the discussion of the dynamics of the poetic complex with an experience I already alluded to in the introduction. Not so long ago I made a study trip to Paris. I had some free time on my hands, and I felt the urge to go to the Louvre. So, one morning into the museum I went, and only after entering did I start to wonder what I actually want to do there. Suddenly I got an idea of doing an experiment that runs against all recommendations of how to engage with art: I wanted to check how long it would take to go through every single room of the museum. Almost eight hours later I had an answer. This grand tour could not boast of any depth, but it certainly made one rather mundane yet very enigmatic phenomenon extremely clear to me. Walking through this formidable collection of treasures, I could not help but notice how some pieces caught my attention more than others. Some of them I hardly even noticed, some I registered but did not stop to look at, and some made me stop for a moment. And then there were some pieces, especially Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* that completely possessed my gaze. I had seen Géricault’s painting before, but for some reason this time was different: the colossal painting seemed to saturate the space with its presence, eclipsing even Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People*, which hung next to it. The art historian Simon Schama has noted that some paintings have such “an uncanny force field”, that when you turn your back on them, you still feel their presence.61 For me, Géricault’s masterpiece was one such painting.

The idea that powerful experiences with art often entail a sort of heightened presence is by no means new.62 However, previous accounts have not in my view

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62 For example, in Longinus’s treatise *On the Sublime* (1973, 209, 235) we can find a claim that certain linguistic devices and musical instruments can have “a marvellously moving and seductive effect” which “casts a spell on us, […] winning a complete mastery of our minds”; Baumgarten (2007, 152) argues that one of the “aesthetic perfections” of an object is what he calls “aesthetic magnitude”, by
elaborated sufficiently the phenomenological character of this peculiar presence often found in art. I want to argue here that such description can be done in terms of gravity, and that such elaboration also opens up the door to the ontological description of the elsewhere and its dynamics. My central thesis is that the experience of the elsewhere requires being caught up in the gravitational field of a piece of art, or, to put it in other terms, it requires that the piece “performs” its presence in such a way that it captures my attention and makes me unable to master that presence, resulting in the experience of immersion.

Applying the notion of gravity developed earlier in § 13.4, I want to argue that the gravity of a piece of art is related to the degree in which the piece curves my phenomenal field. This curvature can occur in many different ways, as it is conditioned and obstructed by several factors. The gravity of the piece can derive from, for example, its sensible, emotive, material, spatial, historical, personal, conceptual density: for instance, the Géricault painting captivates by the sheer force of its emotional charge, the Willendorf Venus with its primordial presence, a church, like the basilica of St. Peters in Rome, with the otherworldly sublimity of its architectonic volume; a painting by Jackson Pollock can seduce by its sheer material and sensuous presence, whereas the “invisible paintings” of Yves Klein can captivate the viewer with their presence without offering anything to see. Furthermore, gravity can be the result of intensity in one certain dimension sense – for instance, the paintings of Jason Martin revel in the sheer materiality of paint – or of the complication of several overlapping dimensions of sense. This is the case of Anselm Kiefer, whose works are endowed with a strong gravity through the complicated union of sensuous density, material weight, and allusions to history, poetry, alchemy, and so on. Accordingly, gravity can be both extensive, rising from the sheer amount of phenomena presented by the work, or intensive, rising from the force by which the work imposes phenomena upon the witness.

which he means “1) the weight and gravity of the objects, 2) the weight and gravity of the thoughts proportionate to them, and 3) the fecundity of the two together”; similarly, Herder (1993, 197) argues that “the essence of poetry […] is the force, which adheres to the inner in words, the magical force, which works on my soul though fantasy and recollection.” Walter Benjamin (see Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit in Benjamin 1980) called the heightened presence of art the “aura” of the work; Gernot Böhme (1995, 16–17) has argued that art is one mode of “aesthetic work” which aims at producing “atmospheres” and making them thematic; and, more recently, the object-oriented ontologist Timothy Morton (2015) has argued that works of art can exhibit a special kind of “charisma”. Krzysztof Ziarek has discussed art as a “force field” in The Force of Art (2004), but for him it has more to do with art’s capacity to function as a social, transformative force rather than with phenomenal presence.
The gravity of pieces of art, as the gravity of any entity, also has an element of context-specificity and situatedness. The fact is that the gravity of a phenomenon is not simply dependent on the phenomenon itself but on its position in my lifeworld. A piece is never independent of the hermeneutic context in which it is encountered, and its mere position in this context can produce a field of gravity around it. Indeed, in the case of art, the mere declaration of something as a piece of art suffices to create an aura, at least to some degree. One instance of this was an exhibition of invisible art, held in London's Hayward Gallery in 2012. It was comprised mostly of pieces in which an invisible entity – practically nothing – was declared art. This was enough to make visitors act as if the space was full of significant objects; they circled an invisible car like it was a sculpture and were somehow distressed by a small orb of bewitched air, presented on a pedestal like a statue. There were, strictly speaking, nothing to be seen, and yet the space was saturated with gravity due to the conceptual acts related to the situation.

Since the sense of things is configured in a complicated hermeneutic dynamics in which I am not just the passive receiver of sense but an active part of its determination, my personal horizon also configures in the complication of presence. For example, I had personally wanted to see Caravaggio's *David and the Head of Goliath* (1609–1610) for years, so much so that it became one of the main attractions of my first trip to Rome. What interested me in the painting was its striking historical background, but, when I saw it for the first time, it was not just the brutal honesty of the painting that struck me, but also the fact that there it was at last. There was a certain personal dimension attached to the painting, a certain fulfilment of anticipation that added to its presence, which might not be present for those who came to see something else. To take another example, my response to the Géricault painting was undoubtedly coloured by the fact that when I encountered it, I had just heard that one of my relatives was suffering from a terminal illness, and the scene of desperation somehow resonated with feelings I was processing at the time, thus making the experience of the painting stronger than it would perhaps have been in other times.

In addition to expectations and prior affective attunement, much of the gravity of the piece is dependent on background knowledge related to the piece. For instance, the captivating presence of Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) owes much to the historical importance of the piece, since in itself the urinal is of little interest. An apt example of this sort of transfiguration is Olinka Vištica’s and Dražen Grubišići’s ongoing project *The Museum of Broken Relationships* (begun in 2006), which exhibits donated objects that remind their owners of past relationships. The random, seemingly inconspicuous objects, like buckets, teddy bears, and contraceptive pills, gain a
tragic aura of significance as the viewer reads the unhappy love stories behind them. Suddenly the exhibits become somehow special and cease to be mere objects among objects. Similarly, a dull painting can become far more captivating in front of one’s eyes if its secrets are told. A modern viewer of, say, Pieter Cornelisz van Rijk’s *Market Stall with Two Figures* (1622) might look at it as nothing more than a depiction of a man and a woman amid copious amounts of vegetables and poultry. However, if one is told that in Dutch still lives pumpkins – of which there are plenty in the painting – are a symbol of adultery and birds refer to fornication, then the painting can be taken to hint that more than just vegetables are on sale in this market stall. One begins to look at the painting through wholly different eyes – and sometimes this is enough to turn an insignificant piece into something extraordinary.

One could mention here that some modern and postmodern pieces have intentionally attempted to dismantle the relationship between art and gravity. This objection necessitates two remarks. First of all, this objection does not threaten the validity of the phenomenology expounded here, since I have emphasised the difference between the work of art and the piece of art. The categorisation of something as a piece of art is a sociologically, historically, and culturally determined choice, whereas the status of a work of art – in the sense that I am using it here – can be given for certain pieces with certain ontological and existential effects related to their gravity. Therefore, the fact that some pieces intentionally avoid any sense of gravity does not undermine the relationship between the work and the gravity expounded here, since I argue that gravity is only essential in the case of the work of art and not so much regarding pieces of art. Secondly, Gernot Böhme has claimed that despite the vehemence of its efforts, avant-garde art did not manage to rid itself entirely of the aura of exceptionality; instead, the only thing it managed to do was to thematise the aura and show that, despite the fact that there is nothing in the piece itself that makes it art, the aura related to it does not necessarily go away. The same argument could be translated into the language of gravity: works that intentionally attempt to be as dull and mundane as possible, so as to avoid any sense of gravity, can still have a strong field of gravity: a prime example of this is Duchamp’s *Fountain* and his other, equally iconic ready-mades, which exude presence despite their banality due to their fame and historical importance.

There is, however, one more crucial point to be made about the relationship between gravity and the elsewhere, namely this: a piece of art can have gravity without

eliciting the taking-place of the elsewhere, that is, without becoming an immersive work of art. This situation can occur for many reasons: the piece itself might not be strong enough to sustain immersion, or there could be too much interference for it to happen, or my intentional attitude toward the piece might prevent my succumbing to the work. These situations will be discussed later in more detail, but here it suffices to note that gravity does not straightforwardly equal the taking-place of the elsewhere; instead, it is one of the main components in a complex interplay that produces the work of art. As will become more evident later on, the taking-place of the elsewhere requires specific conditions for it to occur, of which gravitational pull is but one.

18.2 An-archic beginning

Taking this hermeneutic starting point, the first question to ask is what kind of event is a work of art – that is, how does a work of art make its entry into my world? In answering this question, I find Romano’s distinction between *evental* events, or *innerwordly facts* (*fait intramondain*), as he also calls them, and *evential* events very instructive. In his evential hermeneutics, Romano points out that Heidegger’s *Ereignis* is not an event but the primordial event that makes possible the event-ness of being. It is that which clears the Open for anything to occur in the first place. Romano develops Heidegger’s event ontology by arguing that in and through *Ereignis* a plurality of different events becomes possible. These events, Romano claims, can be divided into two main groups: innerwordly facts and evential events.

For Romano, innerworldly facts are events that actualise a pre-existing possibility, a possibility that already belongs to existence – or “adventure”, as Romano calls it. An innerwordly fact completely yields to my pre-existing hermeneutic horizon. This means furthermore that innerworldly facts yield to a causal explanation – they can be integrated into the pre-existing network of sense – and they can be dated – that is, inscribed in time. These are events that conform to the existing order of the lifeworld and share the same *there* as their scene; they can be unified into a continuous flow, where one event is grasped as following the other. This is because their conformity with pre-existing horizons allows the subject to grasp them as they occur and consequently also to remember them. An innerworldly fact

64 Romano 1998, § 3.
also has a definite relation to the subject: it needs me as its “privileged subject of ontic assignation” (sujet d’assignation ontique privilégié), since it is only against my hermeneutic horizon that the innerworldly fact gains it meaning. As such, it does not challenge my comprehension or implicate my mode of existence in any way; my selfhood is not at stake in these events. In sum, innerworldly facts are events which fall entirely within my pre-existing hermeneutic horizon and do not challenge my mastery over the world.

In contrast to innerworldly facts, there is another category of events which cannot be integrated into the pre-existing order in the same way – evential events. Unlike innerworldly facts, these are events that do not fit into the established world but instead upend and re-organise it: the death of a loved one, an accident, illness, and falling in love are, in Romano’s view, events that turn one’s whole world upside down. They re-arrange the horizon of possibilities which governs the meaningfulness of my world. As such, they are the inverse of innerworldly facts. Romano develops the notion of the evential event in terms of four characteristics: 1) the evential event always implicates me in its occurring: it is unsubstitutably me to whom the event occurs. When I am injured in a car accident or someone I love dies, no one can substitute me in living through the change that these events bring about. It is exactly through these events that my selfhood is determined, as these events put my very understanding of my place in the world at stake. 2) By re-arranging the horizon through which I make sense of the world, the evential event also discloses the world anew; because the event re-appropriates my way of being-in-the-world, I also have to re-appropriate my sense of the world. The evential event does not fit into the existing context of my world but rather re-arranges it. In other words, the evential event does not so much occur in the world as it founds the world. 3) The evential event cannot be wholly integrated within a causal chain. Causality can be established only within a context, and the evential event occurs precisely as a rupture in this context. Certainly, a phenomenon’s causal chain can be determined on the factual level – that injuries caused by a collision occur because I hit my head and so forth – but this factual explanation does not exhaust its meaning. Instead, the meaning of the event exceeds the preceding horizon and comes from a horizon.

66 Romano 1998, 43.
67 Romano 1998, § 5.
68 Romano 1998, 43–46.
of its own. In Romano’s words, “an event opens to itself, gives access to itself, and, far from being subjected to a prior condition, provides the condition of its own occurring.” What this means is that the meaning of the event can only be understood within the horizon that it opens by itself. As such, the event is its own origin, “a pure beginning from nothing” and “an an-archic bursting forth” that uproots the causal framework. The evential event does not occur in time, but instead it opens time. Romano claims that there is a diachrony between the evential event and the adventent’s (Romano’s term for the subject) thematic grasp of it: the event has always already occurred before I can grasp it. Consequently, there is a delay between the event and my thematic grasp of it. This diachrony shows itself as a disruption in the flow of experience: the evential event cannot be integrated within the continuity of innerworldly facts. Furthermore, after the event, the world is not the same anymore – and as such, the event opens the future for me. It cannot be dated in the sense that, on the evential level, it cannot be integrated within a continuous span of time. The evential event, then, is not a point in time but instead the origin of time.

My fundamental aim in this chapter is to argue that in many respects a work of art resembles Romano’s description of evental events – though I will claim that in some respects a work of art does not wholly fit Romano’s account. As I will elaborate in the following, the elsewhere is here understood as an event of expropriation, where both the sense of the world and the sense of selfhood are momentarily fragmented. The elsewhere occurs precisely as a disruption and discontinuity in the flow of innerworldly facts. The elsewhere does not take place here, in the sense that it would position itself neatly within the pre-established lifeworld; instead, the poetic world opens its own there, the threshold, which is experienced as the elsewhere – but, and this is a crucial but – the “where” of the elsewhere must not be understood as another place over and above the lifeworld, but instead as a re-staging of the very opening in which the lifeworld takes place. It occurs as an an-archic manifestation of the heterogeneous threshold of the work – as an opening to a foreign place, where we, strictly speaking, can never enter, but whose nearness destabilises the order of the lifeworld. As such, there is a certain heterotopy in the taking-place
of the elsewhere that cannot be reduced to the topography of the lifeworld. This also entails that the taking-place of the elsewhere cannot be wholly remembered or made thematically present to consciousness – its occurrence can be integrated into the flow of events only retrospectively by the traces it leaves as it disrupts the flow of experience. Levinas has aptly described such manifestation in terms of disturbance (dérangement):

Disturbance is a movement that does not propose any stable order in conflict or in accord with a given order; it is movement that already carries away the signification it brought: disturbance disturbs order without troubling it seriously. It enters in so subtle a way that unless we retain it, it has already withdrawn. It insinuates itself, withdraws before entering. It remains only for him who would like to take it up. Otherwise, it has already restored the order it troubled – someone rang, and there is no one at the door: did anyone ring?

The taking-place of the elsewhere occurs precisely as such a disturbance: it makes an entrance and touches in its own manner outside order, only to efface itself from the slightest interference; order is restored, but some traces are left behind. The phenomenology of such an an-archic disturbance can be further elaborated in terms of the following interrelated aspects.

The arrival of the elsewhere cannot be predicted. In traditional aesthetic theories, especially those with a cognitive bent, one often gets the impression that the aesthetic object is treated as something that passively succumbs to the contemplation of the subject, and that the reflective contemplation is, if not equal, at least synchronous with the happening of the work. This approach, however, becomes blind to the way the elsewhere makes an entry: it is not something I can enter by will, or whose coming I could predict. Martin Seel captures this when he writes: “Frequently, however, there is no actual doing at all required – when what is appearing suddenly

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Levinas 1996, 70; Levinas 2016, 290: “Le dérangement est un mouvement qui ne propose aucun ordre stable en conflit ou en accord avec un ordre donné, mais un mouvement qui emporte déjà la signification qu’il apportait: le dérangement dérange l’ordre sans le troubler sérieusement. Il y entre d’une façon si subtile qu’il s’en est déjà retiré, à moins que nous ne le retenions. Il s’insinue – se retire avant d’entrer. Il ne reste que pour celui qui veut bien lui donner suite. Sinon, il a déjà restitué l’ordre qu’il troublait: on a sonné, et il n’y a personne à la porte. A-t-on sonné?”
holds us spellbound, or when the conversion to aesthetic consciousness befalls us.”⁷⁴ In other words, the taking-place of the elsewhere has the phenomenological character of surprise.

Let us look at this in more detail. It is a commonplace in hermeneutic thinking to point out that we project ourselves towards the future and interpret the meaningfulness of events against pre-given expectations, or, as Bernhard Waldenfels puts it, “everything we encounter is usually embedded in a horizon of experience, which allows us to expect something definite despite all partial openness.”⁷⁵ Surprises, according to Waldenfels, are those events that deviate from our expectations and undermine our cognitive mastery of the situation. Waldenfels makes a distinction between what he calls “normal” and “anomalous” surprise.⁷⁶ Normal surprises are those events, which are unexpected but which nevertheless do not disturb the order of normality, like in cases where one forgets what day it is and finds a museum closed or that the train is running on a different schedule.⁷⁷ Anomalous or “proper” (eigentlich) surprises are those cases in which the limits of normality are overstepped, and consequently these limits need to be reconsidered – in other words, cases akin to Romano’s eventual events.⁷⁸ What is important, according to Waldenfels, is that the surprise exceeds our capacity to expect it and therefore accommodate its arrival: “What is meant [by surprise] is that which overcomes us, descends upon us, precedes as surprise our grasp and in the over-suddenness (Über-raschung) is quicker than our reaction; what is meant is everything that happens to us endowed with a certain punch […]; what is meant is that which unpredictably befalls us and shows our cautions and precautions their place.”⁷⁹ Such an anomalous happening questions the activity and synchronicity of the subject, as Waldenfels continues:

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⁷⁵ Waldenfels 2015, 281: “Alles, was uns so begegnet, findet sich normalerweise eingebettet in bestimmter Erfahrungshorizonte, die uns bei aller partiellen Offenheit Bestimmtes erwarten lassen.”

⁷⁶ Waldenfels 2015, 282.

⁷⁷ Waldenfels 2015, 282.

⁷⁸ Waldenfels 2015, 282.

⁷⁹ Waldenfels 2015, 294: “Gemeint ist das, was uns überkommt, was uns überfällt, was als surprise unserem Zugriff zuvorkommt und in der Über-raschung schneller ist als unsere Reaktion; gemeint ist alles, was uns zustößt, ausgestattet mit einer gewissen Schlagkraft […]; gemeint ist schließlich das, was uns zufällt, mit einer Unvorhersehbarkeit, die all unsere Vorsicht und Vorsorge in ihre Schranken weist.”
Becoming surprised means a passivity of a special kind, not a mere reversal of the active, which would make us the plaything of foreign influences, but rather a medium in the sense of Greek grammar, a sense of being seized and grasped, in which the familiar and the foreign, self-affection and external affection (Fremdaffektion) intertwine with each other. From this it follows that surprises are understandable only afterwards [...]. We always come too early or too late to catch a surprise in flagranti.80

In other words, surprises are subversive events, which cannot be intentionally regulated and synchronised with the subject’s reflective grasp; instead, they make an entry as an-archic coming which grabs the subject rather than the other way round.

Aesthetic immersion is one such experience. There is, of course, a long historical discussion concerning the role of surprise in aesthetic experience.81 In more contemporary literature, Heidegger claims in the first version of The Origin that the greatness of an artwork is measured by its “disruptive power” (Zerstörungskraft), by which the work unexpectedly cuts our usual ties to the world,82 and Gadamer claims that “great art shakes us because we are always unprepared and defenceless when exposed to the overpowering impact of a compelling work”,83 whereas Mal diney describes the event of art in very much the same way I am aiming at here:

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81 For example, Aristotle (Aristot. Poet. 1452a11–12) claims that tragedies should imitate unexpected events and thereby surprise us; Bouhours (1671/2016, 341), as I have noted, argues that the je ne sais quoi of art enchants precisely because it surprises us; Baumgarten (1954, §§ 43–44, 48) argues that poetic representations should incite de wonder and surprise; Fichte (1981, 345) describes aesthetic experience as “an unexpectedly surprising but completely unmotivated and purposeless feeling […], which bears no comprehensible relation to the other workings of our minds”; and, as Karl Heinz Bohrer (1981) has shown, the notion of suddenness (plötzlichkeit) – the temporal discontinuity of aesthetic experience – has been a key notion in aesthetics from the early Romantics to Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin and the French Surrealists.

82 Heidegger1989b, 8.

The alterity of a work of art, however, differs from that of a pure and simple being-there. It is an event, which has surged from elsewhere, where elsewhere is here. It is a radiant otherness, which opens to us, in surprise, the space of its radiance. It is a question of recognizing the apertural moment of the work’s space. We will only learn it in surprise.84

The taking-place of the elsewhere, in a figurative turn of speech, sweeps one off of one’s feet and takes one to the threshold. As Maldiney says, "the genesis of a work of art does not take part in the es weltet. It is not a moment in being-in-the-world"85: a work of art does not take place as an innerworldly event but as something that opens its own world in the midst of the world. It hollows itself its own time-space in which the elsewhere takes place. What is essential at this point is that this opening is not the active achievement of the witness; instead, it befalls on them and sur-prises – literally over-takes – them. Of course this event requires all sorts of dispositions from the witness (these I will discuss further in § 29), but this does not contradict the claim that, phenomenologically, there is a diachrony between the occurrence of the elsewhere and the witness's reflective grasp of this happening, which undermines the witness’s capacity to expect it and synchronise themselves with it.

All this has to be said with a few reservations. The surprise-character of a work does not entail that it occurs as a violent shock, as surprises sometimes do. On the contrary, too strong and sudden shocks might make one all too aware of one’s reaction, making it difficult to let oneself sink into the work-event. The surprise in question is often much more subtle. Think, for instance, of the case of listening to a classical concert: the first measures of the music fill the concert hall, and you listen intently, perhaps examining the conductor’s style and the orchestra’s tone, but then, as the music flows on, little by little your concentration relaxes, you perhaps close your eyes or stare at some blank spot, your thoughts begin to wander and sway in the musical flow…until suddenly you become alert again, realising that you had gone for a moment. This is the mischievous surprise of the music: slowly it had taken over you and sur-prised you, lulled you into self-oblivion, and for a moment

84 Maldiney 2012, 269: "L’altérité d’une œuvre d’art, toutefois, diffère de celle d’un pur et simple être-là. Elle est un événement surgi d’ailleurs, là où ailleurs c’est ici. C’est une altérité rayonnante, qui nous ouvre, dans la surprise, l’espace de son rayonnement. Il s’agit de reconnaître le moment apertural de l’espace de l’œuvre. Nous ne l’apprendrons que dans la surprise."

made you forget where you are. You become aware of this surprise only when you become again conscious of yourself and your surroundings and realise that you can’t quite remember what just happened. In this sense, the surprise in question could be called, following Romano, “vesperal surprise” (surprise vespérale), which “catches fire only when the flash of the event has finished growing dim”, in contrast to the “matinal surprise” (surprise matinale), which surprises in its very surging-forth.86

Neither does this condition of surprise necessarily entail that the piece, through which the work occurs, is itself surprising, though this of course helps. Novelty value quickly wears off, and only rarely can a piece of art fascinate for extended periods or several times. However, there are undoubtedly those pieces that do not seem to lose their capacity to enchant even when one knows them by heart: there are passages in Bach’s St. Matthew Passion that get me every time even if I know perfectly what to expect. What this underlines is the fact that what surprises in an artwork need not be the unexpected arrival of something wholly unknown – though this is often the most effective way of getting to the elsewhere – but instead the coming of a sense that intention cannot wholly contain, even if it can to some extent expect it. In the case of the Passion, even if I can remember the lyrics of the aria Mache dich mein Herze rein and play it in my head, this does not compare to the full-blown emotional and bodily fullness it has if sung by a good bass. Even here the taking-place cannot be predicted with certainty beforehand so that I would know that “now it’s going to happen”. If I do so, it probably won’t work. As I will discuss further in § 29, even familiar pieces require a certain amount of Gelassenheit from the witness in order to work: if I take the Passion as a mere execution of notes I know by heart, immersion will elude me, but if I let myself be taken by the stream of sound, there is a chance I will find myself somewhere else.

Furthermore, even if I wish to emphasise the non-predictability of the experience, this should not be taken as implying that the elsewhere flashes like lightning the very second I encounter a powerful piece of art. Sometimes that does happen, but often it does not: sometimes one needs to linger awhile, sometimes for hours, in the piece’s presence for it to start speaking to you. A story goes that when the great Russian art collector Sergey Shchukin bought his first Picasso, the painting Woman with a Fan (1909), at first he hated it so much that he compared looking at it to swallowing crushed glass; yet he forced himself to look at it daily, until one day, as

86 Romano 2014, 171; Romano 1999, 221: “[…] il y a une surprise matinale et une autre vespéral qui ne s’allume que quand l’éclat de l’événement a achevé de s’estomper.”
he recounts, the “incredible inner force” of the painting had him “hypnotised and bewitched”.

Similarly, as James Elkins recounts, the seemingly black paintings in the Rothko Chapel require long and hard observing before the eye discerns movement in the paintings, and then suddenly one finds oneself encroached by the darkness. What I am aiming at here is that the elsewhere takes place suddenly, but this suddenness does not have to be synchronous with the first encounter with a piece – sometimes time is needed, but when it does take place, it happens so suddenly that one realises one was immersed only in waking from the experience.

*The elsewhere makes an entry as an an-archic beginning.* A recurrent claim in Western philosophy, already insinuated in Antiquity and thematised in early modern philosophy, is that any state of affairs is meaningful only if it can be grounded upon some other state of affairs. This claim goes by the name of the principle of sufficient reason, which – to choose one of its formulations – states, as Wolff puts it: *nihil est sine ratione cur potius sit quam non sit* – nothing is without a ground or reason why it is rather than it is not. Schopenhauer, giving a Kantian twist to an old philosophical idea, develops this notion by arguing that every phenomenon must be connected to something else in terms of causality, spatio-temporal relation, logical relation, or willing: “Therefore, knowledge that serves the will really knows nothing more about the objects than their relations, knows the objects only in so far as they exist at such a time, in such a place, in such and such circumstances, from such and such causes, and in such and such effects – in a word, as particular things.” This means that nothing exists whose existence could not be explained by linking it to some cause. In this way the world becomes an interconnected chain of causal links, where everything is explicable in terms of its position within this chain.

Such a principle does not wholly describe phenomenologically the way some events are experienced. In his eventual hermeneutics, Romano has pointed out that, phenomenologically speaking, only innerworldly facts sit neatly within a causal chain and succumb to “an explanatory archaeology” (*une archéologie explicative*),
whereas evential events are characterised by an “an-archic bursting forth” (*surgissement an-archique*), which is not reducible to something antecedent to it.\(^91\) This point has to be carefully considered: “This doesn’t mean,” Romano notes, “that nothing prepares for or prefigures events, that they have no anchor point in history, and that they burst forth mysteriously, with no relation to that history.”\(^92\) The fact is that even evential events can be subjected to causal analysis, but this only explains the event on the level of a concrete fact, which does not account for the way the event is addressed to the one undergoing it, or, as Romano puts it: “this is not to suggest that these latter [evential events] ‘float’ around without a cause, but rather to say that the causes that condition them operate at a completely different level from their phenomenological *meaning*-character.”\(^93\) The primary meaning of a car crash that has paralysed me is not reducible to the fact that the friction under the tyres was such-and-such, or that the impact followed such-and-such causal chain. Instead, for me the crash is something that was wholly unpredictable and uncontrollable, as if it came out of nowhere, and whose significance I can gather only retrospectively by the way it reorganises the horizon of my possibilities. Factually, there is certainly a sufficient reason for it to happen, but phenomenologically the event is its own *origin*: it bursts forth unexpectedly and changes my world. Instead of being reducible to a precedent history, it starts history anew.

Such an an-archic self-constitution also applies to the taking-place of the elsewhere. Though of course an encounter with a piece of art is explainable in terms of a causal chain – for example, the vibrations of a musical instrument are transmitted through the air into my ear, where specific physiological processes turn them into neural impulses – this does not explain away the fact that the concrete experience of the piece is, if it amounts to that, something that comes out of the blue and captures me in a way which is beyond my regulative control. On an experiential level, the work of art constitutes itself outside the causal order. Interestingly, Schopenhauer himself observes that there is a possibility in which phenomena are manifested outside the strictures of the principle of sufficient reason – and this possibility is

\(^{91}\) Romano 1998, § 7.

\(^{92}\) Romano 2009, 41; Romano 1998, 58: “Non que l’événement ne serait préparé ni préfigure par rien, non qu’il n’aurait point d’ancrage dans une histoire et surgirait mystérieusement sans aucun rapport à elle […]”

\(^{93}\) Romano 2009, 58; Romano 1998, 89: “Non point celui-ci ‘flotterait’ sans cause, mais parce que les causes qui le conditionnent n’atteignent en rien sa teneur phénoménologique de *sens*.”
realised precisely in art.\textsuperscript{94} For Schopenhauer, the unity of the world, which the principle sustains, is in the service of the will: we can instrumentalise phenomena only if we subject them to a pre-existing system of causes and effects. However, if willing, and the system which it requires is suspended, phenomena can appear without the limitation imposed by the principle:

Whilst science, following the restless and unstable stream of the fourfold forms of reasons or grounds and consequences, is with every end it attains again and again directed farther, and can never find an ultimate goal or complete satisfaction, any more than by running we can reach the point where the clouds touch the horizon; art, on the contrary, is everywhere at its goal. For it plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world’s course, and holds it isolated before it. This particular thing, which in that stream was an infinitesimal part, becomes for art a representative of the whole, an equivalent of the infinitely many in space and time. It therefore pauses at this particular thing; it stops the wheel of time; for it the relations vanish; its object is only the essential, the Idea. We can therefore define it accurately as the way of considering things independently of the principle of sufficient reason, in contrast to the way of considering them which proceeds in exact accordance with this principle, and is the way of science and experience.\textsuperscript{95}

What is interesting is the autonomous character Schopenhauer ascribes to works of art: they can appear as meaningful even beyond the principle which sustains the unity, and thus the meaningfulness, of the world. Similar notions can be found, for example, in early Lukács, who describes aesthetic experience as an “unmetaphysical

\textsuperscript{94} Schopenhauer 1991a, 243–245, 252.

\textsuperscript{95} Schopenhauer 1966a, 185; Schopenhauer 1991a, 252: “Während die Wissenschaft, dem rast- und bestandlosen Strom vielfach gestalteter Gründe und Folgen nachgehend, bei jedem erreichten Ziel immer wieder weiter gewiesen wird und nie ein letztes Ziel, noch völlige Befriedigung finden kann, so wenig als man durch Laufen den Punkt erreicht, wo die Wolken den Horizont berühren; so ist dagegen die Kunst überall am Ziel. Denn sie reiß das Objekt ihrer Kontemplation heraus aus dem Strome des Weltlaufs und hat es isolirt von sich: und dieses Einzelne, was in jenem Strom ein verschwindend kleiner Theil war, wird ihr ein Repräsentant des Ganzen, ein Aequivalent des in Raum und Zeit unendlich Vielen: sie bleibt daher bei diesem Einzelnen stehen: das Rad der Zeit hält sie an: die Relationen verschwinden ihr: nur das Wesentliche, die Idee, ist ihr Objekt. – Wir können sie daher geradezu bezeichnen als die Betrachtungsart der Dinge unabhängig vom Satze des Grundes, im Gegensatz der gerade diesem nachgehenden Betrachtung, welche der Weg der Erfahrung und Wissenschaft ist.”
causa sui” and more recently in Andrew Benjamin, who discusses the “self-staging” of the work from a materialist point of view. Of all the contemporary phenomenological writers, it is perhaps Maldiney who has emphasised most the auto-constitutive character of the work-event: according to Maldiney, a central feature in the work of art is that “it flourishes in the gratuitousness of ‘without why’” and that:

a work of art exists to open its way, without one preceding the other. It is in precession of itself, and contradicts thereby, that is to say by that which makes it a work of art, all positivity and all attempts to determine its being in the form of objectivity. In this projection which it is, it originates at its exit. […] It does not have its foundation in the prose of the world.

Another way of putting this is Maldiney’s provocative slogan: “Art has no history.” This, of course, does not mean that pieces of art are somehow ahistorical objects, independent of the context of their manufacture. Instead, it means that the work of art does not occur within a pre-existing history but rather disturbs history and makes it begin anew. This point can also be found in Dufrenne when he writes: “The aesthetic object is historical only for critical reflection. In itself, the aesthetic object tends to escape history, to be not the witness of a historical epoch but the source of its own world and its own history.” More recently, Paul Crowther and Andrew Benjamin have laboured to show that art is not reducible to its position within a historical chronology.

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96 Lukács 1917, 22; Benjamin 2015, 11.
97 Maldiney 2012, 17: “elle s’épanouit dans la gratuité du ‘sans pourquoi’.”
98 Maldiney 2003, 8: “Une œuvre d’art existe à ouvrir sa voie, sans que l’une précède l’autre. Elle est en précession d’elle-même, et contredit-par là, c’est-à-dire par où elle est œuvre d’art, à toute positivité et à toute tentation de déterminer son être dans la forme de l’objectivité. En cette avancée qu’elle est, elle s’origine à son issue. […] Elle n’a pas son fondement dans la prose du monde.”
99 Back cover text of L’art, l’éclair de l’être (Maldiney 2012).
100 This, of course, echoes Heidegger’s claim in The Origin that “Whenever art happens – that is, wherever there is a beginning – a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again.” (Heidegger 2001, 74; Heidegger 1977b, 65: “Immer wenn Kunst geschieht, d. h. wenn ein Anfang ist, kommt in die Geschichte ein Stoß, fängt Geschichte erst oder wieder an.”
101 Dufrenne 1973, 408; Dufrenne 1953, 505 : “L’objet esthétique n’est historique que pour une réflexion critique; en lui-même, il tend à échapper à l’histoire, à être non pas le témoin d’une époque historique, mais la source de son propre monde et de sa propre histoire.”
102 See, for example, Crowther 2002, “Painting History, Painting Philosophy: David’s History Paintings” in Benjamin 2004 and Chapters 1–3 in Benjamin 2015.
According to Romano, this an-archic character of the evential event gives it a peculiar temporal character. One of the differences between an innerworldly fact and an evential event is that the *advenant* can be synchronous with the former, whereas the latter occurs in such a way that the *advenant* cannot reflectively keep up with its bursting forth. This means further that a fact can be dated, that is, positioned within a temporal order, whereas an evential event does not accommodate itself with the *advenant*’s “now” but instead disturbs it: it occurs diachronically so that the *advenant* can only retrospectively take it up as the theme of reflection – but then the event has already gone by. This diachrony will be of utmost importance later on in my exposition on aesthetic immersion.

*The elsewhere occurs as a call.* The description above entails that the witness of the elsewhere is not the constitutive subject of the event but instead someone upon whom the event befalls or, as Romano might put it, *advenes*. This an-archic bursting forth, which sur-prises me – that is, takes me over – occurs essentially as a *call*: the work calls me to be its witness. Hence, having a work-experience with art is not something I can summon or command, or something I can treat like an object, which succumbs to my intentional grasp; on the contrary, it requires submitting oneself to an event, which occurs on its own accord – or, as Schopenhauer puts it, “everyone has to stand before a picture as before a prince; and, as with a prince, waiting to see whether it will speak and what it will say to him: and, as with the prince, so he himself must not address it, for then he would hear only himself.”

I do not remain a distanced and detached observer of the event, but rather the elsewhere takes place precisely by implicating me. In the taking-place of the elsewhere, then, the selfhood of the witness cannot be taken in the nominative, but rather in the accusative or dative case. I will discuss this in further detail later on, as this is a critical issue in the relationship between selfhood and aesthetic immersion, which I will take up in Chapter 4.

Here it suffices to note that this sort of coming-into-presence as a call inverts certain tightly held views of selfhood. Phenomenologists like Levinas, Marion, and Romano have argued that the subject is not a self-sufficient, self-constituting entity that exists prior to givenness, but rather an entity that is constituted in and through

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104 Schopenhauer 1966b, 407; Schopenhauer 1991b, 473: “Vor ein Bild har Jeder sich hinzustellen, wie vor einen Fürsten, abwartend, ob und was es zu ihm sprechen werde; und, wie jenen, auch dieses nicht selbst anzureden, denn da würde er nur sich selbst vernehmen.”
the givenness of the world: I gain selfhood only because phenomena summon me as the one who receives them. This primordial being-subjected-to-givenness is in quotidian experience covered over by the self’s capacity to project its own horizon over givenness and to assume the position of an active subject as the protagonist of one’s own life. This status in the nominative, as these phenomenologists claim, can however be interrupted by certain phenomena: in the case of Levinas, it is the other’s face that calls me to my responsibility and strips me of my entitlement; in Marion, saturated phenomena call me instead of me being able to summon them.\(^{105}\) What is important here is Marion’s remark that in such phenomenological calling, the call becomes a call only in and through answering to it: for example, the other’s face addresses me in such a fashion that in finding myself called I also find myself already having answered to this call by being subjected to responsibility.\(^{106}\) In the case of aesthetic immersion, this captures the phenomenological fact that the elsewhere does not call me “prior” to me being captured by it, but instead the call of the elsewhere is tantamount already to this disruption whereby I have answered to the call by giving myself over to its spectacle. The difference between the call of the elsewhere and the call imposed by other saturated phenomena or evential events is that whereas Levinas, Marion, and Romano point out how these phenomena are addressed unsubstitutably to me, so that I become aware of my irreducible selfhood, I will argue in Chapter 4 that the taking-place of the elsewhere strips me momentarily from my selfhood and my capacity to assume the experience as “mine”. But here I am getting ahead of myself.

*The elsewhere calls for engagement.* If the taking-place of the elsewhere is a call, then what does it ask from the witness? Again, this is a question that I will discuss further in Chapter 4. Here I wish to make a note of this merely to ward off the impression of passivity that the account so far might give. I have at several points emphasised how it is the work that takes the active role in the encounter. This must not be taken as implying that the witness does not contribute to this event in any way, as if the work was the self-sufficient achievement of the piece. No, on the contrary, in this study I will side with the play-theoretical tradition of aesthetics, which in phenomenology is represented, for example, by Gadamer, Dufrenne, and Berleant. Being called to witness the elsewhere entails engaging oneself with the spectacle in complicated ways that defy the simple categorisation into activity or passivity. At

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105 Marion 2013b, § 26.
106 Marion 2013b, § 28.
this point, it is too early to go into this in more detail, and this remark ought to be taken as a mere indication of what follows later. 

*The work of art reconfigures the lifeworld only contingently.* So far my description of the work-event has been remarkably similar to Romano’s model of evential events. However, it is clear that in some respects the work of art is different from Romano’s paradigmatic evential events, such as an accident. Firstly, Romano claims that the evential event forces me to re-determine my selfhood after its occurring. For instance, if I have an accident which results in paralysis, the event reconfigures the horizon of my possibilities and thereby forces me to reconfigure my own place in the world and thus also my identity. The work of art does this only contingently: even if there are surely cases where an aesthetic experience has changed someone’s life, this is not a necessary characteristic of these experiences. Instead, it often happens that after an aesthetic experience life goes on as if nothing had happened, and my identity remains unchanged. The play to which the work of art places my selfhood is one of immersion, of hiatus, which amounts to only a discontinuity in the constitution of selfhood rather than its re-organisation. Secondly, the work of art does reveal a world to me, but here the world in question is that of the poetic world; if any revelation upon the lifeworld occurs, it occurs retrospectively and contingently. In other words, the totality of sense that makes up my world does not necessarily re-organise itself after the work; it is merely put on hold momentarily. Thirdly, the work of art does not necessarily open a new future to me; it is merely a hiatus in the quotidian flow of time. This is related to the work’s relation to my horizon of possibilities: if it re-organises it only contingently, then it also opens up the future contingently. So, even if the work of art resembles Romano’s evential event in that it is an an-archic bursting-forth which cannot be subjected to causal explanation and with which the witness cannot be synchronous, it differs in the crucial respect that it does not necessarily have the serious impact on my future as the evential event proper.

18.3 *Metaphor and anamorphosis*

But what exactly happens in the dislocation into the elsewhere? What is the phenomenological character of this immersive pull? So far I merely described the way the elsewhere makes an an-archic entry into the lifeworld. But how do I enter the elsewhere? In what follows, I will argue that this dislocation can be elaborated by two interrelated functions I here call *metaphor* and *anamorphosis*. The former notion is modified from a corresponding concept developed by Miguel de Beistegui, whereas the latter is inspired by Jean-Luc Marion.
A topological account of the *elsewhere* should not limit itself to thinking where we are when we are *in* the elsewhere, but also take into account *how* we get there. In other words, the work of art as the taking-place of the elsewhere also includes an element of dis- or re-locating the subject into the elsewhere. Here I would like to follow Miguel de Beistegui’s suggestion and approach this dimension of the taking-place of the elsewhere in terms of *metaphor*.

De Beistegui argues that the end of metaphysics opens up the possibility of leaving behind the traditional thinking of art in terms of *mimesis* and reconceiving it in terms of *metaphor*. As I outlined in § 9, de Beistegui argues that *mimesis* does not properly articulate the ontological function of certain aesthetic practices, since it subordinates the event of art to the representation of a pre-existing truth instead of presenting the world anew. Approaching art in terms of metaphor allows one to think of this event more accurately. For de Beistegui, metaphor does not refer to a linguistic device but to an ontological event, which can be understood as an “operation that reveals or opens up that space and time, hidden or folded in the space and time of ordinary perception and cognition”. Here metaphor is understood in the etymological sense as “carrying-over” or “trans-portion” (*meta* “after, with, across” + *ferō* “to bear, to carry”) from one place to another. Obviously, this carrying-over should not be taken in a physical sense but in an existential or ontological sense: art as a metaphor dislocates us and reveals a layer of experience often concealed and latent behind the everyday lifeworld. De Beistegui writes: “If art has a meaning, it only consists in its ability to go farther than what is already here, not a beyond of the world or life, but in the still undamaged depth that the world and life might retain […].”

In short, then, we can recover three intertwined notions from de Beistegui’s account: two elements on what *happens* in the work of art (transportation and de-familiarisation) and what *appears* in this encounter (the excess of the sensible). In de Beistegui’s view, works of art are moments of disruption and de-familiarisation, where our everyday way of being-in-the-world is momentarily suspended and the world shows itself in a new light. This displacement reveals an excess of sense, which in everyday being-in-the-world remains concealed behind our habitual ways of encountering the world. The layer of experience revealed by the metaphor is what de

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107 De Beistegui 2012, 6.
Beistegui refers to as the hypersensible.\textsuperscript{110} It is not some otherworld beyond our own, not a Platonic heaven of super-sensible ideas, but the concealed side of sensibility itself, a hidden layer within the sensible. When things are released from the grip of our everyday ways of dealing with them, they are able to appear as something that exceeds our grasp of them, that is, as hypersensible. The two first elements – transportation and de-familiarisation – will be discussed here, and the discussion of the hypersensible will be postponed until § 20.

Despite the fact that de Beistegui’s theory offers an invaluable starting point, the account itself is insufficient at least in two ways. Firstly, the scope of de Beistegui’s account is too narrow. I will argue here that metaphor constitutes only one mechanism of the work: it articulates the transportation and what appears in this transportation, but it leaves out the place, where we go in and through this transportation, that is, it does not sufficiently take into account that when the coming-into-presence of sense is transformed, also the subject’s being-in-the-world, which correlates with this coming-into-presence, is transformed. Secondly, de Beistegui’s description of metaphor is not deep enough. De Beistegui identifies many essential elements that happen in the work of art, but cramming them all within the notion of metaphor blurs many aspects that could be developed further. The following discussions on the anamorphic nature of the work of art and the space-time of the elsewhere aim at both widening and deepening de Beistegui’s thinking on metaphor.

Furthermore, de Beistegui’s account fails to address what it is in the work of art that brings about its metaphorical effect – why is it that some pieces of art work on us metaphorically and others do not? Here the theory of gravity can propose an answer. I have argued that it is the gravitational pull of the piece that elicits the work of art as the unfolding of the elsewhere. The poetic world introduces an element of the extraordinary into the midst of the lifeworld, creating a field of gravity around the piece. If the conditions are favourable, this gravitational pull will effectuate the metaphoric transportation into the event-horizon of the work. As such, metaphor can be seen as one of the manifestations of phenomenal gravity.

But let us slow down a bit and inspect the elements of de Beistegui’s account one by one. I will return to the theme of the hypersensible later on in § 20. Here I want to concentrate on the two intertwined ontological movements in de Beistegui’s metaphor: the transportation and the de-familiarisation of the world. I would like

\textsuperscript{110} de Beistegui 2012, 4.
to separate these two conceptually and discuss them separately. The conceptual distinction aims at a more precise and more structured articulation of the event these concepts articulate; on the phenomenological level they are two ways of expressing the same phenomenon.

The distinction that I suggest goes as follows. I will reserve the notion of *metaphor* to refer only to the dis-/re-locating dimension of the work. Metaphor articulates the gravitational pull of the piece that amounts to the taking-place of the elsewhere. The metaphor occurs as a transportation in which subjects are distanced from their usual lifeworld; it positions the subject within the proximity of the threshold, in the event-horizon of the work. Surely, this notion of transportation must not be taken too concretely: the work of art does not sweep me away in any physical sense. Instead, it is an existential operation where my mode of being-in-the-world is momentarily changed, and hence the very way the world shows itself as sensible is modulated; it is a movement that does not move me, and yet it carries to another place in a far more radical sense than any physical movement.

I would like to denote the transformation or de-familiarisation of sense related to the metaphor with another term which comes from Marion. According to Marion, a phenomenon appears by first approaching me and aligning me in such a way that it can appear. Marion calls this *anamorphosis.* In its usual meaning, *anamorphosis* names the constitution of an image when a distorted and indistinct blob of shapes and colours turns into a distinct image through the repositioning of the viewer – like the famous skull in Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (1533), which, when gazed at directly, is nothing but a strange greyish, oblong shape in the foreground, but which, when looked from a steep angle at the right side of the painting, turns into an almost three-dimensional skull. *Mutatis mutandis,* in Marion’s phenomenological terminology, *anamorphosis* names the way the phenomenon aligns me with regard to itself so that it may give itself as itself. Phenomena do not appear first as an indistinct blur of sensory stimuli, but instead they reveal themselves as always already individualised. According to Marion, this determination of phenomenality requires that in giving itself the phenomenon claims me and aligns me with a vantage point from which it appears as what it is. Though this may sound abstract, what Marion attempts to articulate here is a rather obvious and mundane observation: for example, in order to see a hammer as a tool, I have to be positioned with regard to it in such a way that I approach it as something I

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111 Marion 2013b, § 13.
can use to drive in a nail; in order to understand Duchamp’s Fountain, I need to see it as a piece of art and not just as a urinal. Anamorphosis names the way meaningfulness is transfigured by the metaphor; it names the “position” or “angle” to which the subject is positioned by the dislocating effect of the metaphor and from which sensibility gives itself from a new perspective.\(^\text{112}\) This applies to pieces of art in an emphatic manner: each piece requires its own way of attending to it for it to work.\(^\text{113}\) Marion insists that it is the phenomenon that aligns me with regard to itself and that the interpretation of it occurs only after it has already fully given itself. However, I agree with Shane Mackinlay that there is a hermeneutic requirement to the success of the anamorphosis: the viewer has to conform to the demands of the phenomenon for it to appear unreservedly.\(^\text{114}\) The viewer can also actively modulate the vantage point from which it apprehends the phenomenon: I can look at the hammer as an equipment, as a design product, or as a configuration of matter. In all these cases, the anamorphosis can occur only if the aligning occurs within a pre-established horizon of meaningfulness.

For Marion, anamorphosis articulates the mode of contingency of the phenomenon – contingency understood here in the etymological sense as the way the phenomenon touches me and implicates me in its manifestation.\(^\text{115}\) One these modes is what Marion calls imposition, which names the anamorphosis of phenomena that surround and engulf me in such a way that I cannot remain separate from their

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\(^{112}\) Marion 2013b, 203–206.

\(^{113}\) Nigel Wentworth has observed in The Phenomenology of Painting (2004, 227) that “[…] the precise mode of looking that the viewer adopts in order to experience the pictorial qualities of a painting has to be determined or drawn out by the painting itself, for the different manners of working of paintings require different modes of looking on the part of the viewer […]”. Thus, Wentworth continues, if one looked at a painting by Fra Angelico in the way one looks at de Kooning, one would probably miss the painting altogether.

\(^{114}\) Mackinlay 2010, 163–166. Marion agrees with this when he claims: “To accede to it [the phenomenon], not only must a gaze know how to become curious, available, and enacted, but above all it must know how to submit to the demands of the figure to be seen” (Marion 2002, 124; Marion 2013b, 205: “[…] pour y accéder, il faut non seulement qu’un regard sache se faire curieux, disponible et exercé, mais surtout qu’il se soumette aux exigences de la figure à voir […].” However, he immediately contradicts himself by claiming that “ana-morphosis indicates that the phenomenon takes form starting from itself” (Marion 2002, 124; Marion 2013b, 206: “L’ana-morphose indique ici que le phénomène prend forme à partir de lui-même.”)

manifestation. Though Marion himself is rather vague at this point, I want to argue that the contingency of the work’s anamorphosis is one of imposition: the work of art that elicits the taking-place of the elsewhere is an event that momentarily engulfs me. However, one could further argue that the mode of imposition in the case of art is somewhat different than in the cases Marion uses. For Marion, the crucial thing about phenomena that impose themselves upon me is that they are habitual by nature, that is, I must inhabit them for them to appear. Some of the examples Marion uses – the shade of a tree, a commercial city – relate to the way habitual phenomena disclose and sustain my lifeworld. However, I have argued here that the work of art should be understood precisely as a metaphorical dislocation from the lifeworld to the elsewhere. As such, the mode of contingency of the work of art should be taken as a form of imposition in the sense that the work engulfs me and discloses the world in a specific way. However, this disclosure does not sustain the lifeworld but instead distances me from it, dislocating me in such a radical manner that the very mode of worldhood momentarily changes. As such, the metaphor of the work effectuates a particular sort of anamorphosis, one of de-familiarisation and distancing rather than disclosure and sustenance.

This is the contingency of the extraordinary: a touch of sense from beyond the threshold. The work has an anamorphic force which changes my way of comportment towards phenomena, as Dufrenne too observes: “the work is a forceful lover who draws the spectator to precisely those points where he must place himself in order to become a witness.” The extraordinary threshold effectuates the anamorphic unfolding of the elsewhere. In this falling-in-between, the lifeworld ceases to be the dwelling it is, and by the force of the work’s entry, it becomes its own opposite, a non-home, unheimlich. As such, the elsewhere is a peculiar mode of Ereignis in which the temporal spatial playing field organises itself in a distinct manner, namely – as I will elaborate in the following – as a syncopation of time-space, as a suspension of selfhood as well as a re-articulation of the sense of the world. It does not unfold the world as a dwelling, but precisely fragments the sense that sustains dwelling.

In sum, then, the gravitational pull of a piece that amounts to aesthetic immersion can be articulated in terms of metaphor and anamorphosis: metaphor names

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116 Marion 2013b, 212–215.
117 Marion 2013b, 214–215.
118 Dufrenne 1973, 51; Dufrenne 1953, 87: “[…] l’œuvre est un aimant puissant qui attire le spectateur aux points où il doit se placer pour devenir précisément un témoin.”

CHAPTER 3: THE ELSEWHERE
the existential dis-/re-locating aspect of the work in which the subject is transported to the event-horizon of the work, and anamorphosis denotes the change in the way the there is manifested as the elsewhere through this transportation.

18.4 Fragility of the elsewhere

The model presented above should not be taken too straightforwardly. Experience show that the work of art is not solely dependent on the piece itself but also on the overall hermeneutic situation in which the piece is encountered. For the work to occur, it requires what Gadamer calls “total mediation” (totale Vermittlung), a way of coming-into-presence in which the process of mediation is covered over by that which becomes presence through this mediation. The problem is, this sort of total mediation can be interfered with in many ways. These interferences steer the witness's intentionality away from the work and consequently restrain the immersion required for the work to occur. In other words, they hold the subject in a position that is too distant from the event-horizon of the work. The experience of the work is a frail, ephemeral thing which is easily broken, as Schopenhauer observes:

There always lies so near to us a realm in which we have escaped entirely from all our affliction; but who has the strength to remain in it for long? As soon as any relation to our will, to our person, even of those objects of pure contemplation, again enters our consciousness, the magic is at an end.

In claiming this, I follow a strand in aesthetics which emphasises the “fragility of beauty” (Hinfälligkeit des Schönen). This strand, which originates in K.W.F. Solger's Erwin (1815), was given a phenomenological interpretation by Oskar Becker in his article “Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers” (1929) in which Becker emphasises the unique, unrepeatable, and vulnerable character of aesthetic experience. According to Becker, aesthetic experience is the correlate of a certain “extreme” (Extremum) of the immediate phenomenal

119 Gadamer 2010, 125.
120 Schopenhauer 1966a, 198; Schopenhauer 1991a, 268: "So nahe liegt uns beständig ein Gebiet, auf welchem wir allem unserm Jammer gänzlich entronnen sind; aber wer hat die Kraft, sich lange darauf zu erhalten? Sobald irgend eine Beziehung eben jener also rein angeschauten Objekte zu unserem Willen, zu unserer Person, wieder in Bewußtseyn tritt, hat der Zauber ein Ende [...]."
fullness of the aesthetic object.\textsuperscript{121} Picking up the metaphor of mountaineering used also by Solger, Becker describes aesthetic experience as having a “peak-character” (\textit{Spitzen-charakter}), as it signifies the highest attestation of our sensory capacities.\textsuperscript{122} The important point here is that for Becker, having an aesthetic experience is as fragile as standing on top of a mountain: “the smallest of missteps is enough to cast one from the sharp summit into the abyss,” Becker writes.\textsuperscript{123} Because it is such a peak experience, it is also rare and unrepeatable:

The structure of the aesthetic sphere is “heraclitic”, which means that the “same” experience of the “same” aesthetic object by the “same” subject is not with certainty repeatable. After all, the aesthetic is only in the extremely vulnerable “momentary” experience of an extremely vulnerable and thereby only “potential” object. This necessitates its “fragility”.\textsuperscript{124}

Unfortunately, Becker does not set about to catalogue the different ways aesthetic experience can be broken. The following is a rough outline – one that I will develop further in Chapter 4 – of the main ways aesthetic immersion can be interfered with.

The first category of interferences can be called \textit{external distractions}. This type includes all “external” phenomena that disturb the witness’s immersion. Such distractions could be named endlessly: people talking in the audience, someone snoring next to you, bad acting, off-key instruments, bad lighting, the squeaking of ballet shoes, a crowd in front of a painting, yelling guards, too much noise when trying to read, uncomfortable seating, and so on. These distractions force the perceiver to divide their attention between many \textit{noëmata}, thereby restraining them from giving in to the metaphorical pull of the piece and keeping them at a distance from the event-horizon of the work.

The second type can be called \textit{internal distractions}. This type includes all “internal” states of the subject that could alter their intentional attitude towards the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} Becker 1929, 27.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Becker 1929, 27–28, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Becker 1929, 32: “[…] der kleinste Schritt von steil aufragenden Gipfel führt in den Abgrund”
\item \textsuperscript{124} Becker 1929, 29: “Die Struktur der ästhetischen Sphäre ist ‘heraklitisch’ d.h. ‘dasselbe’ Erlebnis ‘dasselben’ Subjekts ‘dasselben’ ästhetischen Gegenstand gegenüber ist nicht mit Sicherheit wiederholbar. Also ist das Ästhetische schließlich nur in dem äußerst verletzlichen ‘momentanen’ Erleben eines seinerseits äußerst verletzlichen und dazu bloß ‘potentiellen’ Gegenstands. – Dies bedingt seine ‘Fragilität’.”
\end{itemize}
piece of art. For instance, headache, hunger, tiredness, or a bad mood effectively disturb one's possibility to concentrate on the piece and be immersed in it. Similarly, it sometimes happens that one's expectations differ from what one encounters in the piece itself, resulting in a feeling of dissonance and irritation that interferes with the reception of the piece. Furthermore, if I'm dealing with a piece of art for research purposes – for instance in order to analyse certain themes in a play – my analytical gaze might keep the metaphorical call of the work at bay. However, it is important here to note that the mood required for the taking-place of the elsewhere is not one certain, singular mood. Instead, there has to be an alignment between the mood of the subject (or a disposition to attune to this mood) and the atmosphere of the piece for immersion to take place: for example, sugary love stories, which otherwise might feel nauseating, can be highly immersive when one has fallen in love; a violent film can be distasteful in a serene mood but very satisfying when one is angry. The important thing, then, is that the perceiver's mood is not dissonant with the atmosphere of the piece or that the subject is in a disposition where the piece can attune them to the right, responsive mood. Then, in addition, the intentional attitude of the perceiver might condition the way they allow pieces to touch them – an art dealer looking for profit or a critic looking for something to write about might approach the pieces very differently than a casual visitor, and, as Gadamer notes, connoisseurs cannot experience art as art if they go to the opera to hear Callas sing rather than to experience the piece as a whole: “such an attitude is incapable of mediating an experience of art in any real sense,” Gadamer claims.125

These internal distractions are situational and temporary. If I manage to cure my headache, an operatic work might again become very engaging. However, one can also discern a category of internal disposition that hinders the piece from turning into a work of art. Namely, my personal tastes can interfere with the encounter in such a way that even though I recognise the artistic merits of the piece, it still fails to attract me. Personally, I have never been able to stand Renoir, nor have I ever been a great fan of Mozart – and yet I can recognise why they are held as masters in their fields. My dislike of them hinders their art from eliciting anything remotely resembling immersion. In addition to matters of taste, ideological stances might oppose a piece to such an extent that I cannot be immersed in it even if I recognise

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the piece’s artistic merits; if the piece is against my political, religious, or scientific worldview, the allergic reaction caused by it can easily amount to an interference. This category can here be called *internal hindrances*.

The last type is closely related to the first, but differs from it in that here the distraction is not taken as an unnecessary and disposable irritation but instead as a positive phenomenon competing for my attention. This type I call *gravitational lensing*. I have already referred to an example from the Louvre: the imposing presence of *The Raft of the Medusa* made Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* seem somewhat insignificant, even though in itself it is a powerful painting. Gravitational lensing occurs when the gravitational field of a phenomenon is distorted by the gravity of another, so that the presence of the phenomenon is thwarted in some way. This distortion can occur in two ways: either the gravity of a phenomenon is diminished, as in the case of the Delacroix painting, or its interest is momentarily diverted to something else – think, for example, of the case where an extremely attractive person enters the room and concentrating on the art work becomes a near impossibility.

All these types of interferences have the same consequence: they thwart the engagement of the subject in such a way that the mediation, and hence the metaphorical effect of the work remains ineffective or only partial. Through the interferences, the lifeworld announces its presence so that the required immersion into the elsewhere cannot occur.

This brings me to the last remark regarding interferences. As the preceding discussion has suggested, interferences hindering immersion are, at least to a point, person-specific and contextual. This conclusion allows me to comment on a discussion regarding the required aesthetic distance that aesthetic immersion requires. Some proponents of the theory of aesthetic distance have argued that the piece of art cannot break the invisible barrier between the lifeworld and the poetic world without the audience thereby losing the aesthetic distance required for the piece to elicit aesthetic experiences. Sheila Dawson and Susanne Langer have both used an example from a theatrical version of *Peter Pan* in which Peter at one point appeals to the audience to clap so that Tinkerbell won’t die.\(^\text{126}\) According to Dawson and Langer, this appeal makes the audience aware of the artificial nature of the situation and thus destroys the aesthetic distance of the audience, breaking the magic.

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\(^\text{126}\) Dawson 1961, 168; Langer 1953, 318.
Langer herself reminisces how the appeal made her feel uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{127} George Dickie has responded that this claim is made untenable due to the simple fact that most children in the audience reply eagerly to Peter Pan’s call without seemingly experiencing any discomfort.\textsuperscript{128} The hermeneutic model proposed here allows one to mediate between these two arguments: interferences are not total in the sense that everyone responds to them in the same way, but rather they have their effect in the broader, person-specific context. This is why the reaction of other children does not undermine Langer’s experience: in her case, the metaphorical effect of the piece was interfered with by the appeal to the audience. On the other hand, it cannot be extrapolated from this singular experience that everyone in the audience should have responded in the same way. Instead, the whole situation merely points to the fact that what might constitute an interference for someone might not do so for others – in other words, interferences are dependent on a broader hermeneutic context that includes the dispositions of the subject, the overall configuration of the phenomenal field, as well as the metaphorical force of the piece.

The preceding discussion can be summarised as follows. Aesthetic immersion occurs as a metaphorical dislocation or transportation in which the subject is dislocated from his or her everyday lifeworld to the threshold of the poetic world. This metaphorical effect is one way the gravity of a phenomenon can affect the subject. If the gravitational pull is strong enough and not interfered with, the gravity of the piece effectuates the metaphor. The metaphor manifests itself as the\textit{ anamorphosis} of the world in which the mode of the taking-place of the\textit{ there} is transformed as the poetic world makes its entrance in the form of the threshold; correlatively, the mode of being-in-the-world of the subject is transformed, as the subject becomes the witness to the work’s manifestation. The mode of the\textit{ there} at the event-horizon of the threshold is denoted by the name \textit{elsewhere}. The elsewhere is that “place” in which we go when the metaphorical force of the work pulls us into the proximity of the threshold. This, however, is the ideal case. The metaphorical effect of the work can be interfered with by many factors, both internal and external. These interferences pull me away from the threshold and as such widen my distance from it. If the interference is too strong, my place at the threshold is compromised, and the elsewhere fails to occur. In this case, the piece of art does not trigger aesthetic immersion, and I remain its disengaged and distanced viewer.

\textsuperscript{127} Langer 1953, 318.
\textsuperscript{128} Dickie 1971, 51.
The model proposed here can be illustrated by the following figure (Fig. 2). The relationship between the lifeworld and the poetic world represents here the case illustrated in Fig. 1.2, where the lifeworld and the poetic world partially overlap. For the sake of visual clarity, the worlds are represented by unified circles; this should not be taken as signifying a closed and fixed world – instead, the lines aim to represent the particular horizons within which the encounter at a particular moment occurs. In § 17, I argued that this is the only constellation of the poetic complex in which the taking-place of the elsewhere can occur.

Here Fig. 2 illustrates the situation where the poetic world has made an entrance into the lifeworld in the form of the threshold. The emergence of the threshold breaks the ordinary limits of the lifeworld and introduces the extraordinary that destabilises the sense of the lifeworld. The extraordinary creates a gravitational field around the threshold of the poetic world. This field manifests itself as the gravitational pull of the threshold, here illustrated with vector \( g \). This pull can be interfered by many factors, here illustrated by vector \( i \), so that the intentionality of the witness is steered away from the threshold. The metaphorical effect of the threshold – here vector \( m \) – is the joint product of these two pulls, here represented by vector subtraction.
If the metaphor places the subject within the right distance from the threshold – into the event-horizon of the work – the metaphor effectuates the *anamorphosis* of the world, and the *there* unfolds as the elsewhere. Of course, neither the gravity of the phenomenon, the force of the interferences, nor the metaphorical effect born of their relationship can be determined with mathematical precision.

To conclude, I have thus far discussed both the topography of the poetic complex (§ 17) and the dynamics that constitute aesthetic immersion in a constellation of the poetic complex (§ 18). What remains to be done is to describe the phenomenological characteristics of the elsewhere itself. If the elsewhere is here conceived as a *place* rather than as internal experience, and if, following the claims of § 13, the taking-place of the *there* has to be understood as the spatio-temporal unfolding of sense, then the question rises: What is the relationship between spatio-temporality and the elsewhere, and what happens to sense itself in this dislocation? These are the questions that I will discuss in the following sections.

129 Needless to say, neither the gravity of the phenomenon, the force of the interferences, nor the metaphorical effect born of their relationship can be determined with mathematical precision.
§ 19. Time-space of the elsewhere

Earlier in § 13, I argued that sense occurs through the spatialising-temporalising taking-place of the *there*. In other words, the sensible unfolding of reality as the *there* has an irreducibly spatio-temporal structure. If the elsewhere is taken as a special modality of the *there*, then the question of the spatio-temporal structure of the elsewhere also has to be raised. Namely, as Bernhard Waldenfels has suggested, there are events, which “create their own space and their own time as they destabilise existing orders of space and time and constitute new spatial and temporal fields”130. So how is time and space experienced in aesthetic immersion? Answering this question faces multiple problems, since the poetic complex – of which the elsewhere is merely a part – is also a complicated intertwining of many overlapping spatio-temporal structures. Identifying the precise modalities of the elsewhere requires several phenomenological and conceptual distinctions.

19.1 Temporality

In order to specify what I am looking for here, let me make yet another tripartite distinction between the different temporalities in the poetic complex. This distinction follows the one made already regarding the topography of the poetic complex in § 13. There I approached the poetic complex in terms of the lifeworld, the poetic world, and the elsewhere. Different layers of temporality can be categorised following this tripartite distinction:

a) *Lifeworld time*

Even though the poetic world is not entirely commensurate with the lifeworld, a piece of art still is by and large an innerworldly entity which is subject to the same temporal conditions as other non-artistic entities. This is why every piece of art has layers of temporality that it shares with the lifeworld. I will not be discussing lifeworld time here in any great detail and will settle for just a few outlines.

130 Waldenfels 2015, 369: “Gleichzeitig schaffen sie sich ihren eigenen Raum und ihre eigene Zeit, indem sie bestehende Raum- und Zeitordnungen destabilisieren und neue Raum- und Zeitfelder konstituieren.”
According to Levinas and Romano, what characterises time in its existential meaning is its ability to break into the unforeseeable future and as such effectuate the flow of time. Without such bursting open of the unexpected future, as Levinas argues, time would be frozen in an instant, in an encapsulated moment without the possibility of release. Time proper begins to flow only when this instant is broken and time temporalises itself by opening up to the future. According to Levinas, this temporalisation occurs through the diachrony between the manifestation of the other’s face and my thematic consciousness of it. Romano credits it to the diachrony between the advenant and the event-character of the world. I will not take a stance on what allows the bursting open of the unforeseeable future; instead, I will here only adopt the stance that lifeworld time is characterised by its inherent possibility of radical newness: lifeworld time is not pre-determined but is instead amenable to radical unforeseeable changes.

By being able to burst forth towards the future, temporal entities are also able to accumulate history. This history is, in a certain sense, as unforeseeable as is the future: that which is my future will at some point become my history, and in the same sense as I cannot anticipate my future, nor can I anticipate the whole of my history. But as partial as it may be, history is that from which I spring forth and against which I determine my identity and the identities of things around me. History informs the space of sense in which the sense of the world and of myself become intelligible.

Thirdly, lifeworld time is characterised by the possibility of reducing it into “clock time”, as Heidegger has shown. Lifeworld time is first and foremost subjective, lived time, but it also provides the basis from which time can be measured in an objective, person-independent fashion. As such, lifeworld time also admits durations that can be measured by temporal units, such as minutes, days or years. In the case of art pieces, its participation in lifeworld time shows itself in many ways. Firstly, most forms of art, with the exception of the plastic arts, have an ontic duration: John Cage’s 4’33” lasts for 4 minutes and 33 seconds, Alfred Hitchcock’s

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131 Levinas discusses this encapsulation of the instant especially in relation to the experience of insomnia and of what he calls the il y a, the “there is”. See Levinas 1983, 24–30; Levinas 2013, 80–91, 95–98, 106–117.
132 This is a recurrent theme in Levinas’s later thinking, most notably in Otherwise than Being. On Levinas’s thinking on time, see Severson 2013.
133 This is the main argument of Event and Time. See Romano 2012.
134 Heidegger 1976a, § 81.
Psycho 1 hour 49 minutes, and Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde around five hours including intermissions. This duration, as I will argue in the following, is different from the temporality of the poetic world – indeed, it only denotes the time the threshold of the piece makes its entrance into the lifeworld. Secondly, every piece is carried along with it the passage of time, and as such these pieces too are subject to historicity: they set themselves within a specific historical context, perhaps becoming defining pieces of that history, or pieces that open an altogether new history; and, similarly, they too have their own histories – histories of popularity, ownership, theft, exhibition, alteration, and, in some unfortunate cases, destruction. Mona Lisa was passed through many hands and events before ending up in its current glass enclosure in the Louvre; Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring (1913) had its problematic youth before becoming a classic; and the novels of Marquis de Sade have long histories of controversy which have coloured their publication history. Thirdly, a piece’s belongingness to lifeworld time also exposes it to the hardships of time, especially in the case of the plastic arts: the piece’s chemical and physical structure can alter to the point that the piece is destroyed. For instance, the bright colours of Matisse’s The Joy of Life (1905–1906) are not as vibrant as they originally were, Aphrodite of Milos has lost not only her colouring but also her limbs in the course of time, the markings in the Colosseum bear witness to the multitude of people who have visited it during the centuries, and Caravaggio’s Saint Matthew and the Angel (1602) survives only in reproductions, since the original was destroyed during the Second World War. Finally, as innerworldly things they too are subject to the unforeseeable future – they might end up making a price record, be found out to be forgeries, or they might be turned into instruments of new political movements, and so on.

b) Poetic time

The temporality of the piece as an entity belonging to the lifeworld is, however, an altogether different thing than the temporality of the poetic world opened up by the piece. A poetic world can surely imitate the temporal structure of the lifeworld, but this temporality cannot be reduced to the ontic duration of the piece. A performance of a Molière play can take only two hours, yet the events in the play take up, in the classical manner, a whole day; it might just take a few days or weeks to read Günter Grass’s The Tin Drum (Die Blechtrommel, 1959), but the poetic world spans 30 years. Similarly, the temporality of the piece is heterogeneous with regard to the lifeworld history of the piece. The physical state and the historical context of the piece might change, but the world of the piece remains unchanged – Andy War-
hol’s portraits of Marilyn Monroe might age, but the imaged Monroe does not: her smooth skin will not wrinkle, and her sultry lips will not begin to thin. Mikel Dufrenne caught this distinction elegantly by claiming that the aesthetic object does not belong to human time in the same way as its “body” (corps) does.135

The poetic world might have a temporal span – like so often in performative arts – but this is by no means necessary. The poetic worlds of plastic pieces do not usually have such a temporal span – excluding cases such as mechanical arts and moving installations – but instead their worlds are held captive in an immobile instant. Laocoön will remain eternally bound to the snake, and Mona Lisa can never stop smiling, as Levinas has pointed out.136 You might look at a painting for 10 seconds, 5 minutes, or a whole hour, yet the poetic world is stuck in its perpetual instant, a moment which does not budge no matter how long you look at it.

These remarks bring us to the central difference between lifeworld time and the time of the poetic world. Whereas lifeworld time is subject to the accumulation of history and the radical newness of the future, the poetic world is closed within its own time without ecstatic openness to the past or the future. As such, the time of the poetic world is in a way cut from the flow of lifeworld time. Levinas has captured well the phenomenological characteristics of this temporal interval. In “Reality and its Shadow” (“La réalité et son ombre”, 1948), Levinas argues that the temporality of the piece, regardless of its form, is suspended in a futureless instant.137 As such, “every artwork is in the end a statue – a stoppage of time, or rather its delay behind itself”138

A piece of drama or film is as futureless as an immobile statue: the characters are condemned to repeat the same dialogues and the same actions again and again, without recourse to a future that would liberate them.139 As such, the temporality of the poetic world can, at best, only partially imitate the temporality of the lifeworld. It can borrow its structure, but it cannot borrow its ecstatic openness for an undetermined future. The poetic world is enclosed in its hermetic instant like Niobe in stone.

136 Levinas 1948, 782.
137 Levinas 1948, 781–782.
138 Levinas 1948, 782: “[…] plastique et que toute œuvre d’art est, en fin de compte, statue – un arrêt du temps ou plutôt son retard sur lui-même.”
139 As John B. Brough (2011) has pointed out, Woody Allen’s film The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985) is an apt cinematic rendering of this differences between the lifeworld and the poetic world.
c) *The meanwhile*

Thus far the discussion has established the heterochrony of lifeworld time and the poetic time of the piece. It now remains to ask how this heterochrony is experienced. How is time temporalised at the threshold of the piece where these two temporalities meet? In other words, what is the temporal mode of the elsewhere?

In *Pictures & Tears*, James Elkins mentions an arresting entry from the visitors’ book of the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas. One of the visitors describes the experience of the chapel as follows: “This is where it stops. Depthless. Time Out.”

Here, I think, this anonymous visitor has touched upon something essential. Is it not that the immersion into a work of art brings with it a forgetfulness of time, a lost sense of duration? The operas of Wagner, for example, can immerse the spectator to such a degree that one loses track of time, making the operas feel much shorter than their gigantic length would suggest; an intricate painting by Brueghel the Elder – say, *The Tower of Babel* (1563) or *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) – can make one lose one’s sense of time as one’s gaze is lost in the flood of details. And did not Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762) make even the otherwise obsessively punctual Kant forget his afternoon walk?

A similar falling-out-of-time, I would like to argue, can be found wherever the metaphor occurs. The diachronic entrance of the threshold introduces a syncopation in the flow of lived time, so that time becomes, as the visitor’s lovely word says, “depthless”: while time in the objective sense keeps on ticking, my experience of time is momentarily suspended.

This interval in the experience of lived time is here denoted by the term *meanwhile*. The meanwhile aims at the caesura in the sense of time effected by the metaphorical dislocation of the work. Dufrenne has noticed this “temporal atmosphere” (*l’atmosphère de temps*) of the aesthetic object, “the more secret time in terms of which the aesthetic object is meaning”; but he does not quite come to its phenomenological characteristics. Similarly, Becker has described aesthetic experience as entailing “an eternal now”, which is “without relationship to the future or the past”, and Maldiney has spoken of the temporal character of the artwork in terms of “monadic duration” (*durée monadique*). However, instead of discussing all pos-

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140 Elkins 2001, 135.
141 Henrich 2003, 55.
142 Dufrenne 1973, 299; Dufrenne 1953, 376: “[…] ce temps plus secret selon lequel cet objet est sens.”
143 Maldiney 2012, 25.
sible recognition of this temporal modality, I will here concentrate on two of them, Levinas and Gadamer, for a fuller picture of the issue.

The term “meanwhile” (entretemps) was introduced by Levinas in “Reality and its Shadow”, but with a slightly different meaning than the one I use here. Levinas writes:

It is not that an artwork reproduces a time that has stopped: in the general economy of being, art is the falling movement on the hither side of time, into fate. A novel is not [...] a way to reproduce time; it has its own time, it is a unique way for time to temporalize.144

This unique temporalisation, for Levinas, refers to the temporal instant in which the poetic world of the piece is stuck, the instant which holds Mona Lisa and Laocoon forever prisoners. Here I would like to suggest a slightly different usage: here the meanwhile does not refer to the temporality of the poetic world but rather to the temporality of the elsewhere, that is, the temporal modus of the place at the threshold of the poetic world. In other words, the meanwhile does not so much denote the temporality of Mona Lisa or Laocoon but rather that of the witness who is pulled to the threshold by the gravity of these pieces. It is not the characters of a novel or the persons depicted in statues who are temporalised by the work of art, but the witness. As such, the meanwhile denotes here the existential structure of the experience of the subject who encounters the piece and is caught up in its work.

The meanwhile is a peculiar mode of time: an encapsulated instant, a duration without openness to the future. This closure contrasts the meanwhile with lifeworld time. Levinas has described a similar temporal modus in the case of insomnia: in the dead of night, when sleep refuses to liberate me, I find myself caught in a timeless instant, in a duration that does not flow into the future.145 A further example of such futureless time is described in Tolstoy’s novella The Death of Ivan Ilyich (1886), where the dying protagonist Ivan Ilyich is stuck in a perpetual instant, as the omnipresence of the gnawing pain, which marks the inevitably approaching death, robs time of its possibility to renew, to open an unforesseeable future: “whether it was morning or evening, Friday or Sunday, made no difference, it was all just the same: the gnawing,

144 Levinas 1989, 139; Levinas 1948, 783–784: “Non point que l’œuvre d’art reproduise un temps arrêté: dans l’économie générale de l’être, l’art est le mouvement de la chute en deçà du temps, dans le destin. Le roman […] est une façon unique pour le temps de se temporaliser.”

unmitigated, agonising pain, never ceasing for an instant, the consciousness of life inexorably waning…What were days, weeks, hours, in such a case?” The meanwhile as the temporal mode of the elsewhere has in this respect the same temporal characteristics: it too exemplifies the witness’s possibility of falling out of time.

However, there is a crucial and illustrative difference between the temporal modalities in the cases of insomnia, suffering, and aesthetic immersion. Insomnia and suffering are cases that are characterised by the sheer impossibility of escape.147 Ivan Ilyich is all too aware of the fact that it is he himself who is subject to this imprisonment in futureless time, he himself who has to suffer this fate. There is a characteristic mineness in the experience of insomnia and pain: I become all too aware of the fact that I cannot exit my own existence – except by dying and losing myself altogether. Aesthetic immersion is in this respect different. When the gravity of the piece transports me to the threshold and unfolds the elsewhere, I am immersed in the poetic world, and the actualities of my lifeworld are momentarily left behind. This immersion is accompanied by a self-forgetfulness, where I let go of the care that conditions my everyday mode of existence. At the same time, the experience of the work ceases to be strictly speaking mine. In other words, the experience of the elsewhere, then, is not characterised by the same sort of mineness as insomnia and suffering.

I will return to this in more detail in Chapter 4. However, here it ought to be mentioned that this self-forgetfulness has its links to temporality. Heidegger and many others in his wake have frequently pointed out that the constitution of selfhood (or Dasein, advenant, or whatever you might choose to call it) cannot be divorced from the constitution of temporality: selfhood is co-original with temporality and cannot be articulated outside it. Correlatively, if the mode of selfhood alters, then also the experience of time can alter correspondingly. Consequently, if the work of art modulates the mode of selfhood – in a way that remains to be analysed – then the mode of temporality of the subject is also modulated.

This point was caught by Gadamer. He describes the temporality of the work of art by drawing an analogy to the festival (Fest).148 Like a festival, a work of art unfolds temporally through celebration. Like the celebration, the work of art is repeatable, yet it never occurs the same way twice. Furthermore, they both need the participation of the audience, who are in both cases distanced from the everyday lifeworld

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146 Tolstoy 2015, 69.
and called to enter the autonomous circle of the event. This distancing, as Gadamer suggests, occurs through the “contemporaneity” (gleichzeitigkeit) of the work (as well as the festival).\textsuperscript{149} By this Kierkegaardian term, Gadamer points to the way the work requires that its diachronic time is experienced as a totally present here-and-now: the work of art requires that its autonomous temporality is experienced as the total, absolute present.\textsuperscript{150} Here, one could argue, time goes out of joint. The celebration introduces a caesura in the everyday “work-temporality” that sustains everyday selfhood. As Gadamer writes, “the spectator is set at an absolute distance, a distance that precludes practical or goal-oriented participation”,\textsuperscript{151} and, consequently, also the spectator’s way of being in time is altered. Gadamer continues:

> Just as the ontological mode of aesthetic being is marked by parousia, absolute presence, and just as an artwork is nevertheless self-identical in every moment where it achieves such a presence, so also the absolute moment in which a spectator stands is both one of self-forgetfulness and of mediation with himself. What rends him from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being.\textsuperscript{152}

Here Gadamer captures the peculiar time of the work, a moment in which the spectators are both removed from themselves and yet continuous with themselves: a paradoxical exit from oneself without going anywhere. I will discuss the issue of selfhood later, but here I want to merely insist that this self-forgetfulness has an irreducibly temporal side to it.

Gadamer points out how this mode of temporality must not be understood as a mode of sacred or transcendent time that would be beyond the finite historical

\textsuperscript{149} Gadamer 2010, 126.

\textsuperscript{150} Gadamer 2010, 126–128, 132–133.

\textsuperscript{151} Gadamer 2004, 125; Gadamer 2010, 133: “Der Aufnehmende ist in eine absolute Distanz verwiesen, die ihm jede praktische, zweckvolle Anteilnahme verwehrt.”

\textsuperscript{152} Gadamer 2004, 125; Gadamer 2010, 133: “So wie Parusie, die absolute Gegenwart, die Seinsweise des ästhetischen Sens bezeichnete und ein Kunstwerk dennoch überall dasselbe ist, wo immer es solche Gegenwart wird, so ist auch der absolute Augenblick, in dem ein Zuschauer steht, Selbstvergessenheit und Vermittlung mit sich selbst zugleich. Was ihn aus allem herausreißt, gibt ihm zugleich das Ganze seines Seins zurück.”

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temporality of factual *Dasein*. The subject is not lifted from time, but instead the modality of their temporality is changed. What Gadamer is aiming at is that everyday “work-time” is converted into the “play-time” of the work. As the work distances me from the actualities of the everyday and makes me forget myself, it also modulates my experience of time. As I have already suggested, this interval introduced by the dislocating diachrony of the work is understood as the temporal modality of the elsewhere, here denoted by the term *meanwhile*.

Let me add one more detail to these descriptions derived from Levinas and Gadamer. Earlier I suggested that the work of art as the taking-place of the elsewhere shares many of the characteristics of Romano’s evential events. One such characteristic in Romano’s theory is that the evential event is “accessible solely from the future”, by which he means that thematic consciousness cannot be synchronous with the event itself. This is what happens in the *meanwhile* as well: the absorption of the work in the non-reflective stage of the experience makes one lose one’s sense of time, and this happening can be realised only after the absorption has been severed. The taking-place of the elsewhere is not accessible to reflection while it happens – indeed, reflection re-establishes temporality as “mine” and in this way destroys the meanwhile as it attempts to grasp it. This is why the meanwhile – and along with the whole taking-place of the elsewhere – offers itself to reflection only after the fact, retrospectively and indirectly, in terms of the traces it leaves on the order it disturbs.

It is important to note that this diachrony is not of the same order as that described by Levinas in relation to the other’s face: whereas in Levinas’s thinking, the call to responsibility comes from an an-archic, utterly bygone past, which has never been the present “now” of the subject, the diachrony of the meanwhile in my model is not as radical, since it does constitute a “now” for the subject, but one which cannot be the “now” of reflective consciousness. It is not a dimension of temporality which has always already effaced itself prior to me becoming an “I”, rather it is an instant which effaces itself at the moment consciousness is capable of gathering itself from the impact the work has on it.

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19.2 *Spatiality*

The question of the spatiality of the work of art has received somewhat less attention than the corresponding question of temporality. Here I need to perform a similar tripartite distinction as I made above concerning temporality and examine the spatial layers of the poetic complex in terms of lifeworld space, poetic space, and the spatiality of the elsewhere.

a) *Lifeworld space*

I have already discussed the unfolding of the *there* as a spatio-temporal scene in which sense takes place in § 13. However, the discussion there remained rather general and did not discuss the way we proximally and for the most part inhabit space. This discussion needs to be taken up here, if only to provide a background for the discussion of the work’s spatiality. Lived everyday space has been discussed in great detail in the phenomenological tradition, and I cannot reiterate it here at any length. I will though briefly discuss Heidegger’s and Merleau-Ponty’s analyses of the spatiality of human existence.

According to Heidegger in *Being and Time*, spatiality of the everyday world is born of *Dasein*’s interaction with the things that fill up *Dasein*’s world.155 Spatiality gives itself primarily in terms of the *distance* between *Dasein* and the things it encounters: the book that I need is over there, the sound of the passing cars comes from the street below my window, and my tea cup is right here on the table within easy reach. Such circumspective encounter entails that the things approached are brought into closeness in such a way that they are positioned within *Dasein*’s context of involvements. Such bringing-close, which also orients *Dasein* spatially with regard to things, is conceptualised by Heidegger in terms of *de-severance* (*Entfernung*) and *directionality* (*Ausrichtung*): lived space opens as a pragmatic space of distances and directions.156 In its existence *Dasein* discloses the world as its playing field (*Spielraum*), as the stage where the play of its existence is played out. “In accordance with its spatiality, *Dasein* is initially never here, but over there, and from

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155 Heidegger 1976a, § 23. Later in the book (§ 70), Heidegger attempts to demonstrate that spatiality is derivative of temporality. In his later thinking he abandons this hierarchy and begins to view time and space as belonging together in *time-space* (*Zeit-Raum*).

156 Heidegger 1976a, 140. In Joan Stambaugh’s translation of *Being and Time*, *Entfernung* is translated as *de-distancing*.
this ‘over there’ it comes back to its ‘here’,” Heidegger writes: \textit{Dasein} exists spatially by projecting itself towards the things it wishes to bring close.\footnote{Heidegger 1996a, 100; Heidegger 1976a, 144: “Das Dasein ist gemäß seiner Räumlichkeit zunächst nie hier, sondern dort, aus welchem Dort es auf sein Hier zurückkommt […].” Translation modified.} This opening up of the leeway is the original and existential meaning of spatiality.

Heidegger’s point is that space is not first and foremost an objective, measurable extension existing independently of the subject, as pre-Kantian philosophy often has it. Instead, lived space is first opened up and animated by our day-to-day dealings with the world. One could argue that the objective measurable space of the physical sciences is only derivative of this subjective pragmatic space in the same way as Heidegger argues that objective world time is grounded on the temporality of \textit{Dasein}. Both of these layers of space could be said to make up our lifeworld space: it is a space in which we for the most part play out our existence but which we also take hold of by dividing it into measurable units.

Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of space follow to a large extent the spirit of Heidegger’s analysis but reformulate it in embodied terms. According to Merleau-Ponty, the lived body is the nexus of spatiality in the sense that it establishes the origin against which the coordinates of the world are determined: directions like “left”, “right”, “up”, and “down” make sense only with regard to the body. As such, the body organises and orients space by providing the frame of reference from which the spatial characteristics – position, size, distance, and so on – of a thing are established. Merleau-Ponty, echoing Heidegger, considers \textit{depth} (\textit{profondeur}) as the primary, “existential” dimension of spatiality: space unfolds primarily as distance between me and things, and other spatial configurations only derive from this primary depth opened up by my body’s relationship with the world.\footnote{Merleau-Ponty 1945, 294–309. Paul Crowther develops the Merleau-Pontian notion of \textit{phenomenological depth} further in the \textit{Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame)} (2009, 3 & passim.): Crowther’s main claim is that the functioning of the visual arts can be described by explicating the ways in which they engage and reflect the phenomenological depth that constitutes human consciousness.} This notion of lifeworld space as the spatialisation of depth/distance will be important later on.

But what does this have to do with pieces of art? Two points need to be made here. First, lifeworld space relates to pieces of art in so far as they are things within the lifeworld: paintings and sculptures have their physical dimensions and volumes, a dancer dances on a stage which has a certain size, the sound of music is dependent on the acoustic elements of the instrument and the concert hall, which, in turn, are
dependent on spatial dimensions. They also have to, at least to some extent, inhabit the same space as I do in order for me to be able to encounter them in the first place. In other words, in so far as the pieces inhabit the lifeworld as material objects or take place in physical space, they take part in a lifeworld space and are dependent on it.

The second point is not quite as obvious. As mentioned earlier, lived space can be seen to be constituted as the distance between me and innerworldly things. This distance is mediated by my pragmatically-oriented dealings with the world. However, Kant and many phenomenologists after him have pointed out how the piece of art qua art is not an object of pragmatic interest. It is not a tool which I encounter in the way I encounter a bicycle when I want to cycle to work or a computer when I need to write. Of course, I can approach a piece of art, say, as something I want to buy, or as something I need to move out of the way. However, in these cases I am not dealing with the piece as a piece of art; my intentionality points to a wholly other direction. In these cases the piece is made mute; it cannot elicit the work of art and unfold the elsewhere. In terms of spatiality, the piece of art qua art cannot be integrated into the lived lifeworld space organised by pragmatic interests. It remains resistant to this space, as a foreigner in common land – and this leads to the poetic space, the spatiality of the piece proper.

b) Poetic space

Merleau-Ponty insists on an important point that the constitution of space is not uniform but dependent on the modality of the subject’s existence, since the modalities of space “always express the total life of the subject.” Merleau-Ponty claims that subjects can also inhabit space in other ways as they do in normal, everyday life. This so because space is not conceived of as a uniform, objective and subject-independent framework but as exactly conditioned by the way the subject exists in the world as an embodied being. Merleau-Ponty writes: “Once the experience of spatiality has been related to our being firmly set within the world, there will be an original spatiality for each modality of this anchorage.”

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159 Merleau-Ponty 2012, 296; Merleau-Ponty 1945, 327: “La perception de l’espace n’est pas une classe particulière d’états de conscience ou d’actes et ses modalités expriment toujours la vie totale du sujet […]”

160 Merleau-Ponty 2012, 296; Merleau-Ponty 1945, 328: “[…] l’expérience de la spatialité une fois rapportée à notre fixation dans le monde, il y aura une spatialité originale pour chaque modalité de cette fixation.”
include, for instance, the spatial experiences in mescaline-produced hallucinations, dreams, and schizophrenia. He also suggest in passing that artworks can modulate our sense of space; for example, he points out how music seems to exist in a different space than the concert hall within which it is played. At one point he makes an interesting and illustrative footnote, which deserves to be quoted in full:

> It could be shown, for example, that aesthetic perception in turn opens up a new spatiality, and that the painting as a work of art is no longer in the space that it inhabits as a physical thing and as a coloured canvas. It could be shown that dance unfolds in a space without goals and directions, that it is a suspension of our history, that in the dance the subject and his world are no longer opposed, are no longer detached from each other, that consequently the parts of the body are no longer accentuated in the dance as they are in natural experience: the torso is no longer the foundation from which the movements arise and into which they sink back once they are completed; rather, the torso directs the dance, and the movements of the limbs are at its service.

Here, then, we get a hint that aesthetic experiences might be on a par with Merleau-Ponty’s other examples with regard to the modulation of spatial experiences. Here Merleau-Ponty points out that at issue in pieces of art is a “new” spatiality, one that differs from the everyday way of inhabiting space and one that belongs more on the same side as such abnormalities as the spatial experiences of schizophrenics. The above discussion also points in this direction. The mode of spatiality of the pictorial world or the world of a dance piece cannot be reduced to the spatial structures of the lifeworld. Here Merleau-Ponty, however, seems to be suggesting that it is the dancer whose relationship to the world and his or her body is changed through the

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161 Merleau-Ponty 1945, 324–337.
162 Merleau-Ponty 1945, 256–257.
163 Merleau-Ponty 2012, 546, n86; Merleau-Ponty 1945, n1, 333: “On pourrait montrer, par exemple, que la perception esthétique ouvre à son tour une nouvelle spatialité, que le tableau comme œuvre d’art n’est pas dans l’espace où il habite comme chose physique et comme toile coloriée, – que la danse se déroule dans un espace sans buts et sans directions, qu’elle est une suspension de notre histoire, que le sujet et son monde dans la danse ne s’opposent plus, ne se détachent plus l’un sur l’autre, qu’en conséquence les parties du corps n’y sont plus accentuées comme dans l’expérience naturelle: le tronc n’est pas plus le fond doux élèvent les mouvements et où ils sombrent une fois achevés; c’est lui qui dirige la danse et les mouvements des membres sont à son service.”

CHAPTER 3: THE ELSEWHERE
dance. Be that as it may, I want to suggest here that the same applies to the audience of the piece, be it a painting or a piece of dance. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty seems to be dealing with two new spatialities – the spatiality of the poetic world and the spatiality of the subject while being in touch with the poetic world – which really ought to be separated. The following discussion follows this cue and aims at establishing the phenomenological character of these new spatialities.

Let me begin with the first mode of spatiality, that is, the spatiality of the poetic world, by looking at an illustrative example. A sound installation titled *Sweet Spot of No Escape* (2014) by the Finnish artist Tuomas A. Laitinen is comprised of three ultrasonic speakers and, occasionally, performers. The speakers are able to create beams of sound that can be used to create directionality and three-dimensionality for the sound. If one stands in the right spot, the sounds of breathing and coins falling to the ground, as well as paranoia-inducing whispers saying things like “I’m looking at you”, sound as if they were coming right into one’s ear and not from a far away speaker. It feels as if there is someone in the room, someone invisible standing behind the perceiver. The juxtaposition of the empty exhibition space and the ephemerally embodied spatiality of the soundscape creates an impression of an invisible world overlapping the actual one, as if the installation had ripped a tear in the space-time continuum and superimposed two worlds, one on top of the other. At times performers are present who hold the speakers, which only highlights the alienating effect of the sound. Laitinen’s installation thematises the fact that the person “whispering” in one’s ear and walking in the space are present only virtually – not there in any actual sense and yet very forcefully present. The piece thematises the way the piece opens up a new spatiality, or, said in another way, suspends lived space and presents a new modality of spatiality. It doubles space, creating two spaces in one place.

This brings to mind what Heidegger says about sculpture in the late essay “Art and Space” (“Die Kunst und der Raum”, 1969, published in the collection *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, 1983). There Heidegger argues that sculptures do not just take up space in a predetermined “physically-technically projected space” (*der physikalisch-technisch entworfene Raum*) but rather thematise the way the *Ereignis* “makes space” (*einträumen*) for a place to occur. In Heidegger’s words, a sculpture is “an embodying bringing-into-work of localities” (*ein verkörperndes...*).

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164 Heidegger 1983a, 209.
165 Heidegger 1983a, 205, 208
Ins-Werk-Bringen von Orten). One could interpret this as saying something very similar to what Heidegger says in the *The Origin of the Work of Art*: in the same way as the work of art suspends the usual way sense is present by thematising the very way sense is constituted, a sculpture interrupts habitual ways of inhabiting space by bringing-forth the way the *Ereignis* unfolds as a clearing-away of the *Da*. As such, a sculpture is not in Heidegger’s view completely commensurate with objective space. There is, of course, a space in which I can encounter the sculpture, and there is also a space that the sculpture occupies with its mass; however, the sculpture is not reducible to this space, since it opens up another spatiality, a primordial layer of space, which grounds both the everyday space and the physical-technical space. As such, the sculpture too doubles space and brings forth a hidden layer of spatiality in the midst of lived space.

Heidegger limits himself to sculpture, but one could extrapolate his argument and claim that the same applies to all poetic worlds, not just to the ones opened up by sculpture and spatial arts like installations. The surface of the painting is a threshold to another world, a pictorial space which opens before our eyes but which we can never enter; the poetic world of a piece of drama irrupts into the lifeworld on the stage, yet I cannot run into this world even if I run onto the stage. This point also applies to pieces that virtualise the lifeworld: the interruption of the everyday rules of my lifeworld by a performance also interrupts the way I inhabit space, suspends it and virtualises it. I no longer inhabit my usual space and gaze at the poetic world from afar. On the contrary, I am taken to the threshold, where the lifeworld and the poetic world overlap to the point of merging into one another. This suspension of lifeworld space announces itself in terms of the *virtuality* of the poetic space of the piece. The world of the piece takes place in another space, one that surges forth into lived space and momentarily transfigures it. It is a space that is present to us but one which we cannot enter: in Laitinen’s piece, I feel anonymous persons walking beside me, and yet there is no way in which I can step into their space in which I could see them. Paraphrasing Dufrenne’s claim that the world of the aesthetic object is “in the world as something not of the world”, one could say that the poetic space occurs in the lifeworld space but is not of that space. It manifests itself by erupting into the midst of the lifeworld space, interrupting it and doubling spatiality.

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166 Heidegger 1983a, 206–209.

167 Dufrenne 1973, 148; Dufrenne 1953, 199: "Cependant, l’objet esthétique apparaît dans le monde comme n’étant pas du monde.”
c) The in-between

Let us now turn to the other “new” spatiality at work in the poetic complex. I have thus far discovered similar heterogeneity between lifeworld space and poetic space as I found in the case of temporality. Similarly, an analogous point with regard to the spatiality of the elsewhere can be made as I did earlier when discussing the mode of temporality. There I claimed that the temporal mode of the elsewhere is an interval in the flow of lifeworld time, a momentary suspension of temporality’s opening up to the future. Spatiality too can be seen to have a similar liminal structure.

The entrance of the threshold doubles space. Where, then, is the witness when he or she is at the threshold of the piece? I have already established that the work of art in its metaphorical workings distances the witness from the ordinary lifeworld. However, the poetic world remains closed and impenetrable, so that the metaphor can transport the spectator only to the threshold of the poetic world. As such, the spatial position of the elsewhere does not lie in the lifeworld nor in the poetic world, but in the in-between of these two worlds, in the peculiar no-man’s-land of the work’s event-horizon. When I am immersed in a theatrical piece, I don’t physically leave the auditorium, and yet I am not strictly speaking there – nor am I in the world of the piece; when I am sitting on the sofa and reading an engrossing novel, I am lifted from my living room, and yet I never reach the world of the novel. The in-between is an atopos, a peculiar dimensionless dimension of the threshold, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as a “space without goals and directions”. It is not that I couldn’t establish the spatial configuration of the poetic world – for instance, understand the positions of things on the stage during a performance, or grasp the space depicted by a painting. Rather, the relevant point is that my relationship to my immediate surroundings is suspended. This space no longer has the structure of de-severance that characterises Dasein’s lived space, and its directionality takes on a peculiar mode: my intentionality is directed towards a space to which I can never enter and never bring close, and consequently it turns itself away from the space of pragmatic distances in which I proximally and for the most part am. If, as Heidegger says, Dasein’s spatiality is characterised by being first and foremost “over there” – that is, by a projection toward localities in terms of which Dasein’s “here” is established – then in immersion the “over there” is located in the poetic world whose distance Dasein can never totally de-sever, as it is beyond a threshold Dasein can never cross. In this peculiar quasi-transcendence from one space to another, Dasein’s sense of “here” is lost.

Like temporality, the spatiality of the elsewhere can be linked to the mode of
selfhood related to the experience of the elsewhere: in the same way as the self-forgetfulness of the witness is linked to the caesura in the temporalization of time, it is also linked to the way space spatializes itself. If spatialization occurs ordinarily as de-severance, then in the elsewhere the establishing of distances is suspended: as Merleau-Ponty notes in the case of the dancer, the separation between the subject and the world is put on hold. This surely does not mean that the subject dissolves into the poetic world or reaches a mystical union with the world. Instead, it exemplifies a situation where the distance between me and the world has lost its ordinary relevance. The coordinates that orient lived space are re-arranged so that the depth of the lifeworld turns into another kind of depth: the depth of the extraordinary.

In contrast to the corresponding aspect of temporality, this spatial feature of the work-experience has been somewhat ignored in the existing phenomenological literature. I believe Maldiney aims at this ambiguous in-between when he writes:

Every work of art establishes a place: its place of being. What kind of relationship is there between a place and space? First of all, a place does not fit into a space of representation. Its phenomenological dimensions are of another order than the mathematical and even topological dimensions. [...] It is impossible to locate it in a spatio-temporal frame, which it precisely – until it has passed – tears: Where was it? When? Not in this place of the world, but in front of a call that no answer has ever equalled.168

This place, which the work establishes, “is not volumetric, nor even metric”, and as such it is an “invisible place without a site”, as Maldiney later adds.169 In this way, I take it, Maldiney articulates the phenomenologically peculiar way the work ruptures and dislocates one’s sense of space that I am aiming at with the term “in-between”. I believe this new space has also been intuited, though not elaborated by de Beistegui when he writes:


169 Maldiney 2012, 269, 283: “Un tel espace, absolu de toute perspective, n’est pas volumétrique, ni même métrique” and “Le là est l’invisible lieu sans site” respectively.
Metaphor signals […] the opening up of a new space of experience. The space in question is that of an in-between, or a difference, which is not between two terms or points, and does not mark the movement from one point to the next (from the sensible to the supersensible); it designates the space in which we dwell, the space we inhabit.¹⁷⁰

What is crucial in this is that the in-between should not be thought of as the in-between of the sensible and the super-sensible but instead as a mode of existential spatiality that occurs at the threshold of the elsewhere – as the spatiality of the place which we inhabit during immersion.

To sum up, in this section I have fleshed out the spatio-temporal layers of the poetic complex and located the time-space of the elsewhere within this complex. I have argued that the entrance of the threshold introduces a virtual time-space of the poetic world in the midst of the lifeworld time-space. If the witness is carried over to the event-horizon of the threshold, this entrance destabilises the ordinary way of being in time-space, suspending both the penetration of time toward the future and the de-severance of spatiality into a pragmatically ordered surrounding. I denoted the temporal interval born of this suspension with the term meanwhile, whereas the spatial position at the event-horizon of the threshold I called the in-between. This liminal time-space as the meanwhile-in-between constitutes the spatio-temporal dimensions of the elsewhere.

¹⁷⁰ de Beistegui 2012, 122.
§ 20. Replete sense

At this point, we arrive to perhaps the trickiest question in the description of aesthetic immersion: how does the work make sense during immersion? If it is indeed so that the work hollows for itself a place outside the structures of causality and everyday time-space, and if, like Schopenhauer says, in aesthetic perception “we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and whither of things, but simply and solely the what”,¹ then how is sense configured in this event? If the work really occurs by overcoming its witnesses and taking them by surprise, so that it arrives without perceivers being able to appropriate it and integrate it within the context of their theoretical and practical concerns, then what kind of meaningfulness is there in such an arrival?

It would be all too easy to jump to premature conclusions. Indeed, the question of how an artwork opens up the perceiver to access meaning otherwise concealed has been one of the central questions of aesthetics from the Greeks onwards, and invariably the cognitivist strands of the tradition have been eager to assign the view opened up by art to the value of truth, and by following Heidegger and Gadamer such a claim might also be tempting here. But let me slow down a bit and assess what is at stake.

First of all, it is an altogether different issue to inquire how a piece of art can reconfigure the sense of the world than it is to ask how the poetic world makes sense in and through immersion; indeed, we can learn and experience all sorts of things from pieces of art without ever going through the precise experience I am aiming at here. Immersion is only one modality of the plural ways we can encounter pieces of art. Clearly, we can look at a painting or read a book and perfectly grasp the content of its poetic world without going elsewhere. In other words, we can reflect on – in the sense of taking a thematic grasp of something – the poetic world, but we cannot reflect on, in this sense, the experience of immersion. The former is something we can make present but the latter is not, since the very act of trying to grasp the experience reflectively destroys the experience itself. This means that a continuity can be established between the lifeworld and the poetic world (though not always a commensurate one due to the element of the extraordinary), whereas continuity between the immersion and the flow of quotidian experience cannot be.

Secondly, it should once again be borne in mind that the work-experience is not a temporally homogenous event but instead something that takes place in stages.

¹ Schopenhauer 1966a, 178; Schopenhauer 1991a, 244: “[…] nachzugehen, also nicht mehr das Wo, das Wann, das Warum und das Wozu an den Dingen betrachtet; sondern einzig und allein das Was […]”
I have argued here that the work of art – the way it works on us – occurs in such a way that it cannot be contained and mastered by reflection while the work is taking place and experienced through immersion. The work is not an object at the disposal of my appropriation but rather an event that bursts forth an-archically and imposes itself upon me prior to my being able to stabilise or integrate it within the flow of my everyday experience. The piece, which effectuates this working – as well as the immersion itself – affords itself to reflective contemplation only after immersion has effaced itself. Only then does it become possible to inquire, as Heidegger and Gadamer do, how the piece or the work opens up new perspectives to reality and to ourselves; in other words, the cognitive value of the encounter – or, as Heidegger might have it, the status of the event as the happening of truth – cannot be assessed while the elsewhere is taking place. My question here is neither how a piece of art makes sense nor how the work of art makes sense after the fact. What I am interested in is how sense manifests itself pre-reflectively in and through aesthetic immersion in the elsewhere. Since much of my answer to this question relates to issues of understanding, I will it take up in further detail later in Chapter 4. Artificial though this separation may be, in this section I will look at the question from the side of givenness and complement it from the side of receptivity in due course.

At the outset, it is crucial to point out that the distinction between non-reflective and reflective stages does not correspond to the distinction between non-cognitive and cognitive experience. Aesthetic immersion, which is a metaphorical dislocation to the elsewhere, does not entail that the organised structure of sense somehow melts away and all we receive is pure, unorganised sense data and “the sheer bubbling and boiling of feeling abandoned to itself.”

172 Though I am critical towards stances that straightforwardly equate the work of art with the happening of truth, I follow them insofar as agreeing that enclosing art into the domain of affectivity misses much of what is at stake in an encounter with a work of art, even in aesthetic immersion. There is no question that, on many levels, the work tells us something, teaches us, and sometimes even transforms us. Though the preceding description has claimed that being immersed in a work of art is a blind spot in the flow of experience, this must not be taken as entailing a somnambulist trance which is devoid of consciousness and which evaporates without a trace. Levinas captures this when he describes the captivation of art: “It is not a mode of being to which applies neither the form

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172 Heidegger 1979, 88; Heidegger 1996b, 103: ”[...] bloßen Brodeln und Wallen des sich selbst überlassenen Gefühls.”

226 part ii: phenomenology of the elsewhere
of consciousness, since the I is there stripped of its prerogative to assume, its power, nor the form of unconsciousness, since the whole situation and all its articulations are in a dark light, present."  However immersed in a work of art I may be, however disconnected from my selfhood, there is still, at least usually, an element of understanding at work in the work: I can work out the elements of a picture, I can fathom the scene in a play or a movie, I can follow the flow of sounds in music, and so on. Immersion does not mean that the poetic world dissolves into a disorganised chaos of sensations, except in the case of pieces which deliberately offer such a chaos. Even if this understanding is not reflective it is still understanding; indeed, if reflection does occur, it can only occur on the basis of this primal understanding.

The very way presence is manifest to us, whether or not we are reflectively aware of it or not, is one of meaningful organisation, and in this way, perception carries with it a pre-reflective comprehension against which the world makes sense. This means that even in the case of a disturbance in the order of the everyday, which the work of art essentially is, “there is no step into a pre-conceptual sphere, no encounter with ‘raw being,’ just as there is no getting to know a ‘chaos’ operating behind all forms,” as Martin Seel observes. So, if this is the case, then how does the elsewhere make sense?

What can be said in response is, I think, really rather simple. This response consists of two interrelated aspects, both of which have been recognised centuries ago. The first is what the Leibnizian-Wolffian rationalists of the 18th century already wrestled with as they, pejoratively, called aesthetic sensation clear but confused (confus) knowledge – thereby identifying a mode of perception in which sense experience overflows reason's capacity to subjugate perception under distinct intellectual concepts. The second is related to the autonomous purposiveness of aesthetic perception – something the Germans also grappled with in the 18th century. Kant canonises this in the Critique of the Power of Judgement, when he claims that in aesthetic judging the cognitive faculties function “without any further aim” and thus “we linger in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation

173 Levinas 1989, 133; Levinas 1948, 775: “Un mode d’être auquel ne s’appliquent ni la forme de conscience, puisque le moi s’y dépouille de sa prérogative d’assomption, de son pouvoir ; ni la forme de l’inconscient, puisque toute la situation et toutes ses articulations, dans une obscure clarté, sont présentes.”


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reinforces and reproduces itself.” In Kant, aesthetic experience occurs as the cognitive capacities refrain from conceptual or practical fixations and instead attend to the phenomena in their unrestrained phenomenality.

Let me develop these two claims further by referring to some slightly more recent phenomenological literature. In Aesthetics of Appearing, Seel rephrases this Kantian conception by speaking of aesthetic experience as “aesthetic lingering” (ästhetisches Verweilen), where the appearing of a phenomenon is not framed within theoretical or practical concerns but is instead let “be in its repleteness” (et-was in seiner Fülle sein lassen). Seel explains this as follows:

The aesthetically granted presence of a sense object is not a being-so that is to be registered, but an occurrence that comes to intuition whenever we desist from a purely identifying or discretion-asserting treatment, whenever we free ourselves from the fixation on fixating the object, whenever we let go of assertion. The experience of the “full,” unreduced presence of an object is an experience of this event.

In aesthetic lingering, Seel argues, the usual conceptual and instrumentalising fixations are suspended, and phenomena are attended in their absolute phenomenal givenness. This does not mean that they are reduced to non-conceptual sensations, but instead that the underdeterminacy of their sense, brought forth by the fixations imposed upon it, is changed to the overdeterminacy of unreduced phenomenal givenness, which thereby defies simple description. Aesthetic lingering is about perceiving phenomena in the process of their appearing without reducing their phenomenal indeterminacy to any ulterior fixations. Rüdiger Bubner, also relying on Kant, summarises the point as follows:

175 Kant 1913, 222: “Wir weilen bei der Betrachtung des Schönen, weil diese Betrachtung sich selbst stärkt und reproduziert […].”

176 Seel 2016, 85.


Art discloses the world not as it is – that would be a task of knowledge, nor as it should be – that would the practical realisation of the intelligible. Art shows the world as it would be if it were meaningfully structured in itself and without our intervention.  

This notion is based on the claim in our everyday dealings with phenomena; our intentional attitudes towards them delimit and configure at the outset how they manifest themselves as meaningful. The point is that in doing so, we cover over or miss altogether a richness of sense inherent to phenomenality as such. The main claim is that in aesthetic perception – or, in my case, the experience of the elsewhere through aesthetic immersion – phenomena break through the fixations imposed upon them and appear unrestrainedly. This endows them with indeterminacy, which overflows the cognitive capacities of the witness. Seel calls this the “repleteness” (Fülle) of aesthetic phenomena. In the same vein, Dufrenne speaks of the depth of the aesthetic object, and Nancy describes the sense of the artwork as follows: “There is ‘art’ every time a sense more ‘originary’ than any assignation of a ‘Self’ or ‘Other’ comes to touch us: sense itself, ‘in a sense,’ in its ‘unique’ and singular sense, insofar as it cannot but precede itself and the being ‘of which’ it is the sense, cannot but precede being in being itself, in the entrancement of praes-entia.”

Paul Crowther has laboured to show that due to our finite and embodied existence, there is always more sense in the world than what we can grasp, and art’s ontological function is precisely to enhance and reflect on our capacity to connect with the world.

De Beistegui, too, considers the work of art as an event, which disrupts ordinary ways of perceiving the world, and reveals “a reality that is precisely different from the reality we observe as beings-in-the-world, without being the reality of another, transcendent, and superior world […].” This dimension of sense underneath the habitual world is what de Beistegui denotes by the term hypersensible, by which he…


180 Nancy 1997a, 135; Nancy 1993, 207: “[…] il y aurait trace ou présomption d’art’ […] chaque fois que vient nous toucher un sens plus ‘originiaire’ que toute assignation d’un ‘Soi’ ou d’un ‘Autre’: le sens même, ‘en un sens,’ en son sens ‘unique’ et singulier, en tant qu’il ne peut que précéder, se précéder lui-même et l’être ‘dont’ il est le sens: précéder l’être dans l’être même, le transir de praes-entia.”

181 This is the main argument of Art and Embodiment (Crowther 1993).

182 de Beistegui 2012, 3.
means the excess of sense uncovered by the work. According to de Beistegui, the work of art elevates our contact with the world from the level of mere perception to that of “artistic vision”, which is “neither the immediate vision of phenomenological life, nor the intellectual vision of the mind, directed toward sense and essences”. In other words, our relationship to phenomena, when transformed by the metaphor, cannot be reduced either to intelligibility (as the metaphysical model would have it) or sensible perception (as, for instance, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of painting claims). Instead, vision is about a change in the way we attend to phenomena, “a certain loosening of perception, a certain distance from the manner in which the world is immediately given”. As such, the work of art changes the very mode of perception itself: the world manifests itself in a radically new manner in and through the metaphor.

But what, then, is this transformation? Here de Beistegui’s account begins to build on the Heideggerian account while at the same time transcending it. As is well known, Heidegger, despite having posited the earth as an ungraspable element of the work of art, considers that through the work we come to understand the world better and appropriate it as the place we inhabit. In other words, the Heideggerian model holds that works of art stabilise the structure of sense that holds the lifeworld intact. De Beistegui wants to emphasise the other dimension of Heidegger’s account, which Heidegger himself opens up but does not thematise, namely the excess of sense introduced by the earth. De Beistegui develops this notion in terms of the hypersensible. The hypersensible revealed by the metaphor denotes the excess of sense that is in constantly differing from itself, eluding all attempts to symbolise it or bring it into discourse. The revelation of hypersensible brings forth the way sense is subject to perpetual dispersal, postponement, and is always in excess of itself. As such, the metaphor does not reveal the truth of the world, not at least in the way that would amount to grasping the essence of the lifeworld: “If truth is involved, it’s not the one that involves accord, agreement, or correspond-

183 de Beistegui 2012, 4.
184 de Beistegui 2012, 67–68.
185 de Beistegui 2012, 67.
186 De Beistegui’s reading of Heidegger is much more favourable than the ones presented by Levinas, Nancy, or Marion. Unlike the latter three, who concentrate on the subjectivist and intellectualist remnants of the early Heidegger in their critiques, de Beistegui approaches the later Heidegger as a thinker of radical difference. Cf. de Beistegui 2004, Part II.
187 de Beistegui 2012, 93–94.
ence between a subject and an object, but between a subject and a potentially endless and non-synthesizable chain of differences, an excess that our cognitive powers can no longer grasp. Consequently, the sense revealed by the metaphor cannot be appropriated by the perceiver. On the contrary, de Beistegui claims, the metaphor reveals sense in its primordial impropriety, its utter ungraspability: the metaphor “is tantamount to recognising a crossing into and through the improper that doesn’t return to proper, a crossing without an end, an irreducible de-propriation or dis-owning.” De Beistegui summarises his account as follows:

It is as if the habitual, the ordinary, the familiar were not more, but less than the world can reveal, as if the world of perception were only a fraction of, and an interested perspective on, the world. Through a change of perspective, which is actually a shift from perception to vision, and so a transformation of the very way in which we see or know the world, the world is made to shine differently. The operation of metaphor, therefore, reveals an excess in the sensible, the excess of the sensible itself, and it is the experience of that excess that we find at once unfamiliar, or foreign, and true. It is the experience of expropriation that we eventually recognise as the only proper experience and the movement away from the habitual that we recognise as the movement of essence. Contrary to what Aristotle believed, the movement in question is irreversible: it cannot be paraphrased, that is, translated back into the semantic and the perception of the ordinary from which it originated.

Following Seel and de Beistegui, I can gather the following answer to the question regarding the meaningfulness of the elsewhere. As the elsewhere takes place, it bursts forth an-archically and hollows itself a time-space in which the witness is metaphorically dislocated. This bursting occurs in such a way that the witness cannot thematically keep up with its occurring. Thus, the event also defies the witness’s capacity to fix its sense upon some ulterior context and thereby integrate it within the flow of the everyday world simultaneously with the work of art. It effectuates the anamorphosis in the way the witness attends to phenomena. This does not mean that the meaningful organisation of the world melts away, but rather that this dis-

188 de Beistegui 2012, 6.
189 de Beistegui 2012, 122.
190 de Beistegui 2012, 113.
tancing allows sense to manifest itself unreduced in its full overflowing richness. This is a layer of sense which is always there, but most often unnoticed and covered over; it is, as Merleau-Ponty might put it, that which remains invisible in our daily dealings with the world. However, it is important to note that while one is undergoing the experience of the elsewhere, one merely experiences this plenitude without being capable of reflecting there and then – that can only happen afterwards. As Arnold Berleant has noted, aesthetic experience concerns “an experience of meaning” rather than its “cognitive apprehension”. 

It is important not to make too much of this view. There is, as Dufrenne notes, a risk of turning this spontaneous experience of sense into “a sort of Romanticism of the profound” through philosophical reflection. Indeed, the history of aesthetics attests to several occasions where aesthetic perception is seen to offer an intimation of the Platonic Ideas, the Absolute, God, or however one wishes to denote the ground of reality as it is “in itself”. But nothing of the kind is claimed here: the perception of phenomena outside any ulterior fixations does not mean that we perceive their inner essences or true meanings, or a super-sensible order from which they emanate. “It is not indeed a higher reality,” Seel notes, but “simply an otherwise obstructed dimension of reality that we enjoy by virtue of our attentiveness to appearing.”

Aesthetic immersion does not offer us access to an order beyond the sensible realm; instead, it “merely” releases the usually unattended richness of the sensible to come to the fore in its non-reduced plenitude. A work of art is not the bearer of a message whose sole purpose is to carry a content to be recuperated; instead, it is a unique manifestation which cannot be transposed into discourse without thereby losing something essential.

The recurrent gist of many phenomenological accounts concerning the sense of the artwork, if a crass generalisation is allowed, is that in and through a work of art we can learn to see the world anew: as is well known, for Heidegger, the work allows a community to realise its historical world and the earth upon which it dwells; for Merleau-Ponty, it makes us see the world in its very flesh, in the process of the world becoming visible; for Gadamer, the work of art is a paradigmatic hermeneu-

191 Berleant 2000, 117.
192 Dufrenne 1973, 399; Dufrenne 1953, 495: “[...] un certain romantisme du profond.”
193 Seel 2005, 57; Seel 2016, 100: “Zwar ist es keine höhere Realität, sondern lediglich eine ansonsten verstellte Dimension der Realität, deren wir in der Aufmerksamkeit für Erscheinen teilhaftig werden [...].”
tic event through which people can deepen their understanding of the tradition within which their horizons are embedded. The list could be continued, and each account would merit its own commentary. That, however, is not my interest here. What I would like to point out is that these philosophical reconstructions of the cognitive significance of art, or their truth-value, rely on the reflective participation of the perceiver. Hence, in keeping with my claim that the work-experience includes at least heterogeneous phases, I wish to argue that the new perspectives art can give us are something we can reflectively appreciate and take up as a theme of philosophical meditation only after the taking-place of the elsewhere: while it takes place, we indeed experience something new and unique, but its significance to our understanding can only be gathered afterwards.

I do not by any means wish to deny the philosophical validity of the claims made by truth-oriented accounts of phenomenological aesthetics. Nor do I wish to assess them here. This is because the phenomenology I am pursuing at this point concentrates on the non-reflective, immersive phase of the work-experience, and whatever happens afterwards – that is, however this experience can be integrated into my hermeneutic horizon and put to philosophical use – is a question of another order which has been extensively treated before, and which would merit further research beyond the scope of this study.

Instead of making grand ontological claims, I wish to recuperate from this experience a far more sceptical teaching. As I argued in Chapter 1, the cognitive strands of aesthetics have been eager to take up art as an organ of philosophy, that is, as a tool by which philosophy can access some higher truths regarding the nature and essence of reality. A similar trend can be seen in many accounts within contemporary phenomenology of art, where art is seen as revealing something fundamental about the constitution of human reality. Such an approach to the way art addresses us faces a risk articulated by Dufrenne:

A presumptuous philosophy tries to control art, as can be seen in various dogmatic systems of aesthetics. A wiser philosophy takes art as an object of reflection but transposes into its own language and integrates into its system only what it discovers to be true in art.194

194 Dufrenne 1973, 323; Dufrenne 1953, 402: “[...] si elle est présomptueuse, elle prétend le contrôler, comme font les esthétiques dogmatiques ; si elle est plus sage, elle le prend pour objet de réflexion, mais en transposant dans son langage et en intégrant dans son système ce qu’elle trouve de vérité en lui.”

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As Dufrenne holds, philosophy can certainly use art as a tool for reflection. I have argued that art deals with a plurality of sense that cannot be captured by philosophical discourse – its form of presentation is such that it exceeds any mediation through discourse and indeed suspends the very symbolic process upon which discourse depends. But there is undoubtedly a continuity between the work-experience and the reflection that succeeds it, so that something of the experience of the work can be retained and salvaged for retrospection. Here this argument could be extended to include the ontological significance of the work: the work reveals something usually hidden about reality, and even though this something cannot be thought of as such while being exposed to it in the elsewhere, later philosophical reflection can take some hold of it.

However, Dufrenne warns that it would be an unjustified dogmatic move to attempt to take control over art in and through philosophy – and, consequently, to reduce it to a single ontological model, that is, of arguing that a work of art reveals this or that precise truth about reality. One must here be wary of generalising too much. The danger we are facing is to claim that art is limited to revealing just one of these aspects. Instead, it would be more faithful to the plurality of sense – and indeed to the actual way we live through the various ways pieces can affect us – to argue that works of art do not reveal the machinery of reality all at once but only fragments of it. The teaching to be taken home from the elsewhere is that human reflection cannot domesticate the whole sense of the world or wholly keep up which its taking-place. Instead of being reduced to an organ of philosophy, a work of art, then, should be taken as a corrective of philosophy: a work of art can be dangerous for philosophy, and in the attempt to master art, “orderly thoughts and preconceptions are under continuous pressure, and after enough time passes, they crumble and dissolve,” as James Elkins observes.\(^{195}\) The preceding phenomenological description does not aim at using art as a venue for deeper philosophical truths. Instead, it is an exercise in trying to redeem what is possible in the face of something that eludes total redemption.

CHAPTER 4

THE WITNESS

The work lives its own life within me; in a certain sense, it thinks itself, and it even gives itself a meaning within me.

Georges Poulet, “Phenomenology of Reading”\footnote{Poulet 1969, 59.}
§ 21. Turning the coin

In the previous chapter, I argued that certain experiences with art – those that I call aesthetic immersion – can be reconceived in terms of an existential event that is tantamount to a fracture in one’s mode of being-in-the-world, where the there momentarily takes place as the elsewhere. This, however, is only half the story. I took on earlier the idea that receptivity and givenness are correlative in the sense that they reciprocally constitute one another: as we appropriate the world as our dwelling in and through our existence, the world also appropriates us, so that the sense of the world and the subjectivity of the recipient are correlative and co-constitutive. The relevance of this starting point becomes pertinent here: just as the sense of the world is dislocated in the elsewhere, the sense of selfhood of the one who undergoes this experience is also put into play. Gadamer captures this neatly when he writes:

[…] the work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The “subject” of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences but the work itself.2

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2 Gadamer 2004, 103; Gadamer 2010, 108: ”[…] daß das Kunstwerk kein Gegenstand ist, der dem für sich seienenden Subjekt gegenübersteht. Das Kunstwerk hat vielmehr sein eigentliches Sein darin, daß es
In other words, as the work of art captures me and changes my way of inhabiting the there, my modality of selfhood does not remain untouched; my way of existing as an I is implied in and through the work, and I don’t remain the same when immersed in the event.

But if this is the case, then what exactly happens to me in aesthetic immersion? What is the modality of my selfhood in this event – that is, what characterises being-in-the-world as being-in-the-elsewhere? Who am I, if not myself, when a work sweeps me off my existential bearing? The following descriptions aim at answering these questions. Needless to say, the dislocation of selfhood in and through the work is not a separate event with respect to the unfolding of the elsewhere, but is instead part and parcel with it, like the converse side of a coin. Hence, the following analyses describe the very same event I have been discussing so far, albeit from another perspective.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that despite the fact that I have largely remained within the frame of the subject’s experience, the discussion of subjectivity I present here does not stem from the metaphysical notion of subjectivity, where the subject is conceived as self-immanent, self-subsisting, and existentially separated from the object. Instead, the notion of subjectivity I employ here stems especially from the purview of Jean-Luc Marion’s and Claude Romano’s phenomenological models. Here subjectivity is seen first and foremost as subjection, that is, as the constitution of selfhood as a response to being affected by an event which imposes itself upon me and precisely summons me as an I to take up this event as something I experience.

This brings out a thorny terminological issue. Like Heidegger, Marion, and Romano, I am aware of the philosophical ballast the term “subject” carries; yet, for the very same reason, I do not wish to tie myself to the alternatives they offer – to the notions of Dasein, adonné, and advenant – even though much of the phenomenology provided in this study stems from their thinking. My strategy of navigating through this terminological issue is to keep using, cum grano salis, the traditional terms subject and subjectivity, but at the same time insist that I use them very loosely and for the sake of avoiding constant shifts in terminological register, only as a marker for a specific dimension of receptivity which correlates with givenness, and not as referring to the metaphysical subject. Selfhood, on the other hand, I take to

zur Erfahrung wird, die den Erfahrenden verwandelt. Das ‘Subjekt’ der Erfahrung der Kunst, das was bleibt und beharrt, ist nicht die Subjektivität dessen, der sie erfährt, sondern das Kunstwerk selbst.”

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signify that dimension of subjectivity by which I am capable of positing mineness upon experience, and, consequently identify myself as the I of my experience. Furthermore, I would like to keep using, for reasons that will shortly become clear, a term employed by Dufrenne in his analyses of aesthetic experience, namely the term witness. Perhaps even more empathetically than Dufrenne, I aim to argue here that the notion of witnessing aptly captures something essential in the way we encounter works of art; yet, the existential depth of the description needs to be taken beyond the Dufrennean usage. Consequently, the term witness will in the following denote the mode of subjectivity in aesthetic immersion.

Let me once again point out that in the same way as in the preceding description of the elsewhere, the following account of the constitution of the witness describes an ideal case, an encounter removed from the hustle and bustle that usually competes for attention with pieces of art. The experience I am concerned with here is a rare occurrence which needs optimal conditions to realise itself; many things, so to speak, have to fall into place at the right time. In reality, my encounters with art, powerful as they may still be, are often affected by external and internal interferences that prohibit me from experiencing the piece as a work; the work of art, as Oskar Becker knew, is a frail event – one that can be blown away by the softest breeze. And even if the work of art occurs, it does not usually last long: for a moment, however brief, I lose myself in the spectacle of the work, but only for a moment; and then I’m back here, here in the museum or the auditorium seat – just like that, the magic is gone. In some cases, the piece manages to captivate me once again. Then I can enter into a to-and-fro movement in which I swing between being immersed in the work and returning from it, being able to reflect what is going on. In the following, I will describe the work-event from the point of view of immersion, that is, by describing the way the selfhood of the witness is modulated in the non-reflective phase where the elsewhere takes place. This description entails a certain sense of purity which must not be taken as betraying the fragility of what it describes.

The following description is laid out in the following fashion. In §§ 22–24, I will explicate the general existential modality of witnessing in terms of self-forgetfulness and will position this modality in a broader phenomenology of subjectivity by comparing the analysis presented here to Marion’s and Romano’s accounts of subjectivity. Then, in §§ 25–28, I will elaborate different aspects of this modality by describing how the different constitutive elements of in-being – affectivity, understanding, language, and intersubjectivity – are modulated in the experience of the elsewhere. Then, finally, in § 29, I will gather some loose threads and explicate the role of the witness in the constitution of the elsewhere in terms of the dispositions.
required from the witness. This discussion aims to ward off the impression that I am here returning to some Romantic notion of aesthetic subjectivity – an impression, which is not wholly unwarranted, since in the following I will return on several occasions to the insights of the German Idealists. Again, I will here retain some of the phenomenological aspects of their thinking, while at the same time using them as the metaphysical paradigm that I wish to argue against in favour of a more complex and hermeneutic notion of aesthetic subjectivity which does not comfortably fit into the dichotomies of metaphysics.
§ 22. Witnessing the elsewhere

Bearing these preliminaries in mind, what is it to encounter a work of art – or, more precisely, to be subjected to a work of art? Let me begin with a short recapitulation of the phenomenal characters I ascribed earlier to the work of art. The peculiar thing about a work of art is that it imposes itself upon its receiver extraordinarily, that is, outside the established orders of the lifeworld. The work-event cannot be integrated into an order without consequently destroying the taking-place of the elsewhere – such integration can happen only retrospectively. I described this peculiar mode of imposition further in the following ways: I found the work to be an-archic, in that it is its own pure beginning outside causality and anticipation; I described it as autononomous in that it follows its internal laws and mediates itself as a factum est which falls upon me prior to my capacity to anticipate it; and finally, I found its mode of appearing to be that of a disturbance, which disturbs order from the outside, but effaces itself without troubling it too seriously. Together, they constitute the work of art as a surprise which cannot be taken over for precisely the reason that it takes me over.

What is it to encounter such a phenomenon? The first thing to note here is the one Heidegger too makes in The Origin of the Work of Art, namely that the work of art is not encountered as a Zuhandensein nor even as a mere Vorhandensein. As it cannot be anticipated or integrated within the lifeworld, a work of art resists being subsumed under the instrumental concerns that sustain our quotidian ways of dealing with the world or being apprehended as a mere object.3 I can surely approach pieces of art as tools or mere things, but such comportment would distort the encounter so as to hinder it from being transformed into a work of art.4 Being immersed in a work of art requires a “letting-be” of the claim that the work imposes upon me, a response to its call which does not amount to suppressing it, but which, on the contrary, heeds it and succumbs to it. The work of art, then, does not melt into the background of my daily hustle and bustle as a tool that sustains it; it does not refer to something else beyond itself and does not allow me to pass over it by utilising it. As a disturbance, the work of art seizes my attention and captures me; but this capture is, precisely, something that I cannot wholly master – instead, I am at the mercy of the event, unable to control it, subjugated to its self-manifestation.

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3 Heidegger 1977b, 24.  
4 Heidegger 1977b, 14, 23–24.
Its mode of givenness, to paraphrase Marion, is one of imposition, by which the phenomenon surrounds and engulfs me rather than letting me take hold of it. Such a mode of encounter I call witnessing.

When I witness a crime or an accident, I am seized by an unexpected event which did not originate from me and which is beyond my control. However, precisely as the witness of this event I am implicated as its participant: even though I am not the active participant in the event, I am neither a passive, separated bystander whom the events would not touch in any way. Instead, I take part in the event precisely by being pulled into the midst of the event from the outside. My participation as a witness occurs in the “middle voice”, somewhere between – and perhaps prior to – the active and the passive. In temporal terms, this “middle voice” shows itself in the fact that, as the unexpected event is beyond my control, it cannot be anticipated beforehand nor grasped simultaneously – and, consequently, I can reconstruct an account of what happened only retrospectively, however small my lagging behind may be. In the event itself, I am pulled into the midst of an event, and I can only bear witness to the scene playing itself out.

Here again I take my cue from Marion. When Marion discusses the notion of saturated phenomena – or paradoxes, as he also calls them – he remarks that the phenomenality of the saturated phenomenon includes the impossibility of being subjected to the subject’s grasp. As such, I cannot take hold of these phenomena as they give themselves but only witness their self-giving. Consequently, my position as a subject is implicated:

The paradox not only suspends the phenomenon’s subjection to the I; it inverts it. For, far from being able to constitute this phenomenon, the I experiences itself as constituted by it. To the constituting subject, there succeeds the witness – the constituted witness.

He goes on: “the saturated phenomenon swallows him with its intuitive deluge” so that “the witness cannot avail himself of a viewpoint that dominates the intuition

5 Marion 2013b, 206–216.
6 Marion 2013b, 355–359.
which submerges him”.

The subject is then reduced to being a “mere” witness to an intuition that passes beyond what his or her hermeneutic grasp can provide. As such, the witness does not enact synthesis or constitution but merely witnesses: *Sinngebung* is inverted. According to Marion, such an inversion of constitution also inverts intentionality: the saturated phenomenon is something the witness cannot intend so as to circumscribe it, and witnesses can only expose themselves to a coming they cannot master. In such a situation, Marion suggests, the subject is not fully an *I* who could intend the phenomenon as *his or her* experience, but instead a witness who has renounced “the first person, or rather the nominative of the first role”.

In Marion’s case, paintings are occasions in which such a constitution of the witness occurs: the radiance of their visibility saturates the spectator’s intuitive capacities. Here I would like to suggest that witnessing is the subjective modality of the work of art as such, regardless of the piece that effectuates it. Arguing this – and everything that it entails – takes up the whole of this chapter.

Incidentally, Dufrenne seems to have intuited the same thing when he too comes to call the subject of aesthetic experience the “witness” (*le témoin*). By this Dufrenne emphasises the way the work of art asks nothing else from the subject than to experience it as a work – that is, to suspend one’s project and let oneself be taken over by the work, let oneself be immersed in it, and precisely in this letting-be allowing the work to unfold as a work. Interestingly, Dufrenne, much like Marion, claims that witnessing a work of art includes an inversion of constitution:

> It is in me that the aesthetic object is constituted as other than me. […] I cannot say that I constitute the aesthetic object. Rather, it constitutes itself in me in the very act by which I intend it, since I do not intend it by positing it as outside myself but by vowing myself to its service. Thus one can see why consciousness is not the provider of meaning. Instead of positing the object, consciousness embraces the object, which affirms itself in this embrace.

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8 Marion 2002, 217; Marion 2013b, 356: “Car le témoin ne dispose d’aucun point de vue dominant sur l’intuition qui le submerge ; […] le phénomène saturé l’engloutit de son déluge intuitif […]”

9 Marion 2002, 217; Marion 2013b, 357: “le témoin succède au *Je* en renonçant à sa première personne, ou plutôt au nominatif de ce premier rôle.”

10 See “L’idole ou l’éclat du tableau” in Marion 2010; Marion 2013a; Marion 2013b, 337–338, 376–378.

11 Dufrenne 1973, 232; Dufrenne 1953, 296: “C’est en moi que l’objet esthétique se constitue comme autre que moi. […] Je ne puis dire que je constitue l’objet esthétique, il se constitue en moi dans l’acte
Dufrenne’s description also catches one important aspect of aesthetic experience which sets it apart from other instances of witnessing. Namely, a crime or an accident can occur without me witnessing it; in their case, my participation consists solely of being the eyes of an outsider. In the case of the artwork, however, the matter is somewhat more complicated: the work needs me as its witness, since its sole being consists in implicating my existential position in the world; it needs me to perceive it, to submit myself to it – only then will the piece metamorphose into a work. Dufrenne catches this neatly by claiming that the witness of the work is also, in a specific sense, its performer (l’exécutant): by offering themselves to the work, the witness performs the work in the sense of participating in its actualisation.\(^{13}\) Hence, to be the performer of the work, one submits oneself to the work and goes through it, and correlatively, provides the work with the place in which to occur. Here, then, performing does not refer to the activity of those we usually call the performers of the work – the musicians, the actors, the dancers – but to the existential participation of the witnesses to the event that has imposed itself upon them: the work can take form only if the witness submits to it and goes through it. In this way performing amounts to what Ingarden has characterised as the concretisation (Konkretisation) of the work: the perceiver does not merely behold or register a finished object but participates in the formation of the work through a complicated set of intentional acts.\(^{14}\)

This peculiar position of the witness, neither wholly inside the work nor wholly outside it, brings me to a characteristic of the work-experience which has been, ever since Kant, attested in modern aesthetics many times over. Since the work of art an-archically catches the witness off guard and imposes itself upon him or her outside order, the work is something that cannot be anticipated. As such, the witness cannot impose his or her own circumspective grasp around the event: it cannot be integrated into the witness’s project and instrumentalised with a view to something external to the event itself. Instead, the witness is severed from an active position and placed as the “mere” stage upon which the work plays itself out. Applying Marion’s optic metaphor, the witness cannot gaze at (regarder) the work but only look (voir) at it:

\textit{mème par lequel je le vise, parce que je ne le vise pas en le posant hors de moi, mais en me vouant à lui. Et l’on comprend pourquoi la conscience n’est pas donatrice de sens : elle ne pose pas l’objet, elle l’épouse et il s’affirme en elle.”}

\(^{13}\) Dufrenne 1953, 1953, 83–91.

\(^{14}\) Ingarden 1960, § 62.
[...] gazing, *regarder*, is about being able to keep the visible thus seen under the control of the seer, exerting this control by guarding [*garder*] the visible in visible without letting it have the initiative in appearing [...]. To gaze at the phenomenon is therefore equivalent not to seeing it, but indeed to transforming it into an object visible according to an always poor or common phenomenality [i.e. phenomena upon which the *adonné* has mastery] [...].

Simply put, a work of art evades my mastery, and thus my relationship to it is one that excludes any utilisation. The witness cannot have an *interest* in the work, since, as Heidegger puts it, “when we take an interest in something we put into the context of what we intend to do with it and we want of it”. A work of art resists such contextualisation, and it can be only looked at, that is, witnessed as it gives itself solely on its own accord.

This is what Kant had in mind in the first of the four moments of the Analytic of the Beautiful, where he claims that “*taste* is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction *without any interest*”. According to Kant, that which is taken with interest is related to desire, for “all interest presupposes a need or produces one [...].” The beautiful, Kant claims, arouses no such need – it simply pleases, “however indifferent I might be with regard to the existence of the object of this representation”, without any relation to an exterior end. Our contemplation upon a beautiful object is purely disinterested. This is a delicate point: according to Heidegger, this must not be understood as meaning that every “essential relation to the object is suppressed”. Rather, Heidegger argues, what Kant

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15 Marion 2002, 214; Marion 2013b, 352: “[... ] pour regarder, il s’agit de pouvoir garder le visible ainsi vu sous le contrôle du voyant, d’exercer ce contrôle en gardant le visible dans sa visibilité, autant que possible sans lui laisser l’initiative d’apparaître [...]. Regarder le phénomène n’équivaut donc pas à le voir, mais bien à le transformer en un objet visible suivant une phénoménalité toujours pauvre ou commun [...].”

16 Heidegger 1979, 109; Heidegger 1996b, 108: "Wenn wir an etwas ein Interesse nehmen, stellen wir dieses in ein Absehen auf solches, was wir damit vorhaben und wollen."

17 Kant 2000, 96; Kant 1913, 211: “Geschmack ist das Beurteilungsvermögen eines Gegenstandes oder einer Vorstellungsart durch ein Wohlgefallen oder Mißfallen ohne alles Interesse.” Emphasis original.

18 Kant, 2000, 95; Kant 1913, 210: “Alles Interesse setzt Bedürfnis voraus, oder bringt eines hervor [...].”

19 Kant 2000, 91; Kant 1913, 205: “[...] so gleichgültig ich auch immer in Ansehung der Existenz des Gegenstandes dieser Vorstellung sein mag.”

had in mind was that when utilising comportment toward an object is put on hold, another kind of relationship between the subject and the object becomes possible. For Kant, according to Heidegger’s reading, disinterestedness does not mean indifference, but rather, as Ingvild Torsen comments, “an attitude of openness,” in which the interest lies solely in the phenomenon itself, in its own phenomenality outside any reference.21 Here she echoes Heidegger, according to whom encountering something disinterestedly entails that “we must release what encounters us as such to its own way to be; we must allow and grant it what belongs to it and what it brings to us”.22 Accordingly, the Kantian doctrine of disinterestedness can be seen as employing a similar notion of “letting-be” of phenomena as Heidegger’s later meditations on Gelassenheit: judgement of taste reveals a comportment toward phenomena in which the beautiful object is allowed to come to the fore purely as itself, outside any frame of reference provided by the faculty of desire.

To be fair, the same phenomenological point was made before Heidegger by Oskar Becker. In “Hinfälligkeit des Schönen”, Becker notes that it would be a misinterpretation to take the claim “without any interest” to mean that the aesthetic phenomenon is devoid of all interest – indeed, he goes on, a complete lack of interest characterises our relationship to that which is boring rather than beautiful.23 The Kantian notion of disinterestedness describes a wholly different relationship to the aesthetic phenomenon:

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that in every Kantian determination something quite fundamental is being said about the aesthetic. The truth is, that in aesthetic experience “interest” is at the same time aroused and broken, and, indeed, given as phenomenal. […] The moment of interest in an aesthetic phenomenon appears as such; its flaring excitation is perceptible as such – but at the same time, it is “broken,” or rather only “caught,” as a thrust can be caught.24

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21 Torsen 2016, 21.
22 Heidegger 1979, 109; Heidegger 1996b, 109: “[…] wir müssen das Begegnende als solches freigeben in dem, was es ist, müssen ihm das lassen und gönnen, was ihm selbst zugehört und was es uns zu- bringt.”
23 Becker 1929, 33.
24 Becker 1929, 33: “Trotzdem ist anerkanntermaßen in jener kantischen Bestimmung etwas schlecht- hin Grundlegendes über das Ästhetische gesagt. Die Wahrheit ist, daß im ästhetischen Erleben das ’Interesse’ zugleich erregt und gebrochen wird, und zwar als phänomenal gegebenes. […] Das ’inte-
According to Becker, the interest we take in aesthetic phenomena is not based on any external need but on the phenomenon itself: “the ‘elementary’ of the sensuous appearing,” he claims, arouses “a suspense, a primitive, kat’ exochēn ‘aesthetic’ interest on certain ‘directly perceptible’ shapes [Gestalten] […].”25 The interest toward an aesthetic phenomenon is comprised solely of the excitement stirred up by the pure phenomenality of the phenomenon, its sheer perceptibility pure and simple. In other words, what Becker and Heidegger caught sight of, via Kant, is that the interest we take in aesthetic phenomena is peculiar in that the phenomenon breaks any imposition of an external interest precisely by interesting us on its own accord, solely by captivating us with its own self-showing.26 Here I think they point to an essential phenomenological characteristic that also applies to the relationship between a work of art and its witness.

A few clarifications, however, are necessary, as disinterestedness is by no means an uncontested notion in aesthetics. In phenomenology Arnold Berleant has, as already discussed in § 8, connected disinterestedness to a contemplative distance that misconstrues the perceiver’s engagement that aesthetic experience requires.27 Paul Crowther has suggested a distinction that aims to make a case for disinterestedness in the face of such critiques. According to Crowther, the shortcoming of this critique is that it understands disinterestedness psychologically as a distinct attitude or mode of engagement, whereas it is more viable to understand it as logical disinterestedness, that is, naming a set of modes of appreciation that are characterised by a lack of reference to any external interest.28 By taking aesthetic immersion as entailing logical disinterestedness, this interpretation becomes resistant to Berleant’s critique of disinterestedness and indeed compatible with his emphasis on the role of the perceiver’s

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resserierende’ Moment am ästhetischen Phänomen erscheint aber wirklich als solches; die in ihm aufflackernde Erregung ist als solches fühlbar – aber zugleich freilich ‘gebrochen’ oder eigentlich nur ‘aufgefangen’, so wie ein Stoß aufgefangen werden kann.”


26 Similarly Martin Seel (cf. 2005, 28; 2016, 56) argues that aesthetic perception apprehends the phenomenon in the process of its appearing for the sake of its own appearing: “Beholding the play of appearances on an object is possible only if we linger in its presence and encounter it with an end-in-itself attentiveness. […] When we perceive in this way, we perceive something in – and on account of – the repleteness of its appearing.”

27 In analytic philosophy, some thinkers have contested the existence of a disinterested attitude; see, for example, Cohen 1977; Dickie 1964; Dickie 1974, Chapter 5.

engagement in aesthetic experience. Berleant paints a picture where disinterestedness is taken as an actively held attitude in which the perceiver removes an object from its context and intellectually contemplates it from a distance, so that aesthetic experience is transformed “into an intellectual puzzle that loses sight of the perceptual immediacy at the heart of aesthetic [sic]”. In *Art and Engagement*, Berleant proposes as a corrective to such intellectual disengagement an aesthetics of engagement in which the participation of the perceiver is taken as a fundamental component in the formation of the aesthetic experience. I’m very sympathetic to Berleant’s correction – indeed, my whole description here revolves around the conviction that immersive experiences with art involve a complicated interaction between a piece of art and the perceiver which is irreducible to distanced intellectual contemplation – but I do also think that the disregarding the notion of disinterestedness altogether amounts to throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Berleant’s critique warrants the following responses. Firstly, in the light of the phenomenological interpretation of Kantian disinterestedness, Berleant’s claim that disinterestedness cannot accommodate perceptual immediacy becomes problematic: contrary to what Berleant claims, disinterestedness is there seen as entailing an immediate perceptual awareness of a phenomenon and not just intellectual contemplation. As Arto Haapala notes, Berleant misconstrues the psychical distance as the distance between the perceiver and the artwork, whereas in Bullough’s theory, which Berleant takes as the paradigmatic contemporary example of the detached aesthetic attitude, the psychical distance actually concerns the viewer’s distance from his or her personal needs and ends, hence aiming to guarantee an intimate engagement with the artwork. Indeed, Bullough himself emphasises that disinterested distance is not “dispassionate”, “impersonal”, or “purely intellectual”, and that aesthetic experience is born in the situation where the aesthetic distance is decreased to the minimum without its disappearance. Secondly, I believe the problematics of disengagement and engagement are much more complicated than Berleant proposes. He seems to suggest that either we are completely disengaged from everything in our aesthetic contemplation, or we are engaged with aesthetic phenomena in such a way that their continuity with the world is always sustained.

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29 Berleant & Hepburn 2003.
30 Haapala 2006, 140, 146, 150n1.
31 Bullough 1912, 91.
32 Bullough 1912, 94.
Contrary to this, I believe there is enough evidence to argue that aesthetic experience itself entails a moment of disengagement which needs to be taken at face value: this disengagement does not mean that I distance myself from the aesthetic phenomenon but rather that the phenomenon’s extraordinary entry momentarily disengages me from my quotidian immersion in the lifeworld. In such an event I am very much engaged with the phenomenon; it is only the lifeworld which recedes into the background. Indeed, Berleant himself argues in *The Aesthetic Field* (1970) that aesthetic perception is characteristically *intrinsic*.33 He writes:

> Aesthetic experience forces us to break out of the web of means/end relationships in which our lives are entangled. For aesthetic experience is *intrinsic* perception, perception in itself and for its own sake, and the experience of art is sufficient in itself.34

This claim is very much in line with the Heideggerian interpretation of Kantian disinterestedness. Thirdly, Berleant’s critique makes it appear as though aesthetic experience was either a matter of distanced and hence passive contemplation or active participation, or, as Crowther might have it, *absolute* disinterestedness or *absolute* interestedness.35 I wish to argue here that the witness’s involvement in the work-event is, in ways that still need to be clarified, ambiguous in such a way that it defies the simple dichotomy of activity or passivity: the work occurs as if of its own accord, imposing itself upon me beyond my mastery, and yet in a pre-reflective level I participate in its birth by providing the platform in which the work realises itself. The crucial point here is that this engagement is disinterested – or *intrinsic* in Berleant’s terminology – in that the work is allowed to take place on its own accord.

Moving on, this peculiar disinterested-yet-interested stance toward the spectacle of the work corresponds to another important characteristic in the constitution of the witness. Namely, as the work imposes itself upon me and calls me to become its witness, my way of being-in-the-world is momentarily disrupted. As I claimed earlier, this disruption entails, among other things, a letting-go of a circumspective gaze through which phenomena are caught up in my struggle to sustain my existen-

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34 Berleant 2000, 121.
35 Crowther 1993, 21, 23, 41.
tial project. In other words, aesthetic immersion entails a momentary suspension of this project that sustains my lifeworld. In everyday comportment, I project my own needs and interests upon phenomena; precisely this projection provides the phenomena with the “in-order-to”-structure that sustains their quotidian meaningfulness. In aesthetic immersion, the direction of projection is reversed: it is not I who thrust myself upon phenomena, but phenomena that thrust themselves upon me, overflowing and saturating my capacity to master them. For a moment, however brief it might be, immersion steals me from my daily engagements, puts my project on hold, and overpowers my circumspective gaze; the work captivates me, in a very literal sense. In the captivity of the work, power relations between me and phenomena are reversed: instead of being the one who appropriates phenomena under my project, I become the screen onto which the phenomena project themselves.

This, I think, is a phenomenological counterpart of disinterestedness – yet one that neither Becker nor Heidegger emphasises: in disinterested comportment in which I submit myself to the self-showing of phenomena, my way of being-in-the-world is implicated. As I let go of my project in order to be disinterestedly excited by the spectacle of the work, my selfhood is also momentarily put into play. Instead of being the protagonist of my project, I become the stage in which the work plays itself out, or, to employ a metaphor from Marion, the screen upon which it projects itself: one could even say, vis-à-vis the famous quote from Cézanne, that “the work thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness”.

But here I am getting ahead of myself. These high-flown claims require some further qualification, to which I now turn.

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36 Cézanne is said to have claimed that “the landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness” (“le paysage se pense en moi et je suis sa conscience.”) Cf. Merleau-Ponty 1948, 32.
§ 23. Self-forgetfulness

The above description of witnessing corresponds on an existential level to the receptive correlate of the artwork. However, the discussion above does not exhaust the qualitative dimensions of the event. What is it to the witness to become the witness of an artwork? How does the witness’s relationship to him- or herself change?

I have already touched, in passing, upon a crucial hint. When I discussed Marion’s description of witnessing a paradox, I noted how the paradox forces the receiver to renounce “the first person, or rather the nominative of the first role”. What Marion suggests is that the receiver is not fully an I when witnessing a paradox, someone who could posit themselves as the I of their own experience. Could something like this also be the case in a work of art?

This seems to be a question – one of the rare ones – to which surprisingly many phenomenologists of art answer in the same way, namely in the affirmative. Indeed, descriptions of this dimension constitute perhaps the most widely attested aspect of the relationship between subjectivity and aesthetic experience in phenomenological literature, and one faces an embarrassment of riches when dealing with it – namely, the description of self-forgetfulness. Dufrenne summarises this point as follows:

I am lost – literally, “alien-ated” – in the aesthetic object. The sensuous reverberates in me without my being able to be anything other than the place of its manifestation and the echo of its power.37

Much like in Marion’s description of the paradox, Dufrenne claims that as I witness a work of art, I become a “derealised” (irréalisé) subject, who gives himself up in order to become “the instrument of the work’s realisation” (l’instrument de cet accomplissement), a “pure gaze” (pur regard), whose being consists in witnessing and actualising the aesthetic object.38 As the work captivates me, it hollows me out and constitutes itself in me. Simultaneously, my sense of selfhood is momentarily compromised, and I lose myself in the spectacle of the work. In such an experience my self-relation is compromised. Dufrenne writes:

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37 Dufrenne 1973, 226; Dufrenne 1953, 290: “[…] je suis comme aliéné : le sensible retentit en moi sans que je puisse être autre chose que le lieu de sa manifestation et l’écho de sa puissance.”

38 Dufrenne 1953, 94, 100, 296.
Being oneself no longer designates the pure relationship to the self which constitutes an “I think” but the substance of the self possessing depth. And intentionality is no longer an aim or mere intention toward but a participation with. And, in fact, to lay myself open is not merely to be conscious of something, but to associate myself with it. Feeling is an act of communion to which I bring the entirety of my being.39

In what follows I would like to flesh out the phenomenology of such self-obliv-ion by briefly tracing its historical emergence from the German Enlightenment to contemporary phenomenology.

Paul Guyer identifies an early articulation of aesthetic self-forgetfulness in Karl Philipp Moritz’s thinking.40 In the essay “Versuch einer Vereinigung aller Schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten” (1785), Moritz argues that “while the beautiful draws our consideration entirely to itself, it draws us for a while away from our self, so that we seem to lose ourselves in the beautiful object […],” resulting in “agreeable forgetting of ourselves” (das angenehme Vergessen unsrer selbst).41 According to Moritz, aesthetic perception requires that we withhold from instrumental circumspection of the artwork and let it hold “supreme authority” (Obergewalt) over us, turning us into the recipients whom it needs to complete itself.42 Through this self-completion of the artwork, we momentarily lose ourselves in our astonishment and turn from “individual, limited existence into a kind of higher existence”.43 The pleasure we draw from aesthetic experience stems, Moritz argues, precisely from art’s capacity to silence our individual strivings and make us able, if only momentarily, to appreciate something unselfishly and purely for its own accord. Another early appearance of self-forgetfulness can be found in Fichte’s “On Spirit and Letter in Philosophy”, where Fichte describes aesthetic ex-

39 Dufrenne 1973, 405–406; Dufrenne 1953, 502–503: “[…] l’être soi désigne non plus le pur rapport à soi constitutif d’un je pense, mais la substance du moi profond; et l’intentionalité [sic] n’est plus visée de, mais participation à. Et en effet, m’ouvrir ici ce n’est pas seulement être conscience de, c’est m’associer à. Le sentiment est communion où j’apporte tout mon être […].”

40 Guyer 2014a, 413.

41 Moritz 1962, 5: “Während das Schöne unsre Betrachtung ganz auf sich zieht, zieht es sie eine Weile von uns selber ab, und macht, daß wir uns in dem schönen Gegenstande zu verlieren scheinen […].”

42 Moritz 1962, 5.

43 Moritz 1962, 5: “Wir opfern in dem Augenblick unser individuelles eingeschränktes Dasein einer Art vom höheren Dasein auf.”

CHAPTER 4: THE WITNESS
perience as having the capacity to “silence individuality” and address “the common sense” (Gemeinsinn) of the universal human that resides, according to Fichte, in all of us.44

This notion was picked up and popularised by Arthur Schopenhauer. In the third book of The World as Will and Representation (Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, 1818), Schopenhauer argues that if art is capable of severing things from their everyday context and showing their ideal forms outside the principle of sufficient reason, “this can happen only by a change taking place in the subject”.45 Schopenhauer describes this change in a remarkable passage:

Raised up by the power of the mind, we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things, and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relation to one another, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will. Thus we longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, but simply and solely the what. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We lose ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words, we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it, and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, since the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception. If, therefore, the object has to such an extent passed out of all relation to something outside it, and the subject has passed out of all relation to the will, what is thus known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the Idea, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the

45 Schopenhauer 1966a, 176; Schopenhauer 1991a, 241: “[…] solches nur geschehen kann dadurch, daß im Subjekt eine Veränderung vorgeht […].”

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will at this grade. Thus at the same time, the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is pure will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge.\textsuperscript{46}

Here Schopenhauer grasps with astonishing phenomenological acuity, though clothed in the language of Platonic metaphysics, the same correlation I have attempted to articulate in a post-metaphysical fashion. According to Schopenhauer, when an artwork severs a phenomenon from the laws governed by sufficient reason, the subject is no longer able to subordinate the phenomenon under his or her will, and consequently the manifestation of such a phenomenon – raised to the level of Platonic Ideas – reduces the subject to being the mere “supporter of the objective existence of those objects” (\textit{der Träger der objektiven Existenz jener Gegenstände}).\textsuperscript{47} Subjects are stripped of their sense of individuality, from the temporality of their quotidian selfhood, as well as from their usual way of circumscribing phenomena in terms of their will, and thus they turn into an “eternal world-eye” (\textit{das ewige Weltauge})\textsuperscript{48} independent of all relations. Schopenhauer writes:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Schopenhauer 1966a, 178–179; Schopenhauer 1991a, 244–245: “Wenn man, durch die Kraft des Geistes gehoben, die gewöhnliche Betrachtungsart der Dinge fahren läßt, aufhört, nur ihren Relationen zu einander, deren letztes Ziel immer in Relation zum eigenen Willen ist, am Leitfaden der Gestaltungen des Satzes vom Grunde, nachzugehen, also nicht mehr das Wo, das Wann, das Warum und das Wozu an den Dingen betrachtet; sondern einzig und allein das WAS; auch nicht das abstrakte Denken, die Begriffe der Vernunft, das Bewußtseyn ausfüllt läßt durch die ruhige Kontemplation des gerade gegenwärtigen natürlichen Gegenstandes, sei es eine Landschaft, ein Baum, ein Fels, ein Gebäude oder was auch immer; indem man nach einer sinnvollen Deutschen Redensart, sich gänzlich in diesen Gegenstand VERLIERT, d.h. eben sein Individuum, seinen Willen, vergißt und nur noch als reines Subjekt, als klarer Spiegel des Objekts bestehend bleibt; so daß es ist, als ob der Gegenstand allein da wäre, ohne Jemanden, der ihn wahrnimmt, und man also nicht mehr den Anschauenden von der Anschauung trennen kann, sondern beide Eines geworden sind, indem das ganze Bewußtseyn von einem einzigen anschaulichen Bilde gänzlich gefüllt und eingenommen ist; wenn also solchermaßen das Objekt aus aller Relation zu etwas außer ihm, das Subjekt aus aller Relation zum Willen getreten ist; dann ist, was also erkannt wird, nicht mehr das einzelne Ding als solches; sondern es ist die IDEE, die ewige Form, die unmittelbare Objektität des Willens auf dieser Stufe: und eben dadurch ist zugleich der in dieser Anschauung Begriffene nicht mehr Individuum: denn das Individuum hat sich eben in solche Anschauung verloren: sondern er ist REINES, willenloses, schmerzloses, zeitloses SUBJEKT DER ERKENNTNISST.” Emphasis original.
  \item Schopenhauer 1991b, 430.
  \item Schopenhauer 1966b, 371; Schopenhauer 1991b, 432.
\end{enumerate}
The knowing individual as such and the particular thing known by him are always in a particular place, at a particular time, and are links in the chain of causes and effects. The pure subject of knowledge and its correlative, the Idea, have passed out of all these forms of the principle of sufficient reason. Time, place, the individual that knows, and the individual that is known, have no meaning for them.49

Underneath the heavy metaphysical apparatus, Schopenhauer makes the following phenomenologically salient observations: first, the selfhood of the subject is implicated in aesthetic experience; second, correlative to the severance of phenomena from the laws of sufficient reason, the subject is also severed from his or her sense of selfhood; third, this severing brings about a change in the spatio-temporal existence of the subject; and fourth, by letting go of his or her individuality, the subject becomes the stage where the manifestation of the absolved phenomena takes place.

Another phenomenologically remarkable post-Kantian emergence of self-forgetfulness can be found in Georg Lukács's article “Die Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung in der Ästhetik” (1917). Along the lines of Kant and Schopenhauer, Lukács emphasises that in aesthetic experience, the subject and the object correspond to one another perfectly: the subject does not subordinate the object but allows the object to appear as such. Furthermore, like Schopenhauer, Lukács argues that such a suspension of imposition changes the modality of the selfhood of the subject: “The aesthetic subject stands in a strict sense only against the object, the work of art: the subject itself is, in the same strict sense, a pure and unmediated experiencing subject.”50 According to Lukács, such pure and unmediated subjectivity entails a loss in the sense of personhood (Persönlichkeit), a “tearing of the Ego in an act of subjectivity without essence”51 and a transformation into a pure “being-directed” (Gerichtetsein): the subject of aesthetic experience is reduced to pure directedness towards the manifestation of the aesthetic object without the intervention of self-consciousness or


50 Lukács 1917, 7: “[…] das ästhetische Subjekt steht in strengem Sinne der Sphäre nur einem Objekt, dem Kunstwerk gegenüber: das Subjekt selbst ist, in ebendemselben strengen Sinne, ein rein und unmittelbar erlebendes Subjekt.”

51 Lukács 1917, 39: “[…] Zerreißung des Ichs in die ’wesenlosen‘ Subjektivitätsakte […]”

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the imposition of an external interest. Phenomenologically speaking, what we can extract from Lukács – in addition to many of the same points as in Schopenhauer – is that the witness’s relationship to the replete sense of the elsewhere is intentional only insofar as the witness directed towards this sense without this intention being capable of surmounting and circumscribing, and hence objectifying, the event. This, I think, is the point Dufrenne is aiming at when he describes the aesthetic subject as a “pure gaze” and what Marion says when he claims that a painting can only be looked at but not gazed at.

Let me give one final early attestation of self-forgetfulness before turning to the phenomenological literature. In his article on psychical distance, Edward Bullough observes that “the aesthetic experience […] has its centre of gravity in itself or in the object mediating it, not in the self which has been distanced out of the field of the inner vision of the experiencer […]”. According to Bullough, asking someone in the midst of aesthetic experience whether they like what they perceive “is like a somnambulist being called by name”. Becoming conscious of oneself puts “the aesthetic mechanism out of gear” and thereby destroys the whole experience. Therefore, as Bullough suggests, aesthetic experience is characterised by “the paradox that the more intense the aesthetic absorption, the less one ‘likes,’ consciously, the experience”.

Let me now turn to the attestations of self-forgetfulness in phenomenological literature. This notion was inherited from Lukács by Oskar Becker. To be precise, in “Hinfälligkeit des Schönen”, Becker discusses self-forgetfulness in relation to the artist’s creative work – but we must not be put off by this, since Becker also argues that the “aesthetic Dasein” of both the creating artist and the experiencing audience is fundamentally the same. Following Lukács, Becker claims that the artist’s (and, mutatis mutandis, the audience’s) “personality is dissolved in an ‘act of subjectivity without essence’”. According to Becker, such dissolution entails that the subject of aesthetic-artistic experience is “historically-factually” compromised: subjects are severed momentarily from their factical history, and they exist “without essence” as
a pure receptive subject.\textsuperscript{58} Any integration of this act of subjectivity – or the work that results from it – into a historical narrative can only happen retrospectively: “as a historical person”, Becker writes about the person who has returned from the adventure of art back to the everyday world, “he is his own epigone!”\textsuperscript{59} What I would like to pick up from this is that the experience of art does not belong to historical chronology, but occurs precisely as its suspension – and the experience cannot be integrated within a narrative of the self except by retrospectively reconstructing it and fictionalising it.

In French phenomenology, we encounter similar notions before Dufrenne’s \textit{Phenomenology} in Emmanuel Levinas’s “Reality and its Shadow”, where he describes the mode of subjectivity in aesthetic experience as a mode of being “to which applies neither the form of consciousness, since the I is there stripped of its prerogative to assume, its power, nor the form of unconsciousness, since the whole situation and all its articulations are in dark light, \textit{present}”.\textsuperscript{60} Then, a few years after Dufrenne’s \textit{Phenomenology}, Levinas’s friend Maurice Blanchot described the event of art as “the situation of one who has lost himself, who can no longer say ‘me’, who in the same movement has lost the world, the truth of the world, and belongs to exile […]”.\textsuperscript{61} These two accounts stress a delicate point, present in the previous accounts, but which here becomes thematic. Namely, self-forgetfulness should not be understood here to be some sort of unconscious state or a black-out akin to fainting or falling asleep, or a state where the receptivity of the subject is compromised. Instead, self-forgetfulness, as the term itself implies, amounts to a change in my \textit{self}-consciousness. According to a long-standing tradition, human experiences are characterised by the awareness that they are \textit{my} experiences: according to Kant, every representation carries, at least potentially, the qualification “I think”, and according to Heidegger, \textit{Dasein}’s existence is characterised by “mine-
ness” (Jemeinigkeit). Self-forgetfulness in immersion could be interpreted against this background as a peculiar situation where the mineness of experience is momentarily suspended: the loss of individuality, the “tearing of the Ego”, the dissolution of personality, and the inability to say “me” all point to a modality of selfhood in which the self’s relationship to itself, its selfhood, is untied so that the experience no longer carries with itself the awareness that it is occurring to me. This does not mean that aesthetic immersion would be non-cognitive: I can, though not exhaustively, make sense of the spectacle and follow its winding paths – but I do not posit myself as the one who experiences this spectacle. I will return to this delicate point when considering the role of understanding in aesthetic immersion in § 26.

Self-forgetfulness also plays a part in Gadamer’s ontology of art in Truth and Method. There Gadamer conceptualises the work of art – understood as an event – in terms of play (Spiel). As in playing, in a work of art purposive relations are suspended, and the event is allowed to unfold for its own sake without any reason beyond itself, and, just as playing requires a player, a work of art requires someone to actualise it. This actualisation also requires that the players give themselves up for play to take over: “players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players.” The subject is not an active participant of the work in that he or she would be the one who has mastery over the work; instead, the subject’s participation involves mere “being-alongside” (Dabeisein) with the work as one allows oneself to be taken by the work. Gadamer also calls this the primacy of play over the consciousness of the player (der Primat des Spieles gegenüber dem Bewußtsein des Spielenden), of which he writes: “The structure of the play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence.” This giving up of oneself to play manifests itself as the loss of selfhood. And like the thinkers discussed above, Gadamer too contends that when the self no longer thrusts itself onto the phenomena it encounters, these phenomena can be received purely as what they are in themselves. Gadamer writes:

62 Kant 1911, § 16; Heidegger 1976a, § 9.
64 Gadamer 2010, 129.
65 Gadamer 2004, 105; Gadamer 2010, 110: “Das Ordnungsgefüge des Spieles läßt den Spieler gleichsam in sich aufgehen und nimmt ihm damit die Aufgabe der Initiative ab, die die eigentliche Anstrengung des Daseins ausmacht.”
In fact, being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being-alongside is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here self-forgetfulness is anything but a privative condition, for it arises from devoting one’s full attention to the matter at hand, and this is the spectator’s own positive accomplishment.66

However, Gadamer also brings about another, rather paradoxical aspect of self-forgetfulness that the previous accounts do not emphasise:

The spectator is set at an absolute distance, a distance that precludes practical or goal-oriented participation. But this distance is aesthetic in the true sense, for it signifies the distance necessary for seeing, and thus makes possible a genuine and comprehensive participation in what is presented before us. A spectator’s ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself. Precisely that in which one loses oneself as a spectator demands that one grasp the continuity of meaning. For it is the truth of our world – the religious and moral world in which we live – that is presented before us and in which we recognize ourselves. Just as the ontological mode of aesthetic being is marked by parousia, absolute presence, and just as an artwork is nevertheless self-identical in every moment where it achieves such a presence, so also the absolute moment in which a spectator stands is both one of self-forgetfulness and of mediation with himself. What rends him from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being.67


67 Gadamer 2004, 125; Gadamer 2010, 133: “Der Aufnehmende ist in eine absolute Distanz verwiesen, die ihm jede praktische, zweckvolle Anteilnahme verwehrt. Diese Distanz ist eine im eigentlichen Sinne ästhetische Distanz. Sie bedeutet den zum Sehen nötigen Abstand, der die eigentliche und allseitige Teilhabe an dem, was such vor einem darstellt, ermöglicht. Der ekstatischen Selbstvergessenheit des Zuschauers entspricht daher seine Kontinuität mit sich selber. Gerade von dem her, worin er sich als Zuschauer verliert, wird ihm die Kontinuität des Sinnes zugemutet. Es ist die Wahrheit seiner eigenen Welt, der religiösen und sittlichen Welt, in der er lebt, die sich vor ihm darstellt und in der er sich erkennt. So wie die Parusie, die absolute Gegenwart, die Seinsweise des ästhetischen Seins bezeichnete und ein Kunstwerk dennoch überall dasselbe ist, wo immer es solche Gegenwart wird, so ist auch der absolute Augenblick, in dem ein Zuschauer steht, Selbstvergessenheit und Ver-
What Gadamer is suggesting is that when spectators are immersed in a work, their relationship with themselves becomes split, so that they are simultaneously detached from themselves, fallen into self-oblivion, and precisely in this detachment capable of relating to themselves and to their world in a new way, as if looking at them from the outside – quite in the same way as Heideggerian anxiety severs Dasein from its project and allows it to affirm this project while being disconnected from it. While I cannot subscribe to Gadamer’s suggestion that self-forgetfulness and self-affirmation occur in the same “absolute moment” – I have already argued that such reflection can only occur retrospectively – I cannot, however, contest the claim that the work of art could be used as a vehicle of self-transformation and affirmation. In addition, Gadamer’s observation that continuity must exist between the work of art and the lifeworld will be important later on, and it will be picked up again in § 26.

Finally, in his article “Phenomenology of Reading” (1969), Georges Poulet makes several observations regarding literary experience that are particularly pertinent here. Though he does not speak of self-forgetfulness per se, Poulet remarks how reading is almost as if one is invaded by another consciousness: “Reading, then, is the act in which the subjective principle which I call I, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my I.”68 However, it is not the consciousness of the author which is transplanted within me, but rather it is the work itself which “lives its own life within me; in a certain sense, it thinks itself, and it even gives itself a meaning within me.”69 It is not me who is actively reading and deriving meaning from the text; instead, a literary experience is characterised by a certain kind of effortlessness, by which the text seems to flow on its own, and I become a mere non-reflective recorder of what occurs within me. Poulet writes: “the work seems first to think by itself, and then to inform me that it has thought.”70 The important point here is the “as if” character of the experience: reading is, of course, a matter of my own cognitive processes, which simply occur as if they were someone else’s thoughts. I would suggest the same applies to aesthetic immersion as such, and not solely to the experience of reading. The point I wish to extract from

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mittlung mit sich selbst zugleich. Was ihn aus allem herausreißt, gibt ihm zugleich das Ganze seines Seins zurück.”

68 Poulet 1969, 57.
69 Poulet 1969, 59.
70 Poulet 1969, 59–60.
this is the emphasis on the peculiar interaction between the witness and the work: the witness participates in the actualisation of the work, but in such a way that the reflective awareness of this engagement recedes from thematic consciousness and one experiences the spectacle as if it was occurring solely on its own accord.

This brief and selective survey amounts to the following conclusions. First, the sheer amount of textual evidence supports the view I purport here, namely that self-forgetfulness describes the modality of the witness’s selfhood – or, more precisely, the lack thereof. Of course, one cannot claim that there is unanimity on this matter in the phenomenological tradition; for example, Ingarden views self-forgetfulness as characterising aesthetic Erlebnis and thus views it as resulting from a “defective culture in communing with the work of art.”71 Here I wish to suggest that the matter is more complicated than that. This self-forgetfulness can be seen to include several phenomenological aspects: it strips me of my prerogative to assume that the event is happening to me and thus severs me from the continuity that sustains my existence as a historical, spatio-temporal being and reduces me to mere receptivity of the work – and in this reduction, I offer myself as the screen against which the work actualises itself. However, such suspension of selfhood should not be taken as a state of unconsciousness whereby my awareness of sense disappears altogether, nor a state of passive contemplation. Instead, the experience of the elsewhere is not pure escapism, a momentary exit from the lifeworld altogether, since there must be a continuity of sense between the elsewhere and the lifeworld, because otherwise the work could not address me and make sense to me. In sum, self-forgetfulness is the phenomenal result of an inversion of projection in which I no longer project myself onto phenomena but in fact let go of myself so as to let the phenomena project themselves upon me.

§ 24. Thin subjectivity

“Mere supporter of the object”, “being-directed”, “the instrument of realisation of the work”, “derealised subject”, “being-alongside”… all these descriptions, albeit in different registers, capture the same subjective state at play in aesthetic experience: a state where the witness lets go of his or her prerogative to impose an exterior purpose upon the phenomenon and becomes the platform in which this phenomenon can appear purely and absolutely. In and though such offering the witnesses are momentarily stripped of their ability to posit themselves as the one who experiences the spectacle. The subject is reduced to being “mere” directedness toward the phenomenon, “mere” receptivity of its appearing.

What are we to make of such a peculiar modality of subjectivity? On the face of it, it seems to run counter to some deeply-held assumptions on what it means to be a subject in the first place – for instance, that being a subject entails precisely being conscious of oneself. And such antagonism, indeed, is the case. In what follows, I will argue that aesthetic immersion provides an example in favour of recent phenomenological theories of subjectivity, namely Marion’s notion of the *adonné* and Romano’s notion of the *advenant*, which challenge not only the modern metaphysical notion of unified, self-immanent subjectivity but also previous phenomenological accounts of subjectivity. Both of them stress that viewing subjectivity as the capability of imposing *Jemeinigkeit* over experience covers over a more primordial level of subjectivity, which existentially precedes this active capability to project an order upon phenomena. I would like to make the case here that aesthetic immersion reduces the subject to this minimal layer of subjectivity.

Let me start by going back to the metaphysical notion of subjectivity, by which I mean here the subjectivist paradigm prepared by Descartes and Kant and epitomised by the German Idealists and Nietzsche. The subjectivist revolution of modern philosophy resulted in positioning the self-conscious Ego as the transcendental signifier, which fixes and conditions the meaningfulness of the appearing world. Here the term *subject* (literally thrown-under, *sub-jectum*, equivalent to the Greek *hypokeimenon*) receives its modern interpretation: human self-consciousness becomes the point of reference, which underlies investigations on the meaningfulness of reality.72

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72 On the development of the modern notion of subjectivity, see, for example, Heidegger’s outline of the matter in “Die Metaphysik als Geschichte des Seins” in *Nietzsche II* (Heidegger 1997, 391–397, 410–413).
Consequently, self-consciousness is little by little conceptualised as autonomous, self-sufficient, and self-immanent: it is the fundament upon which the meaningful presence of reality is based and which exercises sovereign power in shaping this meaningfulness. This implies, as Romano points out, that the modern subject is 1) autarchic, by which the subject is seen as being able to exist independently and to be its own origin, 2) a-cosmic, that is, something that precedes and sustains the world and is in itself worldless, or, to be more precise, has a world only as an object standing before them, and 3) theoretical in the sense that the subject’s knowledge of the world is conceptualised in terms of a theoretical knowledge of objects.73

Such a notion of subjectivity as autonomous, self-sufficient and self-immanent began, as we well know, to fall apart at the turn of the 20th century. In phenomenology, this dissolution does not immediately occur in Husserl’s work but in Heidegger. Heidegger insists that such a notion of subjectivity is not phenomenologically viable: we do not exist as self-sufficient beings over and against the world, but as finite, historically-situated beings whose existence cannot be divorced from our throwness into the world. Furthermore, Heidegger argues that as a finite, temporal being Dasein is not fully self-immanent, as it is perpetually projecting itself toward possibilities and becoming something that it is not: this not-yet character defines Dasein’s temporal existence and can be crossed over only in resolute anticipation of death.74

As such, Heidegger wants to undermine the metaphysical notion of subjectivity, understood in terms of autonomy, self-sufficiency and complete self-immanence.

To use a linguistic metaphor,75 metaphysics approaches subjectivity in the nominative case, where the subject is seen to be the protagonist of his or her own existence, the being who is capable of taking over the sense of the world and of positing him- or herself as the I of this activity. Heidegger shifts the register into the genitive case, where the relationship of Dasein and the world is seen as a reciprocal appropriation, as a chiasmatic taking-over of one another. Such first-person perspectives were undermined by Levinas, who claimed to have uncovered a more primordial layer of subjectivity in which the subject must be viewed in the accusative: the ethical call of the other has always already implicated me in my responsibility before I have the prerogative to assume a position of power. Here, subjectivity is not approached first and foremost in terms of the subject’s or Dasein’s ability to appropriate the world

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74 Heidegger 1976a, § 62.
75 Cf. Marion 2013b, 438–439.
as a scene of self-actualisation, but in terms of the responsibility to answer to the suffering of the other, which, according to Levinas, precedes such projection.\textsuperscript{76}

Finally, Marion and Romano both claim that there is yet another, even more primordial layer of subjectivity, which operates in the dative case: subjectivity as receptivity prior to any imposition of control or subjugation to ethical responsibility. This is the dimension I am interested in here. There are, surely, some differences in their accounts – most importantly in relation to their differing views on the active participation of the subject in the determination of the sense of phenomena – though I am not going to discuss these issues here. Instead, what interests me is the point where their accounts converge: namely, both of them claim that subjectivity cannot be, in its most primordial level, comprehended in terms of activity or passivity or as an imposition of selfhood over experience. Instead, they argue that the subject must be able to receive phenomena, to be open to them, to be touched by them, before being able to act upon them and holding oneself as the one who acts upon them. This emphasis on fundamental receptivity is reflected in their choices of the technical terms they use. Marion’s \textit{adonné}, the “gifted”, emphasises the way the subject is the one to \((à)\) whom the givenness of phenomena is \textit{given} (\textit{donné}) and who is determined in and through receiving this gift. In a similar vein, Romano’s \textit{advenant} names the one who arrives (\textit{advenire}) to oneself only in responding to the events happening to one and makes of them one’s own unique \textit{adventure}. In other words, for both selfhood is not a spontaneous, autarchic and autonomous accomplishment of the subject but a product of a response to an event to which the subject is exposed before becoming themselves.

Let me briefly summarise their views. According to Marion, the \textit{adonné} receives itself in responding to that which gives itself. In other words, the manifestation of a phenomenon calls me to receive its givenness and in this way constitutes me as a subject. Givenness, according to Marion, is also a summons to receive the gift of the given: in giving itself, a phenomenon calls me as the “to whom” the phenomenon addresses itself. There is no “me” before this call: it is precisely the interlocution of the call, its summons to witness the self-giving of phenomena, that singles me out as the one to whom the call is addressed. This means that the fundamental layer of subjectivity amounts to \textit{pre-personal} receptivity prior to any appropriation – “phenomenality is not grasped; it is received,” Marion writes\textsuperscript{77} – and that my respon-

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\textsuperscript{76} See, for example, Kearney 1984, 63; Levinas 1978, 20–25, 33–37; Levinas 1993, 29; Levinas 1996, 17.

\textsuperscript{77} Marion 2002, 264; Marion 2013b, 430; “La phénoménalité ne se comprend pas, elle se reçoit.”
sibility – that is, my ability to respond to phenomenality, my response-ability that precedes any responsibility for my own existence (Heidegger) or for others (Levinas) – comes only after the fact. I can respond to what is given to me only after it has been given; Marion calls this the facticity of the given: it is given as a fact, as a fait accompli, and I have always already received it before being able to respond to its call. In other words, my responsibility, which accounts for my capability to hold myself as the one to whom the call is addressed and who responds to it, presumes a more primordial receptivity, which precedes any activity or passivity. The adonné is given to itself only in and through what is given to it; there is no subjectivity prior to this giving: the dative precedes the nominative.

However, to complicate things further, this does not mean that there would be phenomenality prior to the adonné’s receptivity either. According to Marion, phenomena require the adonné to become “a filter or a prism” (un filter ou un prime) through which their phenomenality is actualised. In the same way, as a projection of a movie requires a screen against which the movie is projected, a phenomenon requires someone to receive it in order to become a phenomenon. This brings Marion to a delicate phenomenological “chicken and egg” situation: which was first, the phenomenon or its receiver? To answer it, Marion highlights the temporal disparity between the adonné’s receptivity and responsibility: response can occur only after something has been received. There is phenomenality prior to the adonné in the sense that phenomenality must have summoned it before it is able to take itself up as the one to whom it is addressed, that is, before it become itself; yet, its own selfhood, its coincidence with itself, does not exhaust its subjectivity: it was already there before taking itself up as itself, acting as the receptive filter through which phenomenality accomplished itself and in the process summoned it to its selfhood. Marion captures this by claiming that the Kantian “I think” does not correspond to my primal relation to givenness, whereas an “I feel” does: I can feel only insofar as I am first touched and in this touching summoned to be the one who feels; the “I think” comes only after this primal receptivity.

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78 Marion 2013b, 477–479. Paul Crowther has suggested an analogous existential structure in Art and Embodiment (1993, 150–151), where he argues that self-consciousness is characterised by attention, comprehension, and projection: consciousness becomes self-conscious only if it is capable of being open to the world, comprehending it, and responding to it by projecting itself upon the world.

79 Marion 2013b, 468–472.

80 Marion 2013b, 430–431.

81 Marion 2013b, 408–409.
We can find a very similar pattern in Romano’s evential hermeneutics. In the same way as for Marion, the *adonné* is that which “receives itself from what gives itself”, for Romano the *advenant* is “the term for the human being as constitutively open to events, insofar as humanity is the capacity to be oneself in the face of what happens to us”. According to Romano, a human being is an *advenant* in the sense that one comes to oneself – acquires selfhood, a sense of mineness – only by being open to what happens to oneself and responding to the singular and unique adventure these events bring with them.

Such coming to oneself through what comes to oneself is constituted by three moments. First, and most primordially, the *advenant* must be open, in an ontological sense, to the event that opens a world – one must be receptive to it in order to allow it to arrive. Romano calls this primordial receptivity to the eventuality of the world *passibility* (*passibilité*): a pre-personal openness to events, which precedes any passive or active position the *advenant* might assume in relation to these events. Such opening-up must not, Romano emphasises, be understood as the *advenant*’s own accomplishment, since this opening up precedes any active appropriation of a possibility, or “as a prior structure ‘in the subject,’ preparing the reception of events,” since this openness is first granted to the *advenant* through the event of birth, which opens up for it the playing field where any exposure can occur. Secondly: since the *advenant* is passible to events, these events can happen to it, that is, *implicate* it as the one to whom these events happen. Third, such implication enables the *advenant* to appropriate the events as its experiences, and, conversely, understand itself as a *singular* being who is addressed by these events. These three moments – passibility, implication, singularity – constitute what Romano calls the *selfhood* (*ipséité*) of the *advenant*, the *advenant*’s capacity to hold itself as the one who undergoes an event. In the same way as Marion, Romano too identifies in subjectivity a primordial level of receptivity, of naked exposure and openness, here conceptualised as passibility, that precedes the subject’s prerogative to assume the

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82 Romano 2009, 20; Romano 1998, 33: “L’advenant est le titre pour l’homme dans la mesure où celui-ci est constitutivement ouvert à des événements, dans la mesure où l’humanité est la capacité d’être soi-même face à ce qui nous arrive.”


84 Romano 2009, 72; Romano 1998, 99: “Cette passibilité, en effet, ne saurait être pensée comme une structure préalable ‘dans le sujet’ qui préparerait l’accueil de l’événement […]”


86 Romano 1998, 125–126.
position of an I who can hold the experience as its experience and thereby can respond to events by circumscribing them into its project. Like Marion, Romano too calls this capability to respond to what is given by integrating phenomena into a project of selfhood responsibility: “To be able to hold open the opening of his possibility by holding himself there, to have the capacity to persist this openness, through which the advenant is exposed to more than he is capable of – this is what I call ‘responsibility’,” Romano writes. Responsibility names the advenant’s capability of holding itself as the one who undergoes an event. Selfhood is the product of the advenant’s response to its own passibility. Like Marion, Romano claims that there is a temporal delay between being exposed to an event and taking it up as “mine”: there is a disparity between the advenant’s passibility and responsibility. In order to become itself and to be able to appropriate the event as a part of its own unique adventure, the advenant must first have been exposed on a pre-personal level to this event that opens up and shapes its world.

Both Marion and Romano claim that on the most primordial level subjectivity (of the adonné or the advenant) is characterised by passibility: pure pre-personal exposure prior to any prerogative to impose a hold over what is given. Passibility, for both, is not an a priori structure of the subject, which would precede givenness, but is instead an exposure which is granted by givenness. For both, the self of this receptivity – that it is the me who receives phenomenality and grasps it – only comes after the fact. This disparity allows one to separate two constitutive dimensions of subjectivity: passibility and responsibility. These two dimensions could be seen as corresponding to two modalities of subjectivity. The modality of subjectivity we face in our quotidian experiences, which I can take over by ascribing mineness to them, and which is caught in the metaphysical and Heideggerian descriptions of selfhood, could be called thick subjectivity. This is the modality of the subject who is actively participating in the world, taking it up as his or her world, and shaping it with its actions. However, this description does not exhaust all the dimensions of subjectivity. Marion, Romano, and to some extent Levinas, demonstrate that such thick subjectivity presupposes a prior layer of subjectivity, which I call here thin subjectivity. This pre-personal layer of subjectivity, which is characterised by its passibility to given-

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87 Romano 2009, 94; Romano 1998, 128: “Pouvoir tenir ouvert l’ouvert de sa passibilité en s’y tenant soi-même, avoir le pouvoir d’insister dans cette ouverture par laquelle l’advenant est exposé à plus qu’il ne peut, c’est justement là ce que nous désignons sous le nom de ‘responsabilité’.” Emphasis original.

ness, remains hidden underneath our quotidian ways of dealing with the world and becomes evident only when this active participation becomes suspended.89

Let me now begin to flesh out the relevance of all this to the problematics of aesthetic immersion. Though Romano rarely discusses encounters with art, he suggests that there are events to which the *advenant* cannot respond by taking them as *its* and which it can only passibly endure: “*Passibility* may be arrayed differently depending on whether or not the *advenant* is capable of being *himself*, that is, whether or not he can appropriate the event by integrating it into a new projection of the world and, by persisting in his own openness, face what happens to him.”90 Such situations, which the *advenant* cannot take up as its own and consequently posit itself as the one who undergoes them, Romano exemplifies in terms of *despair*. In despair, Romano claims, I fall into doleful apathy in which nothing makes sense anymore, and, “unable to appropriate to myself what happens to me and to integrate events into a new projection of the world, 'I' actually become *nobody*: my whole adventure sinks into a bottomless anonymity.”91 In despair, the *advenant* “cannot recover his grasp as himself” and this bankruptcy of selfhood “leaves an *advenant* radically incapable of relating to events in the first person, and entirely handed over to the nakedness of a pure exposure to what strikes him and upends him, before any possibility for him of undergoing this unsubstitutably, nor therefore of responding to it.”92 In an interesting twist of terminology, Romano claims that such falling short of oneself and turning into a naked exposure to what happens to oneself reduces the *advenant* to a mere *subject*:

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89 This notion of thin subjectivity comes close to the notion of *minimal self*, but does not entirely coincide with it. Shaun Gallagher (2000) defines the minimal self as “a consciousness of oneself as an immediate subject of experience, unextended in time” and contrasts it to the *narrative self*, which is “a more or less coherent self (or self-image) that is constituted with a past and a future in the various stories that we and others tell about ourselves”. In my usage, thin subjectivity strictly speaking precedes even the minimal self as the pre-personal passibility to the world.

90 Romano 2009, 93; Romano 1998, 126: “[…] cette *passibilité* est susceptible de se décliner différemment selon que l’advenant est capable ou non d’être *lui-même*, c’est-à-dire selon qu’il peut ou non s’approprier l’événement en l’intégrant à un nouveau projet de monde et, en insistant dans sa propre ouverture, faire face ainsi à ce qui lui advient.”

91 Romano 2009, 104; Romano 1998, 141: “[…] incapable de m’approprier ce qui m’advient et d’intégrer l’événement à un nouveau projet de monde, ‘je’ deviens proprement *personne* : c’est ici toute mon aventure qui sombre dans un anonymat sans fond.”

92 Romano 2009, 93; Romano 1998, 127: “La faillite de l’ipséité laisse l’advenant radicalement incapable de se rapporter aux événements en première personne, livré entièrement à la nudité d’une exposition pure et simple à ce qui l’atteint et le bouleverse avant toute *possibilité* pour lui d’en subir l’épreuve insubstituable et, par conséquent aussi, d’en répondre.”

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“Subject” must be understood literally here in the sense of subjection to what happens to us, to events, insofar as we cannot make them ours. Subject refers to an *advenant* insofar as selfhood is lacking to him, and, since selfhood refers to the fundamental dimension according to which events can make sense for an adventure, the term “subject” is only appropriate for an *advenant* inasmuch as he is stripped of himself.93

In such despair, in which the *advenant* loses grip not only of the event but of itself also, the sense of things is transformed. Romano writes: “In the great calm that sets in at moments of real despair, an impersonal lucidity is revealed, in which things take on a life of their own, and the world, now stripped of all meaning, is transformed into a pure *spectacle*, unfolding before us and taking a form that is even more gripping because it has been deserted by selfhood.”94 The *advenant*, when exposed to overwhelming despair, turns into a “hyperlucidity” (*l’hyperlucidité*),95 a pure possible gaze upon the spectacle of a world that simultaneously makes no sense and makes more sense than ever before. And whatever meaning this despair might have in my adventure, I can only decide afterwards, retrospectively, only after I have recovered my selfhood from the grip of exhausting despair.

It does not take much to see that what Romano is describing is almost in every respect analogous to what I claimed above about aesthetic immersion. Like in despair, in the captivation of the work I lose myself in the spectacle, I’m taken over by it and overwhelmed, surprised (in the etymological sense) by the anarchic overflow of the event; and, as I become a witness to the work, its sense is absolved, and it simultaneously makes no sense – in the sense of being totally graspable – and makes more sense than usual, as sense can manifest itself in its repleteness. Like the one in despair, the witness of the work is characterised by hyperlucidity, which reveals the

93 Romano 2009, 130; Romano 1998, 178: “‘Sujet’ doit s’entendre ici littéralement au sens d’une assujetissement à ce qui nous arrive, aux événements dans la mesure où nous ne pouvons pas, justement, les faire nôtres. Le sujet désigne l’advenant pour autant que l’ipséité, justement, lui fait défaut ; et puisque celle-ci désigne la dimension fondamentale selon laquelle des événements peuvent faire sens pour une aventure, le titre de ‘sujet’ ne pourra convenir à l’advenant qu’en tant qu’il apparaît dépouillé de lui-même.”

94 Romano 2009, 105; Romano 1998, 142: “Ainsi, dans le grand calme qui s’instaure aux vrai moments de désespoir se dévoile une lucidité impersonnelle où les choses se mettent à vivre pour leur propre compte, où le monde dépouillé désormais de tout sens se transforme en pur spectacle qui se déroule devant nous et revêt un relief d’autant plus saisissant que toute ipséité, justement, l’a déserté.”

95 Romano 1998, 142.
world in a deeper and more excessive fashion than before as something detached, something that is not mine, something that I cannot take over. And, finally, whatever meaning, whatever interpretation I can impose upon the event unfolded in the work, I can gather that only after the fact, retrospectively, only after the immersion has dissipated. The crucial difference, of course, is that the experience of the work does not necessarily entail a feeling of hopelessness and apathy as despair does – but this I will discuss later on.

These analyses bring me to the following claim: the work of art reduces the witness from his or her selfhood, suspends responsibility, and addresses him or her as a mere possible subject of the work. In other words, the witness is an example of thin subjectivity. Consequently, when described from a “subjective” perspective, aesthetic immersion entails the suspension of responsibility. I am still implicated by what happens to me, but I am unable to respond to it by appropriating it for my project. This reduction is correlative to the reduction of sense to the replete sense described in § 20 of Chapter 3, and its discovery fulfils the second correlative part of the phenomenology of the elsewhere. In Chapter 2, I argued for a topological ontology according to which subjectivity cannot be conceived of outside the sensible, spatio-temporal place in which and from which it exists; and conversely, such a meaningful place is inconceivable without a subject which holds it open – or, in other words, the there is the place where the world and the human meets, and this meeting constitutes the opening-up of meaningful reality. In this context, a work of art is an event in which this opening-up is modulated so as to implicate both the sense of the world and the sense of selfhood of the witness. It is now possible to formulate this correlative implication more precisely: the elsewhere is the existential there of the witness, and, correlatively, the witness is the modality of selfhood in the elsewhere.

Before attending to some major questions that this claim raises, let me make four further points. First, a remark on temporality. Both Marion and Romano identify a temporal delay between the subject’s reception of phenomenality and one’s response to it: however small the gap might be, I can react to an event or a phenomenon only after it has fallen to my part. In the case of the artwork, this delay between passibility and responsibility is amplified: when I am immersed in the work, I lose myself, and thus also my capability to take this event as mine is postponed to the point where I recover myself from this immersion. This delay, this extraordinary lagging of response, shows itself in the temporal modus of the witness: the work severs the witness from his or her temporal ecstasies and closes off any futurition, that is, any opening toward an unforeseeable future, and casts him or her into an
encapsulated instant, which I denoted earlier by the term *meanwhile*. As such, the analysis presented here is compatible with the temporal analysis of the work presented earlier.

Secondly: the witness cannot be taken as exemplifying either authenticity or inauthenticity in the Heideggerian sense. Witnessing the work by losing oneself in it is not a case of authentic self-affirmation, where I face my unique, unsubstitutable and unescapable existence in the face of existential anxiety. However, despite the fact that witnessing entails a moment of self-forgetfulness, it is neither a case of becoming the *they* (*das Man*), who is immersed in the daily hustle and bustle of a project that has receded into the unnoticed background, since becoming a witness to the work entails the very suspension of this project and the everydayness it sustains. Witnessing a work, then, exemplifies a third option: a self-oblivion far deeper and radical than that of the *they*, and, indeed, one that puts into question the *Daseinsanalytik* from which the distinction stems.

Thirdly, to ward off the impression of passivity, two remarks need to be made at the outset, even though I will elaborate them further in due course. Firstly, the subject can resist this suspension and keep on attempting to circumscribe the piece on the level of responsibility – indeed, this is what seems to be happening with most encounters with art. In order for this encounter to turn into a work, a certain letting-be is required on the part of the perceiver. Subjects are not totally passive in the event, merely subjected to an event beyond their control – instead, they have to submit themselves to the event. Secondly, the suspension of responsibility does not mean that the witness becomes a blank screen upon which the work projects itself – blank in the sense that the witness would not contribute to the projection; rather, the preceding horizon and affective attunement of the witness moulds and delimits to some extent the perspective from which sense gives itself in the work. In both of these cases, the witness contributes to the work in ways that cannot be easily captured in the activity/passivity dichotomy.

Fourthly, and hopefully needlessly, I should remark that the self-forgetfulness described here does not correspond to a union with the Absolute in any Neo-Platonic manner. In § 20, I have already argued how the absolution of sense in and through the work must not be understood as an opening of the absolute unity of reality in the same way as in, say, the aesthetics of early German Romanticism or Schelling’s philosophy of art. Instead, replete sense must here be understood merely as absolution from the *as*-structure, which nevertheless does not completely absolve sense from the unique hermeneutic and affective situation of the witness. Far from presenting the Absolute, the work of art presents the repleteness of sense and

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the finitude of human comprehension. Correlatively, from the perspective of the witness, self-forgetfulness is not a communion with the Absolute but instead the consequence of the witness’s inability to hold an objectifying distance from a phenomenon which exceeds his or her receptive capacities and thus overcomes the witness.

Besides these remarks, the claim above animates several further questions. According to Heidegger, the “in-being” of Dasein’s being-in-the-world consists of three interrelated existentials: understanding (Verstehen), attunement (Befindlichkeit), and discourse (Rede).96 This group of existentials points to the way Dasein’s interaction with the world is mediated by its hermeneutic interactions, affective dispositions, and discursivity. In addition, Heidegger claims that being-in-the-world is always shared with others, that is, “being-in” is always also “being-with” (Mitsein).97 Even if I depart to some extent from Heidegger’s Daseinsanalytik and argue for a more primordial, possible notion of subjectivity, this division of the constituents of in-being is still, I think, a valid heuristic for organising the analysis of the witness’s being-in-the-elsewhere. So, if the taking-place of the elsewhere is taken as a transformation of my being-in-the-world, then it begs the question, how are these constitutive elements of being-in-the-world modulated? This question can be broken down into more specific questions: First, if the work addresses me prior to the “I think” and touches a more primordial affective layer of subjectivity, then how is the affectivity of the work to be thought of? Second: if the sense of the work exceeds the hermeneutic horizon, and if, in strict terms, I am not there to experience it, then how can it be that at the same time I, at least to some extent, understand what is presented to me in the work as absolute sense? Third: if the work is a rupture in the symbolic order, then what is the relationship between it and my way of structuring the world through language? And, finally, fourth: if the work severs me from myself, does it simultaneously sever me from others as well and suspend the intersubjective character of being-in-the-world?

96 Heidegger 1976a, § 28.
§ 25. Affectivity

Let me begin with affectivity. There is a long-standing line of arguments in phenomenology that affectivity is not merely a gloss over a more primordial, cognitive relationship to reality but is instead a constitutive and irreducible feature of the constitution of sense. Thus, we find the notion of attunement (Befindlichkeit) side by side with understanding and discourse in Heidegger’s Daseinsanalytik: being-in-the-world is always coloured by a specific mood (Stimmung), an atmosphere of feeling, which conditions my comportment towards the world. For Heidegger, attunement is co-original with the very opening of the world as the there: Dasein’s being-in-the-world is affective from the start. Dufrenne draws similar conclusions but formulates them in Kantian terminology: whereas for Kant the a priori laws of understanding are solely responsible for constituting the object of possible experience, Dufrenne argues that such a constitution always includes an affective dimension which conditions how the world is felt in the first place. According to Dufrenne, affectivity is involved in the very constitution of experience as such. Human consciousness, then, is affective a priori – affectivity “resides in the deepest stratum of the subject”. Much like Heidegger, Dufrenne claims that affectivity is both cosmological and existential: affectivity partakes in the very opening of the world and belongs to the existential make-up of subjectivity. And, in the same way, we find Romano arguing that feelings are constitutive features of the advenant’s exposure to the world, that is, the advenant’s passibility: “There is never a pure passibility to an event without its already being modalised, affectively colored by feeling”. For Romano, as with Heidegger and Dufrenne, affectivity is situated at the level of world disclosure; our very openness to the world is modalised by feelings. Finally, for all three, affectivity articulates my belongingness to the world: I can be affected only insofar as I partake in the very event in which the world touches me.

If affectivity is indeed a constitutive feature of subjectivity, situated at the level of passibility, and if aesthetic immersion is a reduction to passibility, then the question arises: what is the relation between affectivity and aesthetic immersion? Is there

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98 Heidegger 1976a, § 29.
99 See the chapter "Les a priori affectifs" Dufrenne 1953. Quote from Dufrenne 1973, 450; Dufrenne 1953, 554: “L’a priori affectif constitue un monde consistant et cohérent parce qu’il réside en ce qu’il y a de plus profond dans un sujet […]”
100 Dufrenne 1953, 549–562.
101 Romano 1998, § 16a.
some general point to be made about the affective dimension of witnessing a work, or are we to settle with the perhaps trivial point that works of art can arouse a whole range of feelings, whatever they might at each time be?

Let me begin by first returning to Dufrenne. Earlier I interpreted Dufrenne’s notion of the depth of sense to refer to the excessive nature of sensibility usually covered over by our project, which circumscribes sense into the referential whole of our hermeneutic horizon. The depth of the work, Dufrenne claims, reveals itself to be the depth of being: since the aesthetic object refuses to be integrated into the “universe of our habits” (*univers de nos habitudes*), it summons the whole richness of the world which these habits cover over.\(^{102}\) What is important here is that Dufrenne insinuates that depth is too complex to be taken over by understanding – it saturates consciousness, Marion would say – and thus it announces itself not in terms of widened knowledge but of feeling: depth is in the first instance felt, not known.

According to Dufrenne, I respond to the extraordinary depth of a work in terms of feeling. This brings us to a delicate point, which, I think, Dufrenne tackles masterfully. It would surely be futile to claim that the emotional atmosphere of all poetic worlds is always the same – that, for instance, the tranquil elegance of Scriabin’s piano preludes, the unnerving angst of Munch’s paintings, the celestial grandeur of Messiaen, or the mischievous joy of Oscar Wilde’s plays would all arouse the same feelings.\(^{103}\) On the contrary, it is a trivial observation that pieces of art can express all sorts of feelings. And yet – and this is the important point – Dufrenne argues that aesthetic experience is endowed with a feeling which is invariable with regard to the particular artwork (which in Dufrenne’s terminology is synonymous with “a piece of art” in my usage). In other words, Dufrenne attests that in an aesthetic experience, the feelings at play are a mixture of the feelings aroused by the specific world of the artwork and the feelings aroused by the depth of the aesthetic object; the latter is what he calls *aesthetic feeling* (*sentiment esthétique*) or *feeling of being-in-depth* (*être-profond*).\(^{104}\) This dimension of feeling is not so much dependent on the poetic world of the piece but rather on the dislocation of being-in-the-world that the work amounts to. Therefore, two layers of affectivity can be discerned from the poetic complex: those feelings that

\(^{102}\) Dufrenne 1953, 506–508.

\(^{103}\) It is, however, important to note, as Wentworth (2004, 241) does, that the perceiver’s feeling need not be identical to the feeling expressed by the piece: for example, the feelings aroused by Matisse’s painting need not be identical to the *joie de vivre* of the paintings themselves.

\(^{104}\) Dufrenne 1953, 500–504.
are specific to encounters with each individual piece and those feelings that are related to the existential event that these encounters sometimes catalyse.

What I would like to argue at this point is the following: the first dimension of affectivity cannot be pinned down to specific feelings, whereas in the case of the second, some invariable elements can be discerned. That is to say that even though a work of art can employ a whole spectrum of feelings, there are some affective elements mixed into these feelings that pertain to this experience as such and are thus constitutively parts of witnessing the elsewhere. Here I cannot venture into theories of expression and investigate the particular ways individual pieces elicit the feelings and how they interact with the pre-given affective attunement of the witness. What I want to concentrate on, however, is the phenomenological description of the affective dimension of witnessing per se. How is the suspension of quotidian existence and the revelation of absolute sense experienced affectively?

Again, Dufrenne is to the point. Describing the experience of depth, he writes: “In leaning over an abyss of this sort, I experience the same vertigo as the mountain climber at the edge of a crevasse or an explorer at the edge of a tropical forest.”105 The dislocation into the elsewhere makes me lose my foothold on the world, my secure grasp of sense, and exposes me to the depth of replete sense, which overflows my capacity to take it all in. It is precisely this feeling of standing at the edge of an abyss whose bottom my grasp cannot reach that the word vertigo beautifully captures.

This vertigo of witnessing the elsewhere can be broken down into several elements, most of which have already been identified in previous studies. First, there is a certain strangeness or Unheimlichkeit – literally unhomeliness – in the feeling of vertigo. Dufrenne writes that this strangeness:

[…] results from the fact that depth is experienced only on the condition that it exiles and uproots us from those habits which are the embodiment of the superficial self, in order to bring us face to face with a new world which requires a new outlook. Whenever the aesthetic object is incapable of surprising us or transforming us, we cannot afford it full merit. It remains an ordinary object which we treat by granting it the distracted response which results from habit and by integrating it within our zone of activity.106

105 Dufrenne 1973, 402; Dufrenne 1953, 498: "J'éprouve à me pencher sur cet abîme le même vertige que l'alpiniste au bord de la crevasse, l'explorateur à l'orée de la forêt tropicale."

106 Dufrenne 1973, 408; Dufrenne 1953, 506: "Or, si le profond a souvent quelque étrangeté, c'est qu'il
In other words, strangeness stems precisely from the extraordinary nature of the work; the feeling of strangeness is the affective correlate of the extraordinary.107 But this strangeness is not forbidding: instead, it pulls us to itself and seduces us.

Thus, we get to the second point: the **fascination** of vertigo. There is something unswervingly captivating about the whole spectacle. In *The Space of Literature* (*L’espace littéraire*, 1955), Blanchot connects the fascination we hold towards literary texts precisely to their inherent otherness: literary texts cannot be fully understood and circumscribed as objects of knowledge.108 According to Blanchot, such resistance to objectivising makes readers lose their grasp of themselves, as they cannot distance themselves from the text. The reader, then, cannot hold the position of an *I* but instead turns into an impersonal *someone* (*quelqu’un*).109 For Blanchot, reading is an event of submission, where the reader is lost in the text. This breakdown of the cognitive distance between the reader and the text that cannot be wholly grasped is experienced, according to Blanchot, as fascination:

> Whoever is fascinated doesn’t see, properly speaking, what he sees. Rather, it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to neutral, impersonal presence, to the indeterminate They, the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains – a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal – with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding.110

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107 Charles Baudelaire (1998, 487) seems to have something like this in mind when, in his review of the *Exposition Universelle* of 1855, he claims that “*The Beautiful is always strange*” and that it would be a *contradictio in adjecto* to speak of “commonplace Beauty”.

108 Blanchot 1955, 20–22. For a commentary on the relationship between otherness (or exteriority) and literature in Blanchot’s thinking, see Alanko-Kahiluoto 2007.

109 Blanchot 1955, 22.

110 Blanchot 1989, 33; Blanchot 1955, 24: “Quiconque est fascine, ce qu’il voit, il ne le voit pas à proprement parler, mais cela le touche dans une proximité immédiate, cela le saisit et l’accapare, bien que cela le laisse absolument à distance. La fascination est fondamentalement liée à la présence neutre, impersonnelle, le On indéterminé, l’immense Quelqu’un sans figure. Elle est la relation que le regard entretient, relation elle-même neutre et impersonnelle, avec la profondeur sans regard et sans
Similarly, Romano, though he does not explicitly deal with the work of art, speaks of how some traumatic events – which I have already found in some respects analogous to a work of art – are strangely fascinating: the terrifying experience which subverts my capability to assimilate it and make it my own, captivates me and pulls me towards it even though it pains me. Though aesthetic immersion is hardly a traumatic event, the way it suspends my projection and engulfs me in an anarchic deluge of sense that I cannot completely master – much like in the case of trauma – means that there is a sense of fascination in this overflow.

In the same vein, Dufrenne connects this feeling of depth with “aesthetic amazement” (étonnement esthétique), which calls us to succumb to the self-manifestation of the work:

[…] aesthetic amazement has the peculiarity of provoking reflection only eventually to reject it. The object requires not so much to be understood […] as to be experienced in its peculiar depth as an unimpeachable witness. For, to repeat, we are unfaithful to the object to the extent that we remain insensitive to its “outlaw” quality and claim to tame it with explanation and reintegrate it within the universe of our habits. The object must appear to us as continually new.

Marion, on the other hand, could be seen to aim at the same point when he describes the experience of saturated phenomena – among which the work of art could be included – to include amazement. The saturated phenomenon:

contour, l'absence qu'on voit parce qu'aveuglante.”


112 Dufrenne 1973, 409; Dufrenne 1953, 507: “[…] l'étonnement esthétique a ceci de particulier, qu'il ne provoque la réflexion que pour la débouter: ce que l'objet réclame de nous n'est pas tant d'être compris comme on s'efforce de comprendre un phénomène insolite pour le faire rentrer dans l'ordre et liquider le problème qu'il pose avec l'inquiétude qu'il soulève, que d'être éprouvé dans sa profondeur propre comme un témoignage irrécusable. Car encore une fois nous lui sommes infidèles si nous ne restons pas sensibles à son caractère d'‘outlaw,’ si nous prétendons l'apprivoiser en l'expliquant et le faire rentrer dans l'univers de nos habitudes. Il doit être toujours neuf à nos yeux […].” Translation modified: Casey’s translation speaks of “aesthetic wonder.”
Amazement, fascination – both these aim at an element of awe which accompanies the vertigo of witnessing: what comes to pass in the work is something that exceeds my capacity to anticipate it, master it, and integrate it into a pre-existing context – thus it leaves me stupefied, subjected to a spectacle I can only marvel at. It is commonplace in aesthetics to argue that aesthetic experience is an experience of pleasure. Yet witnessing the elsewhere is not a simple feeling: it is a mixture of excitement in the face of a spectacle and of vertigo induced by the loss of one’s foothold, mixed with the emotive atmosphere of the particular piece. It requires submitting oneself to the work, putting one’s selfhood at risk in order to gain something extraordinary. Hence, if there is enjoyment in experiencing a work – and no doubt there is – this pleasure cannot be equated with simple delight. Instead, it is an enjoyment tinged with the giddiness of losing control. During the history of aesthetics this feeling has most often been associated with sublimity: Edmund Burke holds that the astonishment inherent in sublimity is tinged with “a degree of horror,” and Kant describes the complicated feeling of sublimity as a feeling of terror which remains virtual, as its object does not really threaten us, and which, precisely by this fact, incites a feeling of pleasure. Interestingly, we can also find Moses Mendelssohn describing the experience of sublimity as a peculiar mixture of pleasure and vertigo (Schwindel). Though I think it would be mistaken to identify the fascination inherent to the work-experience with the experience of the sublime and the negative feelings associated with it, I believe there is a similarity between

113 Marion 2002, 201; Marion 2013b, 331: “[…] il vient avant notre vue de lui, il vient avant l’heure, avant nous. Nous ne le prévoyons pas, il nous prévient. Par suite, il étonne aussi, parce qu’il surgit sans commune mesure avec les phénomènes qui le précèdent sans pouvoir l’annoncer ni l’expliquer […].”

114 Burke 1990, 53.

115 Kant 1913, 296.

116 Beiser 2011, 222.
them in that in both cases the enjoyment we derive from being caught up by the work is not simple, mellow pleasure but something far more complex, a vertiginous captivation as the event overtakes us.

I believe Oskar Becker has found an excellent term when he adopts — though he writes in German — the English word *thrill* to describe the pleasure we take in art. In Becker’s usage, thrill refers to the excitement which the sheer phenomenality of the aesthetic phenomenon stirs in us. *Thrill* and *thrilling* refer etymologically to that which is piercing, and the vertigo of the elsewhere could be said to be piercing precisely because, to quote Dufrenne, it “reaches into everything that constitutes me.” My selfhood is at stake in facing that which is thrilling. Also, thrill entails a sense of not knowing what is happening. Thrill is a feeling of pleasure, but one which presupposes an element of risk. That is why it beautifully captures the ambiguous enjoyment in the vertigo of witnessing the elsewhere.

At this point it becomes pertinent to make two further qualifications in order to ward off the illusion of unwarranted Romanticism. First: the way I affectively experience a work of art does not occur in isolation — no element of the encounter does — and my existing attunement not only colours the overall emotional atmosphere of the event but also conditions the possibility of experiencing the elsewhere in the first place. No love story speaks to me if I’m feeling fed up, no comedy exhilarates me if I’m sad; and, in the same vein, no vertigo shakes me if I’m not willing to step out onto the verge of the abyss — there has to be, like Schelling says, a prior “mood of fantasy” before the work can touch me. The work of art is a fickle thing and does not show itself to those who are not open to seeing it; the taking-place of the work requires affective openness, that is, sensitivity on the part of the witness. The witness cannot approach the piece so as to master it — no work will ensue; instead, witnesses must lay themselves bare and expose themselves to whatever will happen: as Dufrenne writes, “the kingdom of the aesthetic belongs to the poor in intellect so long as their hearts are rich.” But even richness of heart is not a guarantee of an

117 Becker 1929, 34–35.
119 Dufrenne 1973, 404; Dufrenne 1953, 501: “Le sentiment esthétique est profond parce que l’objet m’atteint dans tout ce qui me constitue [...]”
120 Schelling 1907, 321.
121 Dufrenne 1973, 416; Dufrenne 1953, 515: “[...] le royaume esthétique appartient aux pauvres d’esprit s’ils sont riches de cœur.”
encounter with a piece turning into immersion: the pre-existing attunement of the subject must resonate with the emotive atmosphere of the poetic world in order for the elsewhere to take place.

Secondly, the vertigo described above is by no means a long-standing feeling but instead describes the primal impression of the event. Sometimes it occurs immediately – I am caught by the very first beats of William Forsythe’s *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* (1987) –, sometimes the piece seduces me unnoticed, so that I suddenly realise I have been lulled in the midst of the work – I’m thinking of the music of Kaija Saariaho – and sometimes I have to make some active effort to decipher the piece in order to unlock something that overcomes me – this often happens with conceptual pieces. In all these cases the vertigo describes the breathlessness and wonder of the moment when the piece starts working and begins to unfold before me. After that, the vertigo disperses into the particular feelings the piece might incite in a particular witness. Dufrenne writes:

> The only gauge of depth which aesthetic feeling is incapable of offering to us overtly is perseverance. But aesthetic feeling compensates for this lack by proffering a plenitude of the moment – not to mention the fact that, even if it does not openly manifest perseverance by its acts, the waves of its influence ebb only gradually, slowly forming our taste and allowing it to mature.122

The vertigo of witnessing, then, is that which faces us when we give in to the work and expose ourselves to it; it is the feeling that accompanies the immersion in the spectacle. And yet, in the same way as self-forgetfulness, this feeling is fragile and it easily gives way to reflection and the particular feelings incited by the emotive atmosphere of the particular poetic world. And this leads me to the next step in our description.

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122 Dufrenne 1973, 404; Dufrenne 1953, 501: “Le seul gage de profondeur que ne puisse donner apparemment le sentiment esthétique, c’est la persévérance; mais d’abord il compense le pouvoir de durer par la plénitude de l’instant; et ensuite on pourrait montrer que, même s’il ne manifeste pas sa persévérance au dehors par des actes, ses ondes ne s’amortissent que lentement, et c’est par là que notre goût se forme et mûrit.”
§ 26. Understanding

The analysis above could be seen as falling back to the *Erlebnis* aesthetics it was supposed to avoid. Indeed, are not the singularity of aesthetic experience, its overflowing affectivity, and its power of merging the spectator with the work, precisely the primary building blocks of aesthetic *Erlebnis*, as Ingarden suggests?123 Do not Heidegger’s disparaging words on Wagnerian aesthetics also describe the experience analysed above:

Here the essential character of the conception of the “collective artwork” comes to equivocal expression: the dissolution of everything solid into a fluid, flexible, malleable state, into a swimming and floundering; the unmeasured, without laws or borders, clarity or definiteness; the boundless night of sheer submergence. In other words, art is once again to become an absolute need. But now the absolute is experienced as sheer indeterminacy, total dissolution into sheer feeling, a hovering that gradually sinks into nothingness.124

So it would seem. As we know, Heidegger and his followers criticise the Kantian strands of aesthetics which divorce aesthetic experience from any cognitive value: they argue that what starts in Kant as a pleasure without content develops in Romanticism into a full-blown *Erlebnis*, a momentary experience of heightened pleasure which is completely removed from the actualities of real life. The move Heidegger and Gadamer take is to shift the focus from the dimension of pleasure to that of knowing (*Wissen*) – they want to show how a work of art is an event of truth, not just “the sheer bubbling and boiling of feeling abandoned to itself”.125

Throughout this study, I have emphasised the immersive and uncontrollable phase of the work-experience. However, this should not be taken too one-sidedly to suggest that this immersion is a purely affective matter. On the contrary, I hold that understanding plays a crucial role in the work-event *while* it is taking place, and not

123 Ingarden 1960, 21–22.


125 Heidegger 1979, 88; Heidegger 1996b, 103: “[…] bloßen Brodeln und Wallen des sich selbst überlassenen Gefühls.”

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only afterwards when we reflect on the experience. Thus, I wish to suggest that the experience of going elsewhere is not a non-cognitive, purely affective experience, but involves a peculiar participation of understanding.

I have briefly discussed the role of understanding in the work-event in Chapter 3. To recapitulate, I myself side with the hermeneutic claim that experience is essentially structured by understanding, so that the givenness of phenomena is always already mediated by my hermeneutic horizon prior to me reflecting on these phenomena. Hence, the experience of the elsewhere is also structured by understanding but in a pre-reflective manner. Here this claim needs to be taken a bit further. What remains to be asked is the following: Is understanding, like affectivity, situated at the level of passibility or responsibility? And if there is understanding at play in aesthetic immersion, what is it to understand the replete sense?

In answering this question, Romano proves to be very helpful. Romano emphasises, like Heidegger and Gadamer, how understanding is “the most fundamental characteristic of the relation between an *advenant* and the world” and “the primary attitude, prior to any other, in which and *advenant* constantly holds himself and by which he relates to all that happens to him: a pre-reflexive and pre-theoretical comportment that is inseparable from the way in which an *advenant* ceaselessly advenes to himself [...].”

In other words, being open to events entails that these events are always already understood in one way or another before they become a theme of my reflection. In other words, though Romano himself is not very explicit in this case, passibility itself is characterised by understanding: already in being exposed to an event, I, at least to some degree, understand the event. Romano continues:

Hence, such understanding, which is pre-linguistic and pre-conceptual, even if it is accomplished in and as speech, precedes any thematic formulation and conceptual elaboration of the meaning of the phenomenon to which it is directed. Thanks to this understanding, an *advenant* can, prior to any intellectual “reflection,” encounter what happens to him double, both as an innerwordly fact and as an event in the proper sense.

126 Romano 2009, 60–61; Romano 1998, 84–85: "La compréhension désigne le caractère le plus fondamental de la relation que l’advenant entretient avec le monde. [...] la compréhension est l’attitude première, préalable à tout autre, dans laquelle l’advenant se tient constamment et par laquelle, à tout moment, il se rapporte à ce qui arrive: comportement pré-réflexif et pré-théorétique indissociable de la manière dont il ne cesse de s’advenir [...].” Translation modified.

127 Romano 2009, 61; Romano 1998, 85: “Prélinguistique et préconceptuelle, une telle compréhension,
However, such understanding must not be understood as always already exhausting the meaning of the event. As the quotation above suggests, this pre-reflective understanding is merely the primal way in which the event announces itself. It merely characterises the way an event makes sense even prior to me reflecting on it – in other words, the sense of the event is not an accomplishment of a "gnoseological act" (un acte gnoséologique) of mine but rather a characteristic of the way the event imposes itself.128 It is precisely because of this pre-reflective, preliminary organisation of sense that allows the advenant to take up its meaning reflectively. This, according to Romano, can occur in two ways: first, in the case of an innerwordly fact, understanding amounts to “the simple explanatory grasp” (la simple saisie explicitante) of the event, which in no way challenges the pre-existing hermeneutic horizon: the event is lived through without anything changing and is understood in the light of its context – this level of understanding might be interpreted as what Heidegger means by understanding as the assimilation of an as-structure upon phenomena.129 Secondly, in the case of an evential event, I can only understand what happened by reconfiguring my existing horizon, since the event exceeds any prior interpretive context and resists any easy integration within the pre-existing world. I can only integrate such an event, that is, understand its meaning, by refashioning my understanding of the world and my place in it. What is important here is that Romano emphasises that such understanding always lags behind the event itself: there is a structural delay, a diachrony, between an evential event and its reflective understanding.130

So, what are we to make of all this in the case of the work-event? It would be counterintuitive to claim that aesthetic immersion would always be a dissolution of the subject into a flux of disorganised sensory and affective data; instead, what we encounter is usually already structured in one way or another: I can recognise shapes, hear distinct motives, follow the narrative, discern the elements of the pictorial space, and so on. But such recognition occurs without me actively reflecting

mème si elle ne s’accomplit que dans et comme parole, précède donc toute formulation et toute élaboration conceptuelle thématiques du sens des phénomènes qu’elle vise; grâce à elle, il est possible à l’advenant de s’y reconnaître avant toute ‘réflexion’ théorétique dans ce qui survient sous le double visage du fait intramondain et de l’événement au sens propre.” Translation modified.

128 Romano 1998, 84.
129 Romano 1998, 86.
130 Romano 1998, 86–89.
on it, in the same way as any encounter with an event is conditioned by a pre-reflective and pre-predicative understanding of the given phenomenon. Even if the work amounts to a suspension of the witness’s responsibility, this does not mean that I am a blank canvas, a tabula rasa, upon which phenomena project themselves; instead, my pre-existing hermeneutic sedimentation shapes the screen which I have become, and thus the projection is also shaped by this pre-reflective understanding. Each witness understands the event uniquely in the light of his or her own background, even though the sense of the poetic world is absolute; as Gadamer puts it, “every work leaves the person who responds to it a certain leeway, a space to be filled in by himself.”\textsuperscript{131} Heidegger’s famous interpretation of Van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes is a case in point: even though Heidegger seems to think that we all come into contact with the peasant woman’s world with its harsh furrows and cold winds, that surely is not the universal case; instead, as Meyer Schapiro has famously suggested, Heidegger can be seen as projecting his own rural background upon the painting, and these personal experiences shape the way he experiences the painting.\textsuperscript{132} If such shaping does not occur, there is nothing in the work that I could hold on to and the whole event would amount to experiencing a mess of sensory data – which hardly amounts to a work of art. This is the reason why, in § 17, I argued that the poetic world of the piece has to overlap with the lifeworld of the witness and that there has to be, at least to some extent, a continuity of meaning between the lifeworld and the poetic world, just as Gadamer too claimed.

However, here it becomes even more crucial to point out that such understanding never exhausts the replete sense that manifests itself in and through the work. The sense of the poetic world, when presented through the work, is replete and absolute, that is, the sense which reveals its depth that cannot be covered over by an as-relation, since the very working of the work consists of distancing the witness from a goal-oriented participation. In other words, the primal understanding of the replete sense given in and through the work is partial and incomplete: it cannot take over or exhaust what is given by the work but merely fathoms its surface and recoils before its depth. This is precisely the point that Blanchot makes:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131} Gadamer 1986, 26; Gadamer 1977, 34: “Jedes Werk läßt gleichsam für jeden, der es aufnimmt, einen Spielraum, den er ausfüllen muß.”
\item \textsuperscript{132} Schapiro 2009.
\end{itemize}
That the work is manifests the explosive brilliance of a unique event which comprehension can then take over, to which it feels it owes itself as if this event were its beginning, but which it initially understands only as that which escapes it. This event is incomprehensible because it happens in that anterior region which we cannot designate except under the veil of no.133

Incidentally, such a mode of understanding is very similar to Kant’s notion of reflective judgement (reflektierendes Urteil), which enters the stage in the case of the aesthetic intuition, which the faculty of judgement is unable to pin down with a concept, that is, intuitions which resist being caught up in a determining judgement (bestimmendes Urteil).134 In such a case, the faculty of judgement can no longer function under the legislation of the faculty of understanding and has to form a judgement without an a priori concept, so that the judgement entertains an intuition it cannot wholly master. To borrow an expression from Fichte, such sense only lingers (schweben), since understanding cannot completely fix (fixieren) it.135 What this means, in simple terms, is that when witnessing a poetic world presented by the work, such as the restless flux of images in Oskar Fischinger’s experimental film Raumlichtkunst (1926), I comprehend that I see circles, squares, and all sorts of geometric shapes flashing before my eyes, I can distinctly hear the wail of a bomb siren amid the clanging and banging of percussion – but all this flows over me with such intensity that I can barely keep up with the deluge of phenomena without being able to synthesise it into a graspable whole. I drown in it and cannot overcome this coming so as to fathom its meaning when it cascades over me. The witness understands what is given and yet its sense eludes a complete grasp; even if my acts of sense-making are not adequate to the event they attempt to grasp, this falling short does not mean that these acts are halted altogether. Dufrenne catches sight of this when he writes of what he calls adherent reflection (reflexion qui adhère):

133 Blanchot 1989, 222; Blanchot 1955, 231–232: “Que l’œuvre soit, marque l’éclat, la figuration d’un événement unique, dont la compréhension peut ensuite s’emparer, auquel elle se sent redevable comme à son commencement, mais qu’elle ne comprend d’abord que comme lui échappant: non-compréhensible, parce qu’il se produit dans cette région antérieure que nous ne pouvons désigner que sous le voile du ‘non’.”

134 Kant 1913, 179.

135 Fichte 1965, 360.
By means of adherent reflection, I submit myself to the work instead of submitting it to my jurisdiction, and I allow the work to deposit its meaning within me. I consider the object no longer as a thing which must be known through its appearance – as in critical reflection, where appearance has no value and signifies nothing on its own – but, rather, as a thing which signifies spontaneously and directly, even if I am unable to encompass its meaning: as a quasi subject. […] Thus, if I were to maintain the notion of genesis, it would be that of an autogenesis on the part of the work. An understanding of the work comes no longer from the discovery of who produced it but, rather, from seeing how it produces and unfolds itself.136

In other words, the mode of reflection – and thus of understanding – the sense of the work qua the work, is one in which the subject of aesthetic experience submits – that is, suspends the usual procedure of delimiting the sense of the phenomenon with respect to an external purpose – to the work and attests to the self-manifestation of the work without attempting to totalise it.

This form of cognition, I take it, is analogous to what the play-theoretical strands of aesthetics have aimed at when speaking of the free play of the faculties of the mind. Such mode of understanding, I argue, is precisely the role of understanding in aesthetic immersion. While being taken elsewhere by the work, the witness understands what happens in a pre-reflexive and, so to speak, preliminary manner: the witness’s understanding attempts to tag along with the self-giving of sense, only to fathom its surface and sense that there is something more to it, something that exceeds and saturates the receptive capacity of the witness. Such recognition of the depth of sense, though pre-reflexive as it is, is accompanied affectively with the vertigo I described earlier. However, as a corollary to this, it needs to be added that it is the sense of the poetic world that I understand in this pre-reflexive manner while being caught by the work; the sense of the work remains unfathomed as long as I stay under its influence – indeed, when I realise I have been caught, the magic is gone.

136 Dufrenne 1973, 393; Dufrenne 1953, 487–488: “Par réflexion qui adhère, je me soumets à l’œuvre au lieu de la soumettre à moi, je la laisse déposer son sens en moi. Je ne la considère plus tout à fait comme une chose qu’il faut connaître à travers l’apparence, en sorte que l’apparence jamais ne vaut et ne signifie pour elle-même, selon l’attitude de la réflexion critique, mais au contraire comme une chose spontanément et directement signifiante, même si je ne puis cerner cette signification: une quasi-sujet. […] Aussi, si je pense encore à une genèse, c’est maintenant à une auto-genèse: comprendre l’œuvre n’est plus découvrir ce qui la produit, mais comment elle se produit et se déploie elle-même.”
Thus, to be able to understand the sense of the work requires a phenomenological attitude which the work excludes.

But this level of understanding is not the whole story, but rather only its beginning. Even if understanding accompanies my every encounter with an event, its further function is to work out the meaning of the event and thereby integrate it with my understanding of the world and my place within it – a function that the work suspends. Even if immersion entails self-forgetfulness, this does not mean that the event is isolated or unconscious. Instead, due to the continuity of sense, the work leaves its traces even after it has effaced itself, traces of sense that can be retrospectively reflected and understood in the eventual sense. Here is where *interpretation* enters the stage. Since interpretation belongs properly to the reflective phase of the work-experience, I will not tread too deeply into the thorny problems related to it and will instead settle for a few preliminary remarks.

According to Heidegger, interpretation is the “development of understanding” where “understanding appropriates what it has understood in an understanding way”, that is, reflectively deepens what is already understood.137 Similarly, for Dufrenne, reflection – which is synonymous with interpretation in his *Phenomenology* – “[…] is to gain self-possession and to look more closely, that is, to recover the appearance in order to discover new significations”.138 This reflection, Dufrenne continues, can take two forms. First, it can be a reflection of the *structure* of the aesthetic object, whereby the subject attempts to reconstruct the relations of the elements that make up the world of the object:

Reflection on the structure of the aesthetic object is similar to constitutive activity. This kind of reflection defines the object by detaching it from the self so that it may be subjected to a critical examination. […] Hence I detach myself from the work by substituting an analytical perception for a perception of the whole. Reflection always implies a sort of plumbing of the depths, but in this case through decomposing the object rather than gaining intimacy with it. […] This type of critical reflection is not without interest, since it is responsible for clarifying the object as a perceived reality. It reduc-

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138 Dufrenne 1973, 370; Dufrenne 1953, 462: “[… ] réfléchir sur une perception, c’est se ressaisir et regarder mieux, retrouver l’apparence pour découvrir de nouvelles significations.”

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es that sense of confused totality in which I seem to become lost and which I experience in the first hearing of a musical work, the first reading of certain poems, or even the first contact with a painting.139

But this sort of reflection, which remains on the structural level, says nothing of the sense that this structure sustains. Therefore, the reflection of structure is accompanied with another level of reflection, namely reflection of sense, which “comes to consider the aesthetic object as a thing in nature whose meaning is to be found in its posterior or anterior context”.140 In other words, such reflection attempts to interpret the poetic world in the pre-existing context of the lifeworld. However, Dufrenne goes on, “this undertaking is ultimately futile, since what is said by the work can be said in no other way […]”141 and “aesthetic experience, once finished, leaves no more than a pale and futile memory, and the knowledge by which it is replaced cannot compensate for its disappearance”.142 What unfolds in the work cannot be translated into propositions, it cannot be completely grasped by any interpretation; no order exhausts that which transcends any order a finite mind could entertain. “In this way,” Dufrenne writes, “the work appears overdetermined: or, rather, each key opens a new door for one without one’s ever penetrating into the inner chambers.”143 Interpretation of the poetic world is an endless task; and hence we can account for the repeated claims of the abyssal inexhaustibility of art that we can also find in Blanchot, Gadamer, and many others.

139 Dufrenne 1973, 388–389; Dufrenne 1953, 483: “La réflexion sur la structure de l’objet esthétique est proche de l’activité constitutive: elle définit l’objet en le détachant de moi pour le soumettre à un examen critique. […] Je décolle donc de l’œuvre, et je substitue à la perception de l’ensemble une perception analytique. Réfléchir c’est toujours approfondir; mais ici en décomposant l’objet, et non en pénétrant dans son intimité […] Cette réflexion critique n’est pas sans intérêt, parce que c’est à cette condition que l’objet comme réalité perçue peut s’éclairer pour moi, cesser d’être une totalité confuse où je me perds: que l’on songe à la première audition d’une œuvre musicale, à la première lecture de certaines poèmes, et même au premier contact avec une certaine peinture.”

140 Dufrenne 1973, 391; Dufrenne 1953, 486: “[…] dont le sens est à chercher dans le contexte postérieur ou antérieur.”

141 Dufrenne 1973, 391; Dufrenne 1953, 486: “[…] entreprise finalement vaine, puisque ce que dit l’œuvre ne peut être dit autrement que par elle.”

142 Dufrenne 1973, 429; Dufrenne 1953, 530–531: “Au lieu que l’expérience esthétique, sitôt qu’elle est achevée, ne laisse plus qu’un souvenir décoloré et vain, et le savoir qui la remplace ne saurait compenser sa disparition.”

143 Dufrenne 1973, 392; Dufrenne 1953, 486–487: “L’œuvre apparaît ainsi comme surdéterminée; ou plutôt chaque clé ouvre une porte sans qu’on pénètre jamais au cœur de la place.”
Questions regarding interpretation raise too many problems to be tackled here. What I want to insist is that this level of interpretation can occur only after immersion has effaced itself; like all eventual events, the work of art offers itself to interpretation only retrospectively. Taking a reflective stance distances the witness from the work, obliterating it. Romano claims that understanding is “necessarily delayed, exceeded from the outset by the interpretative possibilities that an event opens by occurring, such an understanding is retrospective precisely to the extent that the event itself is prospective, precedes itself, and is accessible solely from the future”. Romano himself attests that this is also the case in a work of art – “a work of art, which cannot be understood in its singularity except from the posterity to which it gives rise” – though, admittedly, he understands this posterity in terms of the piece’s impact on the history of art. There is, though, another posterity, which the work gives rise to, namely that of the witness: after the “sweet intoxication, that delightful madness,” as Fichte says, returns a “cool self-possession” in which we are faced with the challenge of making sense of what happened. For Fichte, this “sweet intoxication” precludes the functioning of the mind that conceptual understanding requires, and consequently, as Paul Gordon puts it in his commentary, “any attempt to understand what happens in art would destroy or deny the very thing that one is attempting to understand”. Dufrenne, too, sees the same point: “Thus we are separated from the work as a result of having willed to reconstruct it […]” Immersion into the work and reflection of the sense that it unfolds cannot occur simultaneously – reflection and interpretation happen only after the fact. At best, as it often happens in extended encounters with pieces of art, there can be an oscillation between immersion and interpretation, where I momentarily lose myself in the spectacle, only to return and gain self-possession so as to interpret what is happening.

144 Romano 2009, 64; Romano 1998, 88: "Nécessairement retardataire, excédée depuis toujours par les possibles interprétatifs que l’événement a ouverts en survenant, une telle compréhension est rétrospective dans la mesure exacte où c’est l’événement même qui est prospectif, en précéssion sur soi et accessible uniquement à partir de son avenir."

145 Romano 2009, 62; Romano 1998, 86: "[…] de l’interprétation d’une œuvre d’art, qui n’est vraiment compréhensible dans sa singularité qu’à partir de la postérité à laquelle elle est donne lieu […]”

146 Fichte 1981, 339. To be precise, in the quoted section Fichte discusses the experience of the artist – but later on (1981, 354) he goes to emphasise that the experience of artists is fundamentally the same as that of their audience.

147 Gordon 2015, 65.

148 Dufrenne 1973, 392; Dufrenne 1953, 487: "Si nous nous sommes ainsi séparés de l’œuvre, c’est pour avoir voulu, en somme, la reconstituer […]"
§ 27. Language

The third existential that characterises Dasein’s in-being is discourse (Rede). In Being and Time, this refers to the communicability of meaning, which materialises itself in language (Sprache).\(^{149}\) In his later writings, Heidegger abandons the problematic distinction and associates language and discursivity.\(^{150}\) In the following, I will be speaking of language largely following the later Heidegger.

Language, according to Heidegger, is not a tool at our disposal, one that humans could use to communicate its otherwise non-linguistic encounter with the world, but instead language is the very structure in which the world becomes intelligible in the first place. This primordial discursivity of the world underlies the possibility of discourse in its usual meaning, that is, of communication between persons: it is only because the world is always already structured and organised by language that we are able to express ourselves linguistically.

Here Heidegger follows the Greeks in thinking of discourse in terms of logos. Beyond referring to “discourse”, “speech”, “word”, “proposition”, and so on, logos denotes, according to Heidegger, a gathering (Versammlung).\(^{151}\) As he claims in Introduction to Metaphysics: “Logos here does not mean sense, or word, or doctrine, and certainly not ‘the sense of a doctrine,’ but instead, the originally gathering gatheredness that constantly holds sway in itself”\(^{152}\) The world appears to us as an organised whole, and not as a collection of separated things; instead, the world is a web of relations in which these things are tied together in the same tissue of being without thereby losing their individuality. Logos is the organising structure of physis, the presencing (Anwesung) of the world, which both ties things together and individuates them. However, it does not escape Heidegger that logos is inseparable from language – indeed, logos understood this way is the fundamental meaning of

\(^{149}\) Heidegger 1976a, § 34.

\(^{150}\) Ingwood 1999, 207–208.

\(^{151}\) Heidegger 1983c, § 48. Etymologically, logos stems from legein, “to collect, gather”, which also had the meanings “to count, recount” and “say”. Thus logos can be translated as “gathering”, even though etymological dictionaries (cf. Chantraine 1999; Beekes 2010) do not include this in their list of meanings.

\(^{152}\) Heidegger 2000b, 141; Heidegger 1983c, 136–137: ”Logos heißt hier weder Sinn, noch Wort, noch Lehre, noch gar 'einer Lehre Sinn,' sondern: die ständig in sich waltende ursprünglich sammelnde Gesammelheit.”
language, and the everyday use of language is only derivative of this ontological role. According to Heidegger, we do not have a pre-linguistic access to reality: even without us being conscious of it or thinking in verbal terms, language has always already structured the world into a meaningful place. According to Heidegger, we do not have a pre-linguistic access to reality: even without us being conscious of it or thinking in verbal terms, language has always already structured the world into a meaningful place.153 Language, then, before being an instrument of communication, is the very space that structures the there – in the words of later Heidegger, “language is the house of being” (Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins).154 It is important to note here that Heidegger does not say that language is being, that being could be reduced to language; rather, he says that language is “the house of being”, the place where being dwells; we don’t use language, we live in it.

Gadamer follows Heidegger in this ontological interpretation of language and conceives of language as “a medium where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together”.155 Gadamer argues that the language a person lives in conditions the way this person can access the world: “a language-view as worldview” (Sprachansicht als Weltansicht).156 In a Heideggerian tone, Gadamer writes:

Language is not just one of man’s possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature. […] Language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it. Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it. Thus, that language is originarily human means at the same time that man’s being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic.157


154 The expression “Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins” is mentioned for the first time in “Brief über den Humanismus” (Heidegger 1976b, 313) and from then on is repeated regularly when Heidegger discusses language.

155 Gadamer 2004, 469; Gadamer 2010, 478: “[…] die Sprache eine Mitte ist, in der sich Ich und Welt zusammenschließen oder besser: in ihrer ursprünglichen Zusammengehörigkeit darstellen […]”.

156 Gadamer 2010, 446.

157 Gadamer 2004, 440; Gadamer 2010, 446–447: “Die Sprache ist nicht nur eine der Ausstattungen, die dem Menschen, der in der Welt ist, zukommt, sondern auf ihn beruht, und in ihr stellt sich dar, daß die Menschen überhaupt Welt haben. Für den Menschen ist die Welt als Welt da, wie sie für kein Lebendiges sonst Dasein hat, das auf der Welt ist. Dies Dasein der Welt aber ist sprachlich verfaßt. […] Wichtiger aber ist, was dieser Aussage zugrunde liegt: daß die Sprache ihrerseits gegenüber der Welt, die in ihr zu Sprache kommt, kein selbständiges Dasein behauptet. Nicht nur ist die Welt nur
Here Gadamer picks out the point that human existence is characterised by its linguistic nature – incidentally, the Greeks defined the human as a zőon logon echōn, “living being which has logos”. Language is what sets humans apart from living things: “Man, unlike all other living creatures, has a ‘world,’ for other creatures do not in the same sense have a relationship to the world, but are, as it were, embedded in their environment.” Without going into the validity of such anthropocentrism or supporting it, the point I want to take from this is that it is precisely language that allows this relationship to the world by which the world becomes a meaningful place for us – here I will leave out the question whether this is a uniquely human characteristic.

The important point that Gadamer brings out is that even though language offers us our fundamental access to reality, the meaningfulness of the world cannot be exhausted by any human language. Language is essentially finite, whereas the wealth of meaning is infinite; “unlike the divine word, the human word is essentially incomplete. No human word can express our mind completely”. This point aims to ward off accusations of language-idealism, according to which being is identical to language. Instead, language is the medium through which we come into contact with being which exceeds linguistic grasp. Language orients us to the world but does not close it within any definite bounds.

This brief orientation brings me to inquire the role of language in being-in-the-elsewhere. If language structures being-in-the-world, then what is the relationship between language and the work of art? To this question it is difficult to find a unitary answer, not only because the category of art itself can be divided into linguistic and non-linguistic arts, but also because the relationship between art and language can be approached from many perspectives. Perhaps the easiest way into this problematic starts by observing that the relationship between language and the poetic world and that between language and the elsewhere are slightly different, though overlapping things. Even if it is correct that language indeed mediates hu-
man experience, both our way of understanding a poetic world – whether or not the particular piece employs linguistic devices or whether the piece is solely visual, kinaesthetic or musical – and the experience that might result from this encounter are in one way or another linguistic experiences. However, the thesis here is that these two dimensions should not be conflated into one, since the work of art displays something about language that the piece of art does not necessarily do.

Let me begin with the relationship between language and the poetic world. In § 17, I argued that every poetic world consists of a unique set of devices – colour palettes, harmonic schemata, rhetorical styles, movements, atmospheres – specific to that particular creation through which the piece attempts to communicate itself. This selection of devices can be called the language of the piece. In the same way as language in general can be understood as that which structures presence and makes it sensible, the language of the poetic world is the organising principle, its logos, which gathers the poetic world which thereby presents itself to its witness as a coherent whole – how well the piece’s language manages to do this is a measure of its success. Namely, when a piece works for us, we say that it “speaks”, and, correlative-ly, if the piece fails to touch or communicate itself, we can say that “it didn’t speak to me”. Gadamer insists that all understanding is linguistic, and so too the piece’s language has to be one which I can be in dialogue with – otherwise its world will remain distant, undecipherable, and mute. Gadamer writes: “all artistic creation challenges each of us to listen to the language in which the work of art speaks and to make it our own”.160 I cannot understand a language I do not speak, and such is the case with the language of the piece, however unique it may be: it has to resonate with my communicative capacities in order to speak to me. This is the same point, here expressed in linguistic terms, which I have made earlier: that the poetic world has to, at least to some extent, conform to my lifeworld in order to be able to touch me and be understood by me.

Here it is crucial to remember that language is not solely a cognitive dimension, but it is intimately tied with affectivity and embodiment – this is reflected, for instance, in the close connection between Heidegger’s attunement, understanding, and discourse as the constituents of the “in-being” of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. The language of a poetic world does not need to be something expressed in spo-

ken language, since there can also be a language of movement, a language of forms and colours, a language of sounds, and so on, which all possess their own ways of “speaking”. Indeed, a sign of an original piece is that what the piece attempts to say cannot be said in any other language. This means that the poetic world cannot be transposed to spoken language, nor can a linguistic poetic world, say that of a poem or a novel, be rephrased without thereby losing something. Understanding a poetic world is like translating from one language to another, and like in all translation there is a remainder that is lost in the operation.

If the piece manages to “speak” to me, this address can turn into aesthetic immersion. Here I move on to the relationship between language and the elsewhere. Like the language of the poetic world, the experience which it arouses cannot be translated and captured in spoken language without thereby losing something essential. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes: “In the face of the overwhelming presence of works of art, the task of expressing in words what they say to us seems like an infinite and hopeless undertaking.” Yet we undertake this endless task, since, as Gadamer writes later on:

> We know how putting an experience into words helps us cope with it. It is as if its threatening, even annihilating immediacy is pushed into the background, brought into proportion, made communicable, and hence dealt with.

The experience of the elsewhere is precisely an experience that refuses to be tamed like this. Part of the strangeness – and captivation – of the whole experience stems indeed from the way it eludes linguistic articulation.

Nancy makes a crucial conclusion based on this observation. He alludes to the way the artwork makes sense in such a way that its sense cannot be caught by the signifying system of language. In “Art, fragment” (“L’art, fragment” in *Le sens du monde*, 1993) he writes: “Coming occurs – or opens up an access – only when the

161 Gadamer 2004, 402; Gadamer 2010, 405: “Angesichts der überwältigenden Präsenz von Kunstwerken erscheint die Aufgabe, in Worte zu fassen, was sie uns sagen, wie ein unendliches Unternehmen aus einer hoffnungslosen Ferne.”

162 Gadamer 2004, 450; Gadamer 2010, 457: “Wir wissen, was für die Bewältigung einer Erfahrung ihre sprachliche Erfassung leistet. Es ist, als ob ihre drohende und erschlagende Unmittelbarkeit in die Ferne gerückt, in Proportionen gebracht, als mittelbar gemachte gleichsam gebannt wäre.”

signifying or symbolic order is suspended [...] by an interruption that produces *no void of sense* but, on the contrary, *a fullness and indeed overfullness*: an 'absent sense' or eruptive coming of the sense that is older than all signification [...].”164 The artwork interrupts the way we usually capture sense into a system of signifiers, and releases it so that it can present itself in its “overfullness”. As such, the work presents sense as the *(n)evermore-of-sense* (*plus-de-sens*): a sense that makes more sense than what can be expressed in symbolic language but at the same note never becomes totally articulated.165 Here the interruption of the symbolic order corresponds, from a linguistic perspective, to the absolution of sense I described in § 20. Immersion is a linguistic experience but one at the borders of language, a place where the house of being cannot accommodate the sense of the world. The experience of the elsewhere – the fact that it is possible in the first place – underlines the more general philosophical claim that the sense of the world cannot be gathered into a unity, which could then be brought to language without a remainder. On the contrary, the elsewhere is a case that shows how language merely orients us towards the world and structures its meaningful presence but cannot wholly contain its sense.

This becomes particularly apparent in the case of the literary arts, which thematise this finitude of language. In our everyday comportment, we use language as a tool, and like all tools, language too tends to disappear behind the activity in which it is used – language brings things to presence and names them, yet we usually miss this working of language and turn our attention to that which is thereby brought to presence. As Heidegger observes, a tool, like a hammer, becomes a thematic object of our attention only when it breaks or otherwise fails to fulfil its function – that is, when the tool is removed from the web of practical interests that usually covers it over.166 Similarly, language as language can come forth only when its employment as a means of straightforward communication is suspended. This can be done in and through the literary arts, perhaps most clearly in poetry; indeed, discussions on how poetry can reveal something essential about language constitute one of the

164 Nancy 1997a, 134; Nancy 1993, 206: “Jour ne va nulle part ailleurs, ou ne fraye aucun autre accès, qu’à suspendre l’ordre signifiant, ou l’ordonnance symbolique. À les suspendre et à les surprendre d’une interruption qui ne produit pas un vide de sens, mais au contraire un plein et un trop-plein: un ‘sens absent,’ ou l’irruption d’une venue du sens plus ancienne que toute signification [...].” Emphasis mine.

165 Nancy 1997a, 137; Nancy 1993, 210. For a detailed commentary on art’s relation to sense in Nancy’s thinking, see Heikkilä 2007.

166 Heidegger 1976a, 93–94.
recurrent motifs of continental aesthetics from Friedrich Hölderlin onwards. “Poetry, too, often becomes a test of what is true, in that the poem awakens a secret life in words that had seemed to be used up and worn out,” Gadamer observes. Literature can disclose the depths of language, its ontological function as the *logos* that sustains the meaningfulness of reality. Similarly, Blanchot maintains that behind “immediate language”, which sustains our belief in the familiarity of the world and in language’s capability of naming it, there is an “essential language” in which language severs its immediate relation to the world and folds back on itself, ceases to be a mere carrier of a message and reveals its own materiality, strangeness and distance to what the words are usually taken to mean. Precisely this strangeness accounts for the peculiar fascination a literary text exercises on us.

Henri Maldiney, on the same note, holds that there is an emptiness at the heart of language, an emptiness that signifies language’s incapability to say the whole sense of being. Poetry, for him, discloses this essential emptiness of language, and thus, “poetic speech is *capable* of this incapability, an incapability which is precisely proper to it, because it implies a powerful lucidity, a lucidity not of knowing but of power, which reveals its limits and the sense of its limits”.

These are just examples – a whole study could be filled with this discussion. What I find essential here is how, in thematising the finitude of language, the literary arts are also able to estrange us from the world: by showing the cracks in the unity of *logos*, poetic speech can bring to language that which escapes language: an excess of sense, which I have characterised as an integral element of the elsewhere. The literary arts, then, can effectuate the elsewhere by modulating the linguistic mediation between the witness and the world.

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167 Gadamer 2004, 446; Gadamer 2010, 453: “Auch das dichterische Wort wird oft wie zu einer Probe für das, was wahr ist, indem das Gedicht in abgenutzt und verbraucht scheinenden Worten geheimes Leben weckt und uns über uns selbst belehrt.”


170 Maldiney 2012, 42: “La parole poétique est *capable* de cette impuissance, d’une impuissance qui précisément lui est propre, parce qu’elle implique une lucidité puissancielle, lucidité non de savoir mais de puissance, qui lui révèle sa limite et le sens de sa limite.” Translation mine.
§ 28. Intersubjectivity

In addition to affectivity, understanding, and language, human experience is mediated by its belongingness to social reality. We share our lives with others in the midst of an intersubjectively constructed historical world, which grants me my language, my understanding, my historical background, and so forth. Indeed, some have ventured to argue that the *we* is more primordial than the *I*, that I receive my subjectivity precisely by encountering the other or by belonging to a community. Here it is not a matter of analysing the whole extent to which intersubjectivity constitutes subjectivity. Instead, I take it for granted that human existence is inextricably linked to the existence of others – that *being-in-the-world* is, like Heidegger says, also *being-with*.

Earlier I argued that aesthetic immersion involves a self-forgetfulness on the part of the witness. It is no longer *I* who experiences. But if my self-relation is changed, then it begs the question if my relationship with others is also modulated. Is immersion an intersubjective experience? There is no question of art not being a part of human sociality – we discuss art, we revere it as a central element in society, we use it to build common identities, and so forth – but that is not the question here; instead, the question is: When I am captured by the work and lose my sense of selfhood, am I also severed from others?

There is a long line of arguments, stemming from Kant, which claims that the work of art addresses the universal human in me. For Kant, the claim to universality – which he characterises as a key element in aesthetic judgement – hangs on the inference that even though aesthetic judgement is subjective, it can claim universality, since all individual interests are removed from the judgement, and it rises solely from the play of faculties, which all humans capable of experience must possess. Similarly, Fichte repeats largely the same argument as he claims that in the moment of inspiration, the artist loses his individuality and “takes instead those common characteristics which occur in each one of us, moulding them to form in the individual character of his mind and his work”, which he then “uses to awaken and engage this shared sense (*Gemeinsinn*), and to silence individuality for as long as he

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171 See for example, Emmanuel Levinas’s *Otherwise than Being* and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural* (*Être singulier pluriel*, 1996).

172 Kant 1913, § 6.
has us under his influence […]”173 This “shared sense” Fichte also calls “the universal sense of collective humanity” (der Universalsinn der gesammten Menschheit).174 An aesthetic experience lays claim to universality: since the aesthetic object or work of art addresses characteristics we all share, we should derive the same experience from the object.

Here the loss of individuality is taken to mean that I become an everyman, a general exemplar of humanity, who shares the same predicament – and thus the same experience – with anyone who possesses enough taste to judge the aesthetic object as such. In the light of the hermeneutic model professed here, such a conclusion seems problematic. Here I do not wish to go on to discuss whether we must postulate that as humans we must all possess the same transcendental apparatus that guarantees the uniformity of experience. Rather, what I want to concentrate on here is the question whether we can validly assume that the aesthetic experience of a beautiful object or a work of art is qualitatively universal – that is, does every person endowed with the same capacities experience a work of art in the same fashion?

I have argued that on the ontological level, the work of art denotes a way for the there to open itself as a sensible, spatio-temporal place. However, the hermeneutic nature of this event precludes the conclusion that the experience would be identical for all witnesses. Namely, even if the piece is the same for all, the sense that is thus manifested is not. Even if the work of art absolves the sense of the (poetic) world from the horizon of an individual project, it does not mean that this sense is completely removed from the hermeneutic disposition of the witness: we never receive sense purely and innocently, without the mediation of our individual hermeneutic and affective horizon. This prior sedimentation and affective attunement conditions the way sense appears as sensible. To employ again Marion’s screen-metaphor, the argument for universality presupposes that the silencing of individuality makes me a blank screen upon which the aesthetic phenomenon projects itself, whereas I want to argue here that even though such self-forgetfulness does occur, my hermeneutic horizon still participates in the mediation of the phenomenon, and the screen that I am, blank though it may be, is uniquely shaped and curved by my


unique horizon and affective dispositions. The experience of the work of art, then, is always singular and there is no guarantee that others will experience the work in the same way as I do. Standing in front of a painting or sitting next to each other in a concert, we do not collectively go through the same experience even though we experience the same piece.

However, there is intuitive validity in Kant's claim that we seek the agreement of others in our aesthetic judgements. Where does this derive from if not from the necessary identity of our experiences? Dufrenne offers a nuanced answer to this. First of all, I have pointed out how Dufrenne identifies an element of alienation and self-forgetfulness in aesthetic experience. While speaking of the role of the public in aesthetic experience, he also claims that “the circumstances of aesthetic experience render it invisible”, claiming that the others with whom I am attending to a piece of art disappear from my thematic view in the same way as my self-presence is covered over by the aesthetic object.175

However, this does not mean, Dufrenne claims, that the other is wholly absent in the formation of my experience. To start with, aesthetic experience wakes up an urge to find a guarantor of its validity, “it seeks confidants and co-witnesses”,176 as if to prove to the witnesses that they were right in experiencing what they experienced; the other, then, is non-thematically present in the background of aesthetic experience as someone with whom the experience can be compared and warranted. This craving for security, this need inherent to the dreamlike hovering of aesthetic immersion, could be seen as the urge to find universal approval of which Kant speaks. This point applies, according to Dufrenne, equally to public events in which the other person is immediately present as it does to more private experiences of art, such as reading alone.177 Further, Dufrenne points out how, even in cases where I am part of a larger public, like in the theatre, we do not form a community in that we would recognise each other thematically and pursue to encounter the piece together as a collective group.178 Instead, we are merely “the indefinite multiplication of the witness” (la multiplication indéfinie du témoin), a group of individuals who

175 Dufrenne 1973, 65; Dufrenne 1953, 103: “[…] les circonstances de la perception esthétique ne le rendent visible […].”
176 Dufrenne 1973, 64; Dufrenne 1953, 102: “[…] elle cherche des confidents et des témoins.”
177 Dufrenne 1953, 101–104.
178 Dufrenne 1953, 103–110.
happened to come to a performance at the same time. We all experience what we experience and interpret the experience each in our own ways. For Dufrenne, it seems to be beside the point to inquire whether it is the shared experience that constitutes us as a community, because the source of communality lies somewhere else: even on a non-thematic level I am aware that others are also attending to the piece, and through internalised rules I know not to disturb them and let them have their own experiences. For Dufrenne, it is precisely here, not in the universal sense of the work to be shared, but in the mutual participation of attending to a piece of art that constitutes the community. “The group is a group […] only when the relations of I and thou are surpassed,” Dufrenne writes and continues: “the aesthetic object enables the public to be constituted as a group because it proposes itself as an eminent objectivity which wins individuals to itself and compels them to forget their individual difference.” Thus, the members of the public are tied together not because they all necessarily experience the same thing, but because the event demands that they accept the rules of the game, namely, that the aesthetic object requires the undisturbed attention and admiration of the witness. We form a public in that we mutually respect each other’s pursuit in encountering the aesthetic object. It is this that brings out the human in me:

Man in front of aesthetic object transcends his singularity and becomes open to the universally human. […] What divided men are conflicts on a vital plane. […] But the aesthetic object brings men together again on a loftier plane where, without ceasing to be individualized, they feel themselves to be interdependent. We may say, then, that aesthetic contemplation is in essence a social act much as are, according to Scheler, loving, obeying, and respecting. Aesthetic contemplation is an act which includes at least an allusion to the other as my equal, because I feel supported by him, approved by him, and in a sense answerable to him.

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180 Dufrenne 1973, 66; Dufrenne 1953: “Le groupe n’est groupe […] que là où sont dépassées les relations d’un toi et d’un moi. Et précisément l’objet esthétique permet au public de se constituer comme groupe parce qu’il se propose comme une objectivité supérieure qui rallie les individus et les contraint à oublier leurs différences individuelles.”
181 Dufrenne 1973, 68; Dufrenne 1953, 106–107: “L’homme devant l’objet esthétique transcende sa singularité et devient disponible pour l’universel humain. […] Ce qui divise les hommes, ce sont les conflits sur le plan vital […]. Mais l’objet esthétique rassemble les hommes sur un plan supérieur où sans cesser d’être individualisés, ils se sentent solidaires. Nous aimerions dire que la contemplation
Humanity, I take it, does not here mean so much the transcendental similarity of our faculties, but rather the recognition that we owe each other mutual respect due to the mere fact we are all human. Aesthetic experience is intersubjective not in that we universally share the same experience, or that in losing our individuality we would become some sort of universal we. Instead, aesthetic experience is intersubjective in that the other non-thematically structures it. In this way, though not explicitly saying it, Dufrenne manages to mediate between the fact that the other is not a thematic presence in my aesthetic experience, and yet in some respects aesthetic experience involves the presence of others. This, I think, is phenomenologically a more valid conclusion than the one we can find in Kant or Fichte.

All this, however, must not be understood as suggesting that the intersubjective modality of witnessing corresponds to the Heideggerian *they* (*das Man*). In everydayness, when *Dasein* does not appropriate its singular ability-to-be, it has delivered itself over to the anonymous *they*, a shared order of norms and patterns of comportment which informs how *Dasein* comports itself and responds to phenomena.\(^{182}\) Heidegger claims that the *they* “disburdens” (*entlastet*) *Dasein* from the responsibility of its unique existence and offers a moment of relief from its weight. Similarly, immersion can be seen as constituting such a disburdening. However, there is a crucial difference between the *they* and the witness. In Heidegger’s description, even the inauthentic, self-forgetful *Dasein* retains the prerogative to assume an instrumental hold over the world, even though this appropriation is mediated by an internalised understanding of how “we” are supposed to comport ourselves:

> We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge. But we also withdraw from the “great mass” the way *they* withdraw, we find “shocking” what *they* find shocking.\(^{183}\)

\(^{182}\) Heidegger 1976a, 27.

\(^{183}\) Heidegger 1996a, 119; Heidegger 1976a, 169 “Wir genießen und vergnügen uns, wie *man* genießt; wir lesen, sehen, urteilen über Literatur und Kunst, wie *man* sieht und urteilt; wir ziehen uns aber auch vom ’großen Haufen’ zurück, wie *man* zurückzieht; wir finden ’empörend’ was *man* empörend findet.”
But in immersion, this sort of prerogative is suspended. The anarchic and autonomous manifestation of the work is a rupture in everydayness where the *they* dominates. Surely, one knows how to behave in a museum or theatre, but this does not mean that in witnessing one witnesses as *they* witness. The “who” of the witness is something even more faceless and anonymous than the *they*. On the lines of Blanchot, one could call this impersonal witness *someone* (*quelqu’un*) – someone who has intersubjective support in the sense of having internalised the codes of conduct that pertain to an encounter with art, but not to the extent that this intersubjective support would dictate and overtake the whole experience as in the case of the *they*.

This analysis, I think, suffices to answer the question regarding the relationship between the elsewhere and intersubjectivity. I hold on to the claim that *during* immersion, while I am captured by the work, my immediate relationship with others, even with the person sitting next to me, is momentarily severed: there is just the spectacle of the work, which saturates my attention, and the other can become present only by interrupting it – suddenly, someone sneezes or moves restlessly in their seat, and the magic is gone. Even if I am part of an audience, I do not identify myself with the others in the sense of thinking that we are all experiencing the same thing – no, when the work takes me the other vanishes altogether. But, as Dufrenne notices, the presence of others structures my experience in that I have internalised a set of rules as to how to comport myself in a public setting so as not to disturb others. Then, *after* the experience, the other can become present again, and the experience gains a new intersubjective dimension. We can share our experiences and compare them, interpret the piece together, and evaluate them. But, again, this can happen only *after* the work itself.

But, if I hold on to a claim that aesthetic immersion is an experience of self-forgetfulness in which I give myself over to the work, so that the other becomes invisible and contributes to my experience only through internalised rules, does that not entail that I turn myself away from the other and concentrate solely on the spectacle before me? Is there not something rather selfish in such an experience? Dufrenne writes:

> When we take pleasure in entering the world of the aesthetic object and thereby losing ourselves in it, it appears that we gain nothing more than the enjoyment of “an hour of oblivion.” Then, as after enjoying a self-indulgent luxury, return to reality brings vague remorse at having sacrificed something.\(^{184}\)

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184 Dufrenne 1973, 502; Dufrenne 1953, 614: “[…] lorsque nous nous plaisons à pénétrer jusqu’à nous y
If immersion severs my bonds with others to the extent that the other becomes invisible to me, does not such experience amount to turning one's back on the suffering of the other, a moment of escapism, where I no longer attend to my ethical responsibility? Indeed, in “Reality and its Shadow”, Levinas concludes that aesthetic experience is inherently unethical:

There is something wicked and egoistic and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague.185

Even without holding on to Levinas's philosophy of ethical responsibility, this question is valid. I would like to argue here that Levinas is, to a certain extent, right in his conclusion, but also crucially wrong. Everything hangs on the notion of continuity of sense, which I have discussed earlier. In his analysis of artistic enjoyment, Levinas argues that art severs the viewer from a living relationship with the world and captivates the viewer with a mere play of shadows that has no intrinsic relation to reality.186 He seems to suggest that we become none the wiser with this enjoyment – we gain nothing but the enjoyment itself. Even if I have been so far sympathetic to Levinas's phenomenology of art, which captures the solitary nature of the experience, I cannot agree with this conclusion, since sense, as disclosed by the work, is not closed within the sphere of the work but, to some degree, transcends the event itself. In and through the work, I get in touch with a new world, which I can recollect afterwards. The work exposes me to something new and strange, and I can learn from it after I have recovered myself. Even if one grants that Levinas is right in arguing that an experience with art severs one's immediate relation to the other, this disruption cannot be judged as immoral, since there remains the possibility that the experience can have ethical consequences after it has effaced itself.

Indeed, this is a line of thought pursued by several thinkers from Kant onwards. One remembers how Kant held beauty to be “the symbol of morality”, in that the...

185 Levinas 1989, 142; Levinas 1948, 787: “Il y a quelque chose de méchant et d'égoïste et lâche dans la jouissance artistique. Il y a des époques où l'on peut en avoir honte, comme de festoyer en pleine peste.”
186 Levinas 1948, 774–781.
capacity to judge disinterestedly the beauty of an intuition – that is, taste – prepares one for the similarly disinterested judgements of moral responsibility.\footnote{Kant 1913, § 59.} As such, the contemplation of beauty promotes, not hinders, the moral consciousness of man. Similarly, we find Fichte claiming:

\begin{quote}
The inspired artist does not address himself at all to our freedom. So little does he do so that, on the contrary, his magic begins only when we have given it up. Through his art he momentarily raises us, through no agency of our own, to a higher sphere. We do not become any better for it. But the unploughed fields of our minds are nevertheless opened up, and if for other reasons we one day decide in freedom to take possession of them, we find half the resistance removed and half the work done.\footnote{Fichte 1984, 93; Fichte 1981, 361: "Der begeisterte Künstler wendet sich gar nicht an unsere Freiheit, er rechnet auf diesselbe so wenig, daß vielmehr sein Zauber erst anfängt, nachdem wir sie aufgegeben haben. Er hebt durch seine Kunst uns ohne alles unser Zuthun auf Augenblicke in eine höhere Sphäre. Wir werden um nichts besser; aber die unangebauten Felder unsres Gemüths werden doch geöffnet, und wenn wir einst aus andern Gründen uns mit Freiheit entschließen, sie in Besitz zu nehmen, so finden wir die Hälfte des Widerstandes gehoben, die Hälfte der Arbeit gethan."}
\end{quote}

Here Fichte beautifully brings out the retrospective character of moral growth with respect to artistic experience. There are analogical elements in encountering a work of art and in encountering another human being: both are cases of interaction with otherness, where we have to put our self-understanding at stake and open ourselves to something that contradicts our deeply held prejudices about the world and ourselves. The work of art teaches us openness, even if it does not directly engage us with moral issues. By exposing ourselves to art, we become – perhaps unwittingly – more prepared for a genuine dialogue with the other. And, perhaps needless to say, some pieces of art explicitly convey a political or ethical message, one that makes us pay heed to the cruelties and injustices of the world. It is hard to see how, if these pieces work for us, it would be “wicked and egoistic and cowardly”: on the contrary, even if I momentarily cease to attend to the immediate needs of those around me, after the experience I might be all the more prepared to attend to them.

187 Kant 1913, § 59.
188 Fichte 1984, 93; Fichte 1981, 361: "Der begeisterte Künstler wendet sich gar nicht an unsere Freiheit, er rechnet auf diesselbe so wenig, daß vielmehr sein Zauber erst anfängt, nachdem wir sie aufgegeben haben. Er hebt durch seine Kunst uns ohne alles unser Zuthun auf Augenblicke in eine höhere Sphäre. Wir werden um nichts besser; aber die unangebauten Felder unsres Gemüths werden doch geöffnet, und wenn wir einst aus andern Gründen uns mit Freiheit entschließen, sie in Besitz zu nehmen, so finden wir die Hälfte des Widerstandes gehoben, die Hälfte der Arbeit gethan.”

\textit{Chapter 4: The Witness}
§ 29. Dispositions

The preceding discussion concludes the existential analysis of witnessing aesthetic immersion. There is, however, one more thing I would like to address, a detail that has been running through my considerations like a thread, but which might have confused the reader with its seeming absence, since I haven’t paid attention to it at every turn. My analysis might give the impression that the witness is mainly a passive participant in the event. To a certain extent, this impression is right, though I have pointed out how the witness contributes to the event in several ways. This ambiguity between passivity and activity merits a few further remarks. What I will suggest here is that the ambiguity rises from the work-event itself and that the witness’s participation in the work does not fit the activity/passivity divide easily. Thus, to conclude this chapter, I would like to take it up as a whole and discuss the role of the witness’s disposition with regard to aesthetic immersion.

There is a long-standing discussion of the so-called “aesthetic attitude” and its relation to aesthetic experience running through modern aesthetics. The historical root of this discussion stems from the notion of disinterestedness, which rose to prominence through eighteenth-century British empiricism and Kantian idealism. The first fully formed theory of aesthetic attitude, one might argue, is to be found in Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, where Schopenhauer argues that the cycle of suffering, which governs our daily life, can be momentarily halted by suspending the activity of the will; and this can happen only by adopting a contemplative, disinterested attitude which views objects in merely aesthetic terms.\(^{189}\) In 20th-century philosophy, the notion of aesthetic attitude has been discussed most thoroughly in Anglo-American philosophy – for example, by Edward Bullough, Jerome Stolnitz, and Roger Scruton\(^{190}\) – though the notion has also been picked up by continental thinkers, such as Dufrenne.\(^{191}\) I need not discuss all these here at length, though I wish to pick up some elements from these thinkers. However, I personally prefer to speak of *disposition* instead of *attitude*, since the latter has a connotation of activity, as if immersion could occur only if we actively position ourselves towards

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190 Bullough 1912; Stolnitz 1960, Chapter 2; Scruton 1982, Chapter 10.

191 See Dufrenne 1953, the chapter “L’Attitude esthétique.”
it in a certain way. Though it might, perhaps, be possible to psyche oneself up to be more attentive to the way art addresses us, I am sceptical of the claim that the experience of the elsewhere could be summoned at will; instead, it falls upon us, and our readiness can either aid or hinder its occurring. Nor do I believe that there is a specific and singular attitude that works with every piece of art – to this extent I agree with the critique of psychological disinterestedness – and, on the lines of Nigel Wentworth, I believe the crucial thing “is to look at the work in an open way, without any particular attitude to it”.192 Hence I opt for the word disposition rather than attitude.

The work needs the witness in order to actualise itself, and the witness contributes to the sense of the poetic world as it manifests itself in and through the work. In order for the work to occur, I have to adopt a certain relationship with the piece, since otherwise I could not offer myself to the actualisation of the work. Dufrenne has observed that “the aesthetic object does not really belong to me unless I belong to it”,193 and this requires that I lend myself to the work. This, again, requires some letting-be or an openness on my behalf. Here it remains to be elaborated what kind of subjective dispositions this event requires from the side of the witness. The work of art, to borrow what Schopenhauer says of truth, “is not a harlot who throws her arms round the neck of him who does not desire her; on the contrary, she is so coy a beauty that even a man who sacrifices everything to her can still not be certain of her favours”.194 What, then, can the witness do to win over her favours?

To begin with, it is important to remember that it is the work that calls me and not the other way round. It is the work that has the initiative: it seizes me, captures me in the field of its gravity, and entices me. I cannot march upon a piece and demand it to work. On the contrary, it is the work which calls me to lend my eyes and ears, my body and my full attention to what the work wants to manifest. Speaking of painting, Nancy captures this silent, yet intense demand that the work poses on its witness:

193 Dufrenne 1973, 404; Dufrenne 1953, 501: “L'objet esthétique n’est vraiment à moi que si je suis à lui […]”
194 Schopenhauer 1966a, xix; Schopenhauer 1991a, 16: “Die Wahrheit ist keine Hure, die sich Denen an den Hals wirft, welche ihrer nicht begehren; vielmehr ist sie eine so spröde Schöne, daß selbst wer ihr Alles opfert noch nicht ihrer Gunst gewiß seyn darf.”
We have entered, already; we are exposed to seeing; that is all we are asked, that is all we are permitted, and that is all we are promised. By a device which is far from being unique in painting, but which here finds one of its chosen places, the canvas signals to us, makes us this sign: Enter and look. Come and see. Exhaust your looks until your eyes close, until your hands are raised over them, until your face falls upon your knees. See the invisible. This is the ordinary command or demand of painting: very simple, very humble, even derisory. See the invisible, not beyond the visible, nor inside, nor outside, but right at it, on the threshold, like its very oil, its weave, and its pigment.195

If the work is to occur, I always find myself already captured by it before I realise it: “we have entered, already”. The work unfolds when I respond to its call by lending myself as the site of its actualisation – that’s all it asks and all it permits. To be awarded what the call promises, the witness must merely be receptive and withhold from trying to control the event. The disposition I am aiming at here is then this: exposing oneself to a call beyond one’s mastery. But what does such a disposition consist of?

Firstly, Schopenhauer already insists that aesthetic experience requires withholding goal-oriented circumspection in favour of disinterested contemplation. Disinterestedness must not be understood in terms of irrelevance, so as to render the object of contemplation devoid of all interest, but rather in terms of the autonomous interest lying in the object itself, in its own phenomenality. This means that the piece of art must be attended to for its own sake, for the sake of witnessing what it makes manifest, and not for the sake of some exterior motive – thus, a critic thinking about how to review a piece, or an academic interested in it as material for scholarship, or a connoisseur interested in the piece only as an investment, do not set themselves the prerequisite of submitting themselves to the work itself; thus, though speaking of connoisseurs but hitting on something that applies to the critic and the scholar as well, Gadamer points out how “such an attitude is incapable of

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195 Nancy 1996, 59; Nancy 1994, 106: "Nous sommes entrés, déjà, nous sommes exposés à voir, c’est tout ce qu’on nous demande, c’est tout ce qu’on nous permet et c’est tout ce qu’on nous promet. Par un dispositif qui est loin d’être unique dans la peinture, mais qui trouve ici un de ses lieux d’élection, la toile nous fait ce signe: entrez et regardez. Venez et voyez. Épuisez vos regards, jusqu’à fermer les yeux, jusqu’à porter les mains sur eux, jusqu’à laisser tomber vos faces sur vos genoux. Voyez l’invisible. C’est l’ordre ou la demande ordinaire de la peinture, très simple, très humble, dérisoire même. Voyez l’invisible, non pas au-delà du visible, ni dedans, ni dehors, mais à même celui-ci, sur le seuil, comme son huile même, sa trame et son pigment."
mediating an experience of art in any real sense.”196 The witness must be positioned with regard to the threshold in such a way that the separation of the poetic world and the lifeworld is latently maintained but in such a way that this separation does not become dominant, so as to let the lifeworld intrude and distance the witness from the threshold and destroy the immersion.

Concerning this optimal distance between the witness and the threshold, Edward Bullough has spoken of “psychical distance”, which needs to be minimal without it disappearing,197 and Gadamer of the “an absolute distance, a distance that precludes practical or goal-oriented participation”; immersion requires that the witness submits to the manifestation of the work. In this respect, Arto Haapala has spoken of the *aesthetic intimacy* required in aesthetic experience: we need to get close enough to the work in order to be engaged in it and be touched by it.198 This, in turn, requires both *physical* and *imaginative* participation in the work-event, as I must lend my body to the physical act of attending to the piece (reading, looking at a painting, walking in a building, and so on) and also imaginatively engage myself with the world presented by the piece.199 This is why, as Blanchot remarks, “the dilettante and the critic, on the other hand, devote themselves to the ‘beauties’ of the work, to its aesthetic value; and they believe, as they busy themselves about this empty shell which they consider a disinterested object of interest, that they still partake of the work’s reserve”.200 Attending to the work for its own sake is tantamount to opening up to the depth inherent to sensibility. In sum, immersion requires a certain letting-be of the self-manifestation of the work without active intrusion, either instrumentalising or objectifying, of something external to it.

Secondly, following Jerome Stolnitz, one can argue that such self-submission requires sympathy and attention in addition to disinterestedness.201 Sympathy here must be understood as openness without hesitation to whatever the work has to present; negative prejudice towards a particular piece easily becomes a self-fulfill-

197 Bullough 1912, 94.
198 Haapala 2006.
199 Haapala 2006, 141–144.
200 Blanchot 1989, 230; Blanchot 1955, 240: “[…] tandis que dilettante et le critique se consacrent aux ‘beautés’ de l’œuvre, à sa valeur esthétique et croient, devant cette coquille vide dont ils font un objet désintéressé d’intérêt, appartenir encore à la réserve de l’œuvre.” Translation modified.
201 Stolnitz 1960, 35–36.
ing prophecy, which closes off the witness from the possibility of the work. Anita Silvers has termed this phenomenon *aesthetic akrasia*: for instance, if one reads a book whose political ideology one finds repugnant, or sees a painting of a nude who resembles one's mother, the contextual impediments might result in an inability to let oneself enjoy the piece, even if one recognises its aesthetic merits. A more severe form of this incapacity is what the journalist Louis Inturrisi has called the *Mark Twain Malaise*, in which a person is so cynical and distanced that all art leaves them cold; a person suffering from it is deaf to the work's address and is capable of only judging the work from a detached distance (the reverse side of the *Malaise* is, of course, the *Stendahl Syndrome*, where one becomes uncontrollably and unhealthily moved by art). The witness has to be willing to co-operate with a piece for the work to move him or her. In addition to sympathy, this requires that the witness lends all his attention to the work itself and does not let anything exterior to it interfere – indeed, proper attention absorbs everything external to the work. Gadamer too observes that:

[...] in the experience of art we must learn how to dwell upon the work in a specific way. When we dwell upon the work, there is no tedium involved, for the longer we allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us. The essence of our temporal experience of art is in learning how to tarry in this way. And perhaps it is the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity.

In other words, being attentive to the work does not mean that I should actively aim at it so as to master it, but rather being receptive to it so as to let it impose itself upon me, and thus “dwelling” and “tarrying” in this event, which takes places beyond my control.

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202 Silvers 1972.
204 Gadamer 1986, 45; Gadamer 1977, 60: "Es geht in der Erfahrung der Kunst darum, daß wir am Kunstwerk eine spezifische Art von Verweilen lernen. Es ist ein Verweilen, das sich offenbar dadurch auszeichnet, daß es nicht langweilig wird. Je mehr wir verweilend, uns darauf einlassen desto sprechender, desto vielfältiger, desto reicher erscheint es. Das Wesen der Zeiterfahrung der Kunst ist, daß wir zu weilen lernen. Das ist vielleicht die uns zugemessene endliche Entsprechung zu dem, was man Ewigkeit nennt."
205 The word “dwell” derives from the Old Norse *dvelja*, “linger, delay, tarry” but also “to lead astray, hinder, delay”. See the entry “dwell” in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner 1989, vol.
Thirdly, immersion requires affective attunement, which resonates with its affective atmosphere. Here it suffices to say that this required attunement must not necessarily be understood as a state of equilibrium, as calmness or lack of prior passion, as is often claimed. For instance, Fichte argues eloquently:

Humankind must first attain a certain external well-being and security. A cry of want from within must first be silenced, and strife from without must be settled, before we can observe and linger over our contemplation to aesthetic impressions […] Thus the calm surface of the water captures the beautiful image of the sun; the outlines drawn in pure light dance and are thrown together and engulfed in the mighty face of the inconstant waves.206

On the same note, Schopenhauer recommends abstaining from alcohol and opium and instead opting for a good night’s sleep and a cold bath to ensure a calm, receptive state of mind.207 Though both are surely right in claiming that exterior needs and interests can effectively destroy aesthetic contemplation – an opera can be ruined by a headache or a movie by the consequences of drinking too much soda, and an attempt to read comes to naught if I am troubled by financial issues – but this does not, I would argue, necessarily entail that I must be calm or affectively blank in order to be open to the work. Not all pieces are like the sun, which requires calm waters upon which to cast its rays; some are tempests that only agitated souls can withstand, some are whispers that only sad ears can hear. Indeed, does not Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande (1902), which otherwise might nauseate us with its sentimentality, speak to one who is in love or has just had his heart broken, and do not the desperate pleas of Gregorian chants resonate even in the heart of an atheist whose heart is troubled by despair? Does not Caravaggio’s David with the Head of Goliath (1610) speak to those who themselves know the burden of guilt, and does not the relief on

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207 Schopenhauer 1991b, 428.
the face of the old rabbi in Rembrandt’s *Simeon and the Christ Child in the Temple* (1669) resonate most strongly in the hearts of those who are themselves in need of salvation? In these cases, it is not calmness or affective equilibrium that prepares for affective resonance – indeed, calmness might precisely impede it – but instead such attunement, which resonates with the affective atmosphere of the piece.

In contrast to Fichte, I think Schelling is closer to the truth when he claims that the enjoyment of a piece of art (in this case he is talking about the genre of romantic epic) requires not calmness but “faith, enthusiasm, mood of fantasy” from the subject.208 I take this to entail that the subject need not be calm but instead must be willing to throw him- or herself into the fantasy offered by the work – and this willingness need not be coloured solely by calmness but also by more turbulent emotions. The work requires that I am affectively open to the touch of the work to be affectively moved by the work, but this openness itself can take many affective forms. The required attitude is not affectively universal but is instead specific to each unique encounter with a piece – the witness and the piece must affectively coincide, that is, resonate with each other, for the work to manifest.

All this allows me to flesh out in more detail how this disposition of openness required by the work changes the relationship between the piece and the witness. I would like to approach this matter – which in many ways is at this point a matter of summary – by discussing the notion of “seeing with” (*selon voir*), which Merleau-Ponty develops in relation to painting, though similar notions have been proposed by others as well.209 When I approach a thing as an instrument, I do not perceive the thing as such, but instead my gaze glides over it in view of something else, so that the tool vanishes in the hustle and bustle of my daily life; on the other hand, when I seize a thing with my gaze and approach it as something present-at-hand, my gaze thematises and objectifies the thing. In the case of the artwork, neither option is viable. Instead of submitting itself to my gaze, as happens in both instrumentalisation and objectification, the piece of art demands that I approach it on its own terms. In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty describes how my gaze “wanders” in the pictorial space of a painting and how, “rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it”.210

208 Schelling 1907, 321.


210 Merleau-Ponty 1993, 126; Merleau-Ponty 1964, 23: “Je serais bien en peine de dire où est le tableau
What Merleau-Ponty is aiming at is that seeing a painting requires withholding an objectifying gaze, so that the painting is not looked at as an object or as a representation. According to Merleau-Ponty, a painting is a space of manifestation, where the becoming-visible of the visible becomes manifest. The painting beckons the seer to see this manifestation, but this requires submitting one's gaze to the way the painting achieves it – it requires that the seer does not attempt to dominate the painting as an object of his or her gaze but rather lets the gaze be guided by the painting.\textsuperscript{211} A painting is more like a portal than a surface on which my gaze stops. In other words, when looking at an image, I see not only the image itself but I also through it to what it depicts in accordance with how it depicts it; it is, as Waldenfels has it, “a medium of seeing.”\textsuperscript{212}

Here I would like to contend, following Merleau-Ponty, that this sort of suspension of a natural, instrumentalising and objectifying attitude is prerequisite for the work to speak to us regardless of the genre of the piece in question. In the same way as we can read Merleau-Ponty arguing that if we look at a painting with an objectifying aim, we don’t really see it as a painting at all, I could also argue that other forms of art require that we do not approach them as objects but instead submit ourselves to them and perceive with them or in accordance with them. This could also be formulated by pointing out how a piece, if it is to incite immersion, must not conform to our “universe of habits”, as Dufrenne puts it, because only in this way can it summon up the depth of sense usually covered over by these habits. Moreover, because we both instrumentalise and objectify phenomena through pre-existing categories, which this depth excludes, we cannot rely on our own resources in perceiving the manifestation of the work but instead throw ourselves into being guided by the work’s own unfolding.

\textsuperscript{211} As Saara Hacklin (2012, 62–70) has pointed out, Merleau-Ponty’s point here is reminiscent of Husserl’s analysis of “aesthetic contemplation” (ästhetische Betrachtung) in Ideas I: in looking at an image, I see an image-object (Bildobjekt), a material thing, but simultaneously I see through it to the image-subject (Bildsujet) it depicts – or, in the language of the lecture series Phantasy and Image Consciousness (Phantasie und Bildbewußtsein, 1904/05), I achieve an “image consciousness” (Bildbewußtsein) as I simultaneously apprehend three objects – the physical image (physisches Bild), the representing object (abbildendes Objekt), and the represented object (abgebildetes Objekt) – in one and the same intuition, even though these objects belong to different realities. Cf. Husserl 1980, § 9.

\textsuperscript{212} Waldenfels 2015, 43: “Das Bild bestimmt sich als ein Worin besonderer Art. Es ist kein Objekt, das wir zusätzlich noch sehen also ein weiteres Etwas, sondern es ist ein Medium des Sehens, das am Sehen selbst beteiligt ist und dessen wir als eines Mediums gewahr werden.”
However, the crux of the problem lies in the question whether this disposition with all its aspects involves activity or passivity. Is it an attitude that I actively take up and maintain, or is it something to which I am passively attuned? So far I have emphasised the autonomy of the work and described it as a surprise that overcomes and disarms me – as an event, which imposes itself upon me rather than appearing at my call. But this does not straightforwardly mean that the attitude needed to be open, for the work is something which the anamorphosis effected by the work singlehandedly attunes me to. Of course, some particularly powerful works can do just that – they can stop me in my tracks and sweep me off my feet solely on their own accord. However, in most cases, this event requires the right conditions and some effort on the part of the witness – disinterestedness, attention, and sympathy – in order for this to occur. And these conditions depend as much on the witness as on the exterior circumstances of the encounter. These requirements are, however, not something that witnesses actively take up but rather something they find themselves attuned to. Let me look at this attunement in more detail.

Firstly, the art institutions in which and through which we are usually in contact with art bring with them specific codes of conduct that the audience has internalised: we know how to comport ourselves in a museum or during a musical performance and so forth. These internalised codes guide us to attend to the presented pieces with required attention: in an institutionalised setting, things become removed from their quotidian context and the audience, without often noticing it, attends to these things in a special fashion (I, for one, have once marvelled at a kinetic installation only to realise that it was, in fact, an air ventilator). Being attentive to a piece of art is not, if one can call it an active decision, a reflective one: instead, the context in which the piece is presented usually guides us to take a certain way of attending to it without our reflectively taking it up.

Secondly, in most cases where an encounter with a piece unfolds as a work, the piece itself is endowed with such disarming presence – or gravity – that it simply pulls me towards itself and strips me of my prerogative to assume control: the piece itself tells me how to attend to it (this is precisely the function of anamorphosis). Surely, there are cases where the piece does not speak to me straightaway, and I need to attend to it very carefully and patiently before it opens itself up to me. I must first learn its language, as Gadamer says: “we must realise that every work of art only begins to speak when we have already learned to decipher and read it.”

Gadamer 1986, 48; Gadamer 1977, 64: “Es gilt zu lernen, daß man jedes Kunstwerk erst buchstabie-

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this effort comes to nought; but sometimes my effort is paid back many times over. But even here, where the secrets of the piece are revealed with active effort, immersion is not solely my accomplishment – in the same way as learning a language does not mean that the conversation I can thereby take up in that language is something I can take full credit for. The immersion that takes place through such effort is not something I thereby wholly master: instead, I have only learnt to open myself up in the correct way for the piece to address me.

Thirdly, affective attunement is something in which I find myself – as the German original, Befindlichkeit, etymologically suggests – and not something I can summon at will. Certainly, I can encourage certain affective states by, say, thinking about sad memories or the joy of being in love, but these do not come when demanded. Hence, like in the case of attentiveness, affective attunement is something that is not solely within my control and which I can actively maintain. Immersion cannot be forced by merely taking up a specific attitude. Instead, the eventuation of the work is on the side of the work itself, and I can only encourage its self-manifestation. There can be active elements in this encouragement, but mostly they are non-reflectively taken up by habit or by the gravity of the piece itself; and furthermore, the affective resonance that the work requires is something which, again, I can actively encourage but not master. In sum, most of the active work is done by the work, and the role of the witness is to remain open to it – sometimes this openness requires some active effort, most often not; indeed, too much effort can turn out to be detrimental to the work.

So, instead of depending upon the attitude of the witness, the taking-place of the elsewhere depends upon a large variety of contextual elements, of which the witness's openness is but one. The stars, so to speak, have to be in the right alignment for the elsewhere to take place. The witnesses of the experience have to be in the right state of mind for them to be receptive to the event – and here “the right state of mind” does not mean some definite, universal attitude applicable to all encounters with art, but rather an attitude that resonates with each unique piece of art. Additionally, there should not be interferences that might disturb the mediation of the work. This is why immersion is indeed such a rare event: the conditions have to be just right for the work to show itself, and the witness cannot dictate when and where it makes its appearance. There is an inherent element of randomness, due to the complex contextual requirements of the event, in aesthetic immersion: it cannot be anticipated, manufactured, or produced at will – instead, it takes over the witness when the situation is just right.
CONCLUSIONS
In this study, I have outlined a systematic phenomenology of aesthetic immersion in the context of art. My central aim has been to show that immersion can be described as a change in the perceiver’s mode of being-in-the-world while witnessing a work of art: in and through the artwork the perceiver’s way of occupying the there is dislocated in such a way that it becomes an elsewhere located somewhere between the lifeworld and the poetic world of the piece. Fulfilling this aim has taken us on a long route, which has meandered through two interrelated paths, a deconstructive and a constructive one.

I began this study by outlining several deconstructive critiques of the metaphysical tradition and its implications for the history of aesthetics. I aimed to draw a series of lessons from certain topoi aesthetics has occupied during its history, in relation to which I coordinated my own phenomenological description.

I began by briefly surveying the relationship between art and theory in modern aesthetics. I argued that while the modern tradition has recurrently identified an element of indeterminacy and non-conceptuality in aesthetic experience, it has also been recurrently tempted to neutralise this resistance by giving the experience a mediating role in the division between sensuous and super-sensuous realms or otherwise provide the experience with a rational grounding. The lesson I drew from this was that in attempting to reflect what resists reflection, philosophy can all too easily succumb to its drive for intelligibility and project upon the experience elements that are not necessarily warranted by the experience itself.
The following four lessons I derived from previous research. First, I took on Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s critique of *Erlebnis* aesthetics, according to which the modern tradition has problematically reduced aesthetic experience to a matter of isolated, non-cognitive feeling and thus separated it from the continuity of experience. I contrasted this narrative to another argument, according to which Enlightenment’s distaste for strong emotions is still present in contemporary theorisation of art that emphasises the cognitive significance of aesthetic experience. From this I derived the second lesson to be learned: the phenomenological description of aesthetic immersion has to mediate between the risk of falling into unwarranted *Erlebnis* thinking and the risk of downplaying the immersive, non-reflective aspects of aesthetic experience in favour of its cognitive import. Then, by following the example of Arnold Berleant, I argued that aesthetic immersion cannot be sufficiently described in terms of disengaged contemplation, as Berleant’s interpretation of the Kantian heritage suggests, but instead see aesthetic experience as the outcome of a complex interplay between the piece and its witness. The fourth lesson was derived from Miguel de Beistegui’s claim that throughout its history, aesthetics has given art a mimetic role, whereby the artwork is understood as representing a pre-given world instead of opening up a radically new view to reality. De Beistegui’s suggestion that the artwork, understood as an event, is better understood as being metaphorical – that is, having the capacity to “carry” the perceiver beyond the quotidian world and reveal the hypersensible layer nested within the sensible. This was an instrumental lesson for my subsequent description of aesthetic immersion. The fifth and last lesson came from a critical glance back to the narratives I had used in the earlier lessons: I argued that post-metaphysical thinking on art and aesthetic experience cannot wholeheartedly disregard the metaphysical heritage, as many of its own patterns of thought arise from the tradition itself, and neither should it disregard this heritage, since the tradition is ripe with valid phenomenological insights.

Chapter 2 elaborated further the methodological problems I touched upon in the first lesson regarding the theoretical articulation of an experience that eludes reflection. I argued that due to the situated character of thinking, there is no pure, absolute, or presuppositionless access to experience, and thus even a phenomenological description begins with a specific conceptual space that informs us how the experience under description is taken as a theme of thought. However, as the examples derived from the history of modern aesthetics show, these pre-given frameworks can, if their influence remains unthought, obscure the elusive character of the experience they aim to describe. In order to avoid reflectively filling an experience that *eo ipso* resists direct reflection, I took on a methodological stance whereby

**Conclusions**
a phenomenological description is formulated in terms of the way aesthetic immersion disrupts and destabilises modes of experience to which we have direct access.

In order to provide such a framework, in terms of which I could indirectly describe aesthetic immersion, I outlined a general event ontology by combining elements from Heideggerian Ereignis ontology with some later phenomenological developments that emphasise the excessive nature of sense over the receptive capacities of human understanding. I took as my background a topological ontology that approaches the meaningfulness of reality in terms of the way it unfolds as a sensible place in and through the opening of the there, where givenness and receptivity reciprocally constitute one another. However, I also emphasised the way this correlation is not symmetrical in the sense that givenness would be wholly commensurate with intelligibility. Instead, I argued that givenness is excessive and capable of touching us beyond our grasp. From this background, it becomes possible to approach aesthetic immersion by inquiring how it modulates the opening of the there and thereby also transforms the coming-into-presence of sense as well as the selfhood of the witness.

In Part II, I proceeded to describe in detail the fundamental elements of aesthetic immersion in terms of the taking-place of the elsewhere. I began this description in Chapter 3 by concentrating on the side of the there, that is, by describing how the work of art announces itself in the world and opens up a world of its own with its own peculiar time-space and its own way of making sense. This description was further divided into four thematic groups: 1) topography of the poetic complex, 2) dynamics of the work in the lifeworld, 3) spatio-temporality, and 4) sense-making.

By the poetic complex I denoted the complicated state of affair within which the work can occur, that is, the meeting-point of the perceiver’s lifeworld and the poetic world of the piece. I argued that aesthetic immersion can happen only in the case where the poetic world partially overlaps with the lifeworld – and thus with the perceiver’s hermeneutic horizon – because in this case the overlap guarantees that the perceiver can have some grasp of the poetic world but in such a way that it cannot be totally integrated into the stable order of the lifeworld, so that the poetic world manifests itself as something extraordinary.

This element of strangeness endows the piece with what I call gravity: a heightened presence that pulls the perceiver towards the piece. Only if the piece has this gravitational pull can the work occur; only if the perceiver is caught in the gravitational field of the piece does the transformation into the witness ensue. I argued, following Miguel de Beistegui, that the gravitational pull of the piece amounts to the metaphor of the work, that is, to the existential dislocation where the subject’s...
ordinary way of being-in-the-world is momentarily suspended and his or her way of inhabiting the there is modulated; the gravitational pull draws the witness to the event-horizon of the work. This carrying-over to the threshold of the poetic world amounts to what I called, this time following Marion, an anamorphosis, whereby the point of view, and thereby the view itself, towards the world is changed. I no longer direct myself towards the world in a usual way, since I am taken to see it from another, strange and un-homely angle, where my customary ways of taking hold of the world prove insufficient. This metaphoric anamorphosis accounts for the dynamics of the work, that is, the transition from the lifeworld to the threshold of the piece’s poetic world. I argued, moreover, that this transportation has the characteristics of a surprise: it occurs as a disturbance to order in such a way that I cannot anticipate it or surmount it; instead, the event is its own origin, an anarchic and autarchic self-commencement. It stands outside the strictures of causality and history as a disturbance that interrupts them.

The place, the modality of the there, situated at the threshold of the poetic world, is the elsewhere. I argued that the elsewhere must not be understood as being situated in a realm beyond the lifeworld, so that the work would really transport me to another world, but rather that the elsewhere is a suspension of the ordinary constitution of the there. I argued this by describing how the spatio-temporal structures and the continuity of meaning that sustain the lifeworld are modulated in and through the experience of immersion. When it comes to space, I argued that the way the witness of the work inhabits space is not the same as the way the witness inhabits the lifeworld by opening it up as the leeway of their existence, nor is it tantamount to inhabiting the space of the poetic world; instead, the work spatialises the elsewhere in such a way that the witness falls into an in-between in which spatial distances have lost their significance. Mutatis mutandis, I argued that the temporality of the elsewhere is characterised by a meanwhile in which the projection towards the future is momentarily suspended, and the witness falls, in a sense, outside of time.

Finally, all these different suspensions – of causality, space, and time – condition the way the poetic world gives itself as sensible in and through the work. Namely, as the work requires that the witness suspends an instrumentalising and objectifying attitude towards the piece, and as the manifestation that thus occurs slips away from the structures that sustain the intelligibility and graspability of the lifeworld, sense no longer gives itself within a preordained order, but gains the possibility of giving itself absolutely in its repleteness, absolved from the horizons imposed upon it by the subject’s project. This does not mean that the work of art would present some-
thing as the thing-in-itself or reveal its essential ideal forms or the all-encompassing Absolute behind phenomenal reality. On the contrary, the absolution of sense was argued to manifest the fractal, dispersed nature of sense, or what de Beistegui calls the *hypersensible* character of sense, which cannot be exhausted by language or the finite human understanding, and which usually remains covered over by the perspectives our existence imposes upon sense. By showing that aesthetic immersion can affect all the topological characteristics of the *there*, I showed that approaching the work in terms of the place it opens up offers a starting point from a systematic phenomenology of aesthetic immersion.

Chapter 4 complemented this analysis by describing the mode of subjectivity involved in immersion, which I developed in terms of *witnessing*. Against the metaphysical, self-immanent and autonomous subject, the witness exemplifies a modality of subjectivity that reveals the primordial subjection to something exceeding the receptive capacities of the subject and hence brings about the subject’s essential finitude. I argued that from the perspective of subjectivity, being-in-the-elsewhere entails the suppression of the subject’s responsibility, that is, the capability of responding to an event by taking it over and integrating it within a pre-existing order. In such a situation, I argued, the subject is incapable of being contemporaneous with the event, as the subject is caught by the excessive self-manifestation of the work – and thereby the subject is lost in the event. This momentary self-forgetfulness was argued not to involve a communion with the Absolute or contemplation of eternal Ideas, but instead it was seen as resulting from the fragility of the subject’s self-relation in the face of an excessive event. Hence, being-in-the-elsewhere, I argued, is characterised as a disturbance in the “thick” mode of being-in-the-world in which I am capable of holding myself as the *I* of the experience.

This disturbance shows itself in the existentials that constitute the “in-being” of my being-in-the-world – understanding, affectivity, language, and intersubjectivity – in such a way that all of them in their quotidian functioning are in one way or another transformed.

However, the description was complicated by the recognition that the disturbance does not mean that these existentials are suspended altogether; instead, I argued that they all contribute and sustain immersion and thus tie this event to the unique and individual situation of the witness; hence, immersion does not purify witnesses from the contingencies of their factual situation and address some general human in these witnesses, as metaphysical aesthetics has at times been willing to argue. In all four cases, furthermore, it was observed that these existentials offer the witness an access to the work in the first place, which complicates identifying
the role of the witness in the event: it is not altogether passive, but not altogether active either. The witness carries his or her individual situation into the event and influences what comes to the fore in and through the work, even though the main initiative is on the side of the piece that calls the witness to be the witness of its work. What surfaced through the analysis was a complex hermeneutical situation, where the contribution of the witness is difficult to distinguish from that of the piece – not to mention the external conditions in which the encounter occurs. Being immersed in a work of art, then, is not a purification from the contingencies of factical existence, but rather a dislocation from a position of mastery and exposure to the excessive sense of the world. This world does not lie beyond the sensible world but is instead at the heart of it, albeit usually hidden by our circumspective way of encountering it.

On the level of affectivity, I argued that aesthetic immersion can be seen to have two affective layers, the particular emotive atmosphere of the particular piece and the feeling of vertigo inherent to a work as a dislocation – a peculiar feeling of giddiness in the face of the overpowering manifestation that cannot be pinned down as simple pleasure. Regarding understanding, I argued that two layers of understanding can be discovered with respect to the event: first, while being captured by the work, understanding cannot surmount the event but can only tag along with it, so that it does not completely grasp what is happening, and second, only afterwards can understanding gain its ordinary position and attempt to interpret the manifestation so as to integrate it into an order. Similarly, the witness’s discursive hold of sense is interrupted by the work, so that the witness cannot totally bring the experience to language; and yet the encounter with the piece is mediated linguistically. Finally, I argued that in the same sense as witnesses forget their selfhood while being caught in the work, they also lose sight of other persons – that even though the situation where one encounters art is intersubjectively structured, the work itself is an event where the immediate presence of the other is suppressed. However, instead of being merely an egoistic moment of escapism, I argued that the disposition necessary for being caught up in the work entails a similar openness to otherness as the genuine encounter of the other person – thus, being exposed to the work can be seen as preparing one for ethical comportment (though this, like interpretation, can only happen afterwards).

All in all, this phenomenological description fulfils the parameters outlined in Chapter 1 in the following ways. First, the very methodological make-up of this study aims to restrict the philosophical drive from totalising the experience of aesthetic immersion under a panoptic view of intelligible order and instead aims to
describe the experience precisely as a disturbance in the phenomenal order, thereby – hopefully – paying heed to the elusiveness and existential radicality of the experience. Secondly, I have shown that aesthetic immersion can be articulated in its disruptive and dislocating character without thereby rendering it isolated from the hermeneutic continuity of experience and thus trivialising the experience by separating it from cognitive value. Thirdly, the complex hermeneutic model I have employed has circumvented the traditional view of a fixed, disengaged subject contemplating a fixed and closed object and enabled me to argue that aesthetic immersion is the outcome of a complex hermeneutic engagement that undermines any stable distinction between subject and object or activity and passivity. Fourthly, my model of aesthetic immersion does not give the artwork a mimetic function but rather views it as a metaphorical event in which the witness’s way of occupying the there is momentarily changed. Fifthly, and finally, I hope to have shown in the course of my description that certain phenomenological characteristics of aesthetic immersion have already been intuited prior to the purported closure of metaphysics.

Having reached the final pages of this study, it is time for one last question. What is the value of all these winding meditations? In the beginning, I took up as one of my main aims to show that aesthetic immersion is philosophically interesting and valuable in its own right. However, since I have wished to avoid looking at the experience in the light of some exterior philosophical interest, I have throughout this study evaded the consideration of the reflective import of aesthetic immersion, “the fruit of experience”;¹ which can only be harvested afterwards. Yet, stopping short of providing even an initial answer to this question would be, in the end, much the same as surrendering to the Erlebnis thinking that I have been at pains to avoid. Instead of rendering aesthetic immersion as an isolated, escapist experience with only intrinsic value, let me bring this study to an end with a modest suggestion of the philosophical value of immersion.

Instead of pursuing the traditional line of argument, where the value of aesthetic immersion is found from this or that philosophical insight to which the experience opens up access, I wish to suggest another kind of value for aesthetic immersion, one already present in the early German Romantics and more recently in thinkers like Crowther – namely that the value of immersion lies precisely in that it offers access to something that eludes modes of reflective and conceptual thought.² Aes-

¹ Pater 1900, 236.
² I have discussed the early Romantics in § 6.3. In Art and Embodiment (Crowther 1993, 154–157),
thetic immersion exemplifies a primordial experience that philosophy can endlessly try to articulate but never wholly reach. And this brings me right back to where I started, namely a feeling of wonder.3

Wandering perplexed in the Louvre, hardly being able to take in anything after my encounter with the Géricault painting, the only thing I could think about was the strangeness of the situation. Experiences like these, as Plato and Aristotle have already told us,4 are where philosophy begins: with a sense of sheer wonder in the face of the fact that we inexplicably find ourselves in the world. Due to the finitude of our existence, the world always holds in reserve more than we can take in, more than we can comprehend—a surplus of the gift being grants us, as Heidegger says.5 In the experience of wonder, this surplus cuts through the white noise of our daily concerns and makes that which usually seems familiar and inconspicuous seem unfamiliar, strange, and tantalisingly wonderful. In the experience of wonder, the world is re-illuminated, making transparent what usually remains unnoticed, but this lighting up also presents the world in its essential opacity that is at the heart of its sense. If philosophy, as Aron Gurwitsch suggests, is nothing but a mediation on the mystery of sense, then the experience of wonder is its origin—indeed, as Heidegger himself says, “wonder is the basic disposition that primordially disposes man into the beginning of thinking”.6

However, such wonder cannot be summoned at will. Nor can philosophy bottle and preserve it. Wonder befalls us. Philosophy can only retrospectively try to reconstruct what showed itself in wonder, but this will never match the fullness of

Crowther argues that art aims, through aesthetic experience, at the enhancement and reflection of the ontological reciprocity of humans and the world. That is, it aims at both enhancing and improving our fundamental capacities of existing in the midst of the world with other creatures and opens up the possibility of reflecting this belongingness to the world. In How Pictures Complete Us (Crowther 2016), he takes a somewhat more metaphysical stance and makes the case for “aesthetic transcendence”, by which he means a momentary overcoming of the finitude of human existence, a “going-beyond” of limitations that results in “a felt communion with the divine” (quotes in Crowther 2016, 2, 6).

4 Plat. Theat. 155d: “[…] For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy […]”; Aristot. Met. 1.982b: “It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize […]”
5 Heidegger 1984, 153: “Übermaß einer Schenkung”
6 Heidegger 1984, 170: “Das Er-staunen ist die Grundstimmung, die anfänglich den Menschen in den Anfang des Denkens stimmt […]”
the experience itself. In contrast, the work of art can give us access to wonder – if anything, this study has laboured to argue that in aesthetic immersion, the sense of the world is re-illuminated. The work of art shows us the fullness and opacity of the world’s sense, and thus brings us to the threshold of being, where philosophical thinking begins, and from which it can never leave. Thus, interest in aesthetic immersion does not stem, to borrow Heidegger’s expression, from “modern man’s intoxication with lived experience (Erlebnis),” and it should not be taken as surrendering the dignity of art to simple pleasure. I hope I have shown that something far more profound is at stake in aesthetic immersion, and, like all experiences of wonder, it too should be, in the words of Dominique Janicaud, “hailed and held precious, since it might be the most philosophical act of all”.

7 Heidegger 1984, 162: “die Erlebnistrunkenboldigkeit des modernen Menschen”

8 Janicaud 2008, 87. The whole section goes: “But wonder in the face of being, in the very fact that there is being. This astonishment should be hailed and held precious, since it might be most philosophical act of all.”
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