SCENOGRAPHIES OF PERCEPTION:
RECASTING THE SENSUOUS IN
HEGEL, NOVALIS, RILKE, PROUST

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A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF GERMAN

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January 2015
Abstract

This dissertation concerns the interplay between perceptual and narrative processes, which has been under scrutiny not only in theories of sense perception but also in literary descriptions of sensory experience. The main thesis is that the distinctive logic of sense perception—its inherent temporality and relationality—proves integral to the reading of certain texts by G.W.F. Hegel, Friedrich von Hardenberg, known as Novalis, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Marcel Proust.

This thesis is developed in two steps. The Introduction and the chapters on Hegel (Part One) discuss the possibilities for such an interplay between perceptual and narrative processes. Drawing upon Husserlian phenomenology, theories of literary reception, and recent works discussing the relation between literary texts and the senses, the Introduction hypothesizes that sensory and readerly experience overlap to the extent that both require a narrative restructuring of their immediate diachronic contents (sensations or words) on the part of the perceiving subject. Part One expands on this line of thought by discussing Hegel’s theory of sense perception in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*; Hegel here conceptualizes sense perception as a narrative activity—as a *Geschichte*.

Part Two analyzes the textual instances and traits that lend themselves to acts of readerly perception. The many striking scenes of perception that Novalis, Rilke, and Proust describe serve as exemplary cases in point. Since these scenes are communicated in writing, as scriptings of perception, I term them “scenographies” of perception. Analyzing fragmentary notes by Novalis and passages from *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the opening chapter of Part Two shows that Novalis relates poetic composition (*dichten*) to acts of perception not only conceptually but also practically—in the form of scenographies. The next chapter shows that in certain scenographies of Rilke’s middle period the act of looking proceeds according to a reciprocal exchange of glances between beholder and perceived object, thereby severing the spatial as well as temporal origin of looking from the beholder. The final chapter shows that the first word of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*—*longtemps*—functions as a leitmotif that correlates a recurrent sound with a mutable scene and, separately, that the leitmotific recurrences and transmutations of Vinteuil’s music connect the narrator’s story thematically.
Fruchtig warm und zähflüssig wie Blut
lebt Rot so haftend und schwülstig auf der Fläche.
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Introduction
Introduction

Hypothesen sind Netze, nur der wird fangen, der auswirft.¹

This dissertation concerns the interplay between perceptual and narrative processes. Its main contention is that the distinctive logic of sense perception—its inherent temporality and relationality—proves integral rather than inimical to the reading of certain texts by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801), known as Novalis, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), and Marcel Proust (1871–1922). From this thesis results a twofold task. On the one hand, the possibilities for such an interplay between perceptual and narrative processes must be clarified. With regard to this question, pursued primarily in the Introduction and the chapters on Hegel (Part One), the intermediary role of the reader will be a key issue. On the other hand, it will be necessary to analyze in detail the textual instances and traits that lend themselves to acts of readerly perception. This analysis, pursued mainly in Part Two, concerns the textual structures and devices composing the many striking, often puzzling scenes of perception that Novalis, Rilke, and Proust describe. Since these scenes are communicated in writing, as scriptings of perception, I will call them “scenographies” of perception whenever my inquiry concerns specifically their textual makeup.

To unfold these issues, I will proceed in four steps in this Introduction. First, I will consider two poems by German poet Durs Grünbein (b. 1962) to illustrate the supposed interplay between perceptual and narrative processes in readerly experiency. Second, I will introduce further terms to hypothesize that interplay and to describe the intermediary activity of the reader in more detail. Third, I will develop the notion of a “scenography” of perception and relate it to these terms. Finally, I will situate my
dissertation vis-à-vis other critical positions that broach these issues in a paradigmatic way.

\textbf{The evolving “story” of perception}

\textit{In der Provinz 2}

(Auf Gotland)

Nur dies gab es auf lange Sicht hier, diesen Wellenfluß
Von Landschaft, fokussiert in einem Bussardauge, –
Die kahlen Hügel, einen Feldweg und am Rand
Die Hasenpfote im Gebüsch, vom Wind zerzaust
Ein abgenagtes Sprunggelenk, das in der Hand
So leicht wog wie ein Vogeljunges,
Das noch beweglich war, noch warm war und heraus
Sprang aus der Pfanne, blutig wie die Beute
Des Grauen Würgers auf dem Dorn der Eberesche, –
Ein kleiner Knöchel, winkend mit dem Fetzchen Fell.

Sah so der Rest von einem Hasen aus, nachdem
Der Schatten eines Flügels über ihn gekommen war,
Den Zickzacklauf ein Krallengriff, den flachen Atem
Gezielter Schnabelhieb beendet hatte? Unbequem
Muß dieser Tod gewesen sein, auf winterlicher Erde
Wehrlos verrenkt, die letzte Zuckung.
Was vom Gemetzel übrigblieb, hing in den Zweigen,
Die sich an nichts erinnern wie bestochne Zeugen.
Das Gras, längst wieder aufgerichtet, sorgt dafür,
Daß es auf lange Sicht nur dies gab hier, den Hasenfuß.

Durs Grünbein’s poem\textsuperscript{2} invites us to partake in a scene of perception. Like the other four thing-poems from the series \textit{In der Provinz}, first published in the volume \textit{Nach den}
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*Satiren* in 1999, it describes an encounter with an animal carcass. In this case, the basic scene appears to be something like this: The view on a “wavy landscape,” apparently on Gotland, invites a closer inspection of the area surrounding the current point of view. Moving downward, from landscape to hills to trail, the observing gaze halts on something lying sideways in a bush—a “rabbit paw” [Hasenpfote], as it turns out. Upon closer inspection, this paw appears to have been “gnawed off” [abgenagt] at its ankle. The observer probably took it in his fingers at some point to take a closer look, since we read that it was “just as light as a chick” [wie ein Vogeljunges] and still moveable. The recognition of the rabbit paw as “gnawed off” raises the obvious question: How did this happen? But it prompts at the same time the imagination of the rabbit’s death:

> Sah so der Rest von einem Hasen aus, nachdem  
> Der Schatten eines Flügels über ihn gekommen war,  
> Den Zickzacklauf ein Krallengriff, den flachen Atem  
> Gezielter Schnabelhieb beendet hatte?

Upon this question—if not before—the observer turns away from the present situation, the things which are currently seen, to an imagined incident that would explain the thing he spotted sideways. The perception of the rabbit paw, the “remains of a rabbit” (l. 11), is completed by imagining its prehistory, the story of an “uncomfortable death” (l. 14–15)—a rather wry understatement. In all likelihood, this death was caused by a bird of prey similar to the “grey strangler” [Würger] sitting on some “ash tree” [Eberesche] nearby. Now only the paw remains, and reminds, of the past “butchery” [Gemetzel].

But does the imagination of the prehistory complete the perception of the rabbit carcass, really? Does this neat chronology match up with the scene evoked by the poem? Upon closer inspection, the described scene seems more complex, especially its
temporality; and so is our readerly experience. For the poem as it stands—told in simple past, hence in retrospect—presents both aspects of the encounter, the actual as well as the imaginary, simultaneously. Perceiving and imagining are in effect coextensive operations; they run parallel from the very outset because the rabbit leg is linked time and again to its presumptive prehistory symbolized by the “buzzard” (l. 2) and its metaphoric synonym, the “grey strangler” (l. 9). In fact, the buzzard is introduced before the remains of the rabbit appear in l. 4. On first glance, the expression “landscape, focused in a buzzard’s eye” (l. 2) may have just startled us. Yet it also creates a certain confusion: Is this buzzard part of the site, scanning the area for prey? Or is it that the buzzard’s eye actually functions as the focal point of the entire scene? Is the buzzard’s eye the perspective through which both landscape and rabbit bone are to be seen? In that case, l. 10 could be read as continuation of l. 2, as indicated by the dashes in l. 2 and l. 9, in the sense that “fokussiert in einem Bussardauge” there was “ein kleiner Knöchel, winkend mit dem Fetzchen Fell.” In any case, retaining the information that a bird of prey—the Gotlandic buzzard—is in one way or another part of the scenery, the rabbit’s sad story might dawn on us the moment its gnawed-off paw is announced and, as it were, comes into sight.³

The following lines nourish this dim anticipation of the fatal connection between rabbit and buzzard. In likening the paw to a chick in terms of their weight, l. 6 draws a semantic connection between paw and buzzard, because “chick” belongs to the same semantic field or “isotopy” that also comprises “buzzard’s eye,” “grey strangler,” and “shadow of a wing”: birds. In l. 8–9 the correlation between buzzard and rabbit paw is strongly suggested (note again the simile), though not explicitly confirmed. The second
stanzan finally articulates this correlation, but in the form of a question, which in light of
the preceding lines may seem almost rhetorical. But even if this question in a way makes
sense of the carcass on the ground in connecting it causally to a bird of prey, it remains
still uncertain how exactly the rabbit was killed, how buzzard—invoked in l. 2 for the
first time—and rabbit paw—the poem’s last word—relate to one another. The suggestive
question remains a question.

If all this is true, In der Provinz 2 provides us with the story of a perception
without a clear sequential plot. It outlines the traces of a story rather than depicting a
definitive narrative. For it is quite impossible to determine the causality and chronology
that would enable the reader to differentiate actual from imaginary perceptions. The
interpretation, the realization of this scene therefore hinges above all on a vexed
relationality—precisely on the ambiguous interlacing of observations concerning the
rabbit paw with the imagination of the buzzard’s cruel attack. What is the actual, what the
imaginary part of the scene? This parallelism between seeing and fabulating, between
perception and storytelling, seems to constitute the poetic scene—as much as it troubles
any attempt to produce a (chrono)logically consistent reading.

This parallelism structures not only the phenomenal scene, that is, the incidents,
observations, and the setup the poem represents. The ambiguity of the phenomenal scene
is also mirrored by the poem’s rhetoric. The similes in l. 6 and l. 8–9, aligning the
buzzard with the rabbit carcass, have been mentioned above. Additionally, the beginning
and end of the poem, which invoke the buzzard and the rabbit’s leg, respectively, are held
together by a rhetorical parallelism. The opening formula, “Nur dies gab es auf lange
Sicht hier […] fokussiert in einem Bussardauge,” recurs in the ultimate line, “Daß es auf
lange Sicht nur dies gab hier, den Hasenfuß,” albeit in syntactic inversion because of the subordinating conjunction daβ, hence as a chiasmus. Beginning and end thus demonstratively mark the two elements which both poetic scene and discourse chiastically confound.

Notwithstanding this crux, *In der Provinz 2* is quite articulate and accessible—a general trait of Grünbein’s poetry.5 We have no great trouble imagining the described scene, even without definitively settling both the chronology and causality of events. Naturally, Grünbein’s work includes poems in which it is much harder, if not impossible, to determine a—let alone the—story. In those cases it is rather difficult to piece it all together, to integrate the various feelings, sensations, and perceptions that the poem evokes. We have trouble perceiving a unified space, an integral scene or *Schauplatz* wherein the story unfolds. However, these issues of phenomenological consistency do not necessarily diminish the gripping corporeal force, the sensuous acuity, of a given poem. For an example to the contrary, consider the three-part poem *Niemands Land Stimmen* from Grünbein’s second volume of poetry, *Schädelbasislektionen*, published in 1991. Due to its length, I reproduce only the first half of Part One.

1. Unten am Schlammgrund

Auf den Boden gesunken
Dieser lauwarmen aquarischen Nacht,
Ströme
Von Luftblasen sprudelnd vor Augen
(Ein glasiges Perlen, ein Tanz
Klebriger Laichkugeln
In Mineralwasser lichtwärts)
Müde in einer U-Bahn
(„Was fährt, das fährt“.)
Unten am Schlammgrund
der Straßen
Schaukelnd zwischen Erinnerungsschlieren:
Ein deutscher Wachtraum.
… irgendwas macht, daß Musik
Die du morgens gehört hast
dir Abends noch einmal
Hochkommt, erbrochener Schleimrest
Von Rhapsodien in Schwarz,
Dunkelgrau, Violett …
(Langsame Kamerafahrt durch die Lakunen
Eines gespaltenen Hirns).
Lichtpunkte, Schreie
und jähe Blendungen
auf einer
Unendlich schleichenden
Schnellen Fahrt
ohne das Jaulen,
Ohne das Heulen des Schienenwolfs.
Eingepfercht
Diesseits von Raum und Zeit
(Der Verwandlungen und des Pollenflugs,
Der Kontinentaldrift und der Erfindungen,
Der Hierarchiezerfälle und der Geburten)
Gefangen in der Geschwindigkeitsdruse,
ein Knäuel,
Umspeichelt, verdaut,
im Ekel zerwürgt,
Oder steckengeblieben in einer
Von diesen Speiseröhren der Stadt.
So dämmerst du
wieder einmal
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mitten im Zwischendrin:

„In der Mitte von Nirgendwo“

The erratic and dislocated layout of this poem—reproduced as faithfully as possible—visualizes the incommensurability of the represented phenomena as much as it imitates the turbulent process of readerly comprehension itself. We are confronted with a most multifarious and disparate series of sensations, feelings, associations, events. Bubbles are sparkling in mineral water “toward the light” [lichtwärts], bits of music keep coming back like residual mucous, buzzwords show up (l. 31–33) from the day’s newspapers perhaps, and all these things seem to happen the while he/she/it or we have “sunk to the ground” (l. 1), where everything is pressed together, arousing disgust (“im Ekel zerwürgt,” l. 37). Possibly, these incidents are the efflux of a “reverie” [Wachtraum] during a ride on the subway in Germany (l. 8–13) and therefore belong to the dim in-between such reveries generate (l. 40–43). But this is already conjecture, already storytelling. For although “Unten am Schlammgrund” is much more evocative than the previous example, In der Provinz 2, we hardly find indications, let alone articulations, as to the relationships between the lines. Causality is hardly their connection, and it is doubtful that chronology ties them together either. Neither are they united by the movements and actions of a clearly identifiable protagonist. The centrifugal force that these incidents exert, on the paper as well as in our readerly experience, undermines the possibility of grasping a tangible center, of recognizing a unified scene that coheres on the basis of a readily available plot.

These uncertainties have mainly two reasons. On the one hand, the inconsistent phenomenology of the signified content, specifically the fluctuating scenery and many
contradictory, even oxymoronic events (l. 24–25, for instance). On the other hand, the relation between the described events is indeterminate. Apart from the merely additive use of “and,” there is not a single conjunction coordinating or subordinating the clauses, for instance, in a contrastive or a consecutive way. Moreover, there are only very few predicative verbs found in the poem which could define action (l. 14–17 is one of these few instances). The first sentence in fact lacks a proper subject altogether and hence forms no proper predicate. It is not until the articulation of a “you” [du] in the second sentence (precisely l. 14–17) that we can infer an experiential subject—if, that is, we were to identify this du as a self-apostrophe. Yet the following participle constructions once again lack a specific subject, the result being that our grasp of action and modality, the sense of who is doing what and how, is constantly undermined. The few indicators concerning the cohesion between the described incidents we have are mostly topographical: something or somebody has sunk down, then sparkles up, starts to swing, moves forward, is “trapped in-between” [eingepfercht] (l. 29), and so on.

If we were to look for syntagmatic cohesion in this poem, specifically for a logic that holds the sequence of incidents together, it might involve a spatial logic, a paradoxical movement similar to the paradox of a “creepily slow / fast ride” [unendlich schleichenden / Schnellen Fahrt] (l. 24–25) that the text mentions. Following the (Hegelian? Enzensbergerian?) “furies of disappearance” (l. 70) mentioned in the poem’s second half, “you” [du] travel (or travels) through “the middle of nowhere” (l. 43).7 This last expression—a banal commonplace that appears in quotation marks for precisely that reason, it would seem—executes its meaning graphically, namely by two blank lines before and after, separating the first from the second half of “Unten am Schlammgrund.”
At last, in the second half of the poem, “you” become(s) an “imago”—if “you” were not an imago already in the first place: “das warst du: / Imago im Niemandsland” (l. 81–82)—while the formerly vivid sensations and associations fade away in “silence, a twilight silence” [Stille, zwielichtige Stille] (l. 95).

However, this paradoxical movement is not a property of the text itself but, rather, an experience that emerges in the process of reading and, more precisely, through the recasting of a disparate textual discourse into a sequence of tangible incidents and scenes. Yet, what kind of cohesion would such a recasting produce? How is it that despite the disparity of the text on so many levels this chaotic “no man’s land” makes sense to a reader?

At least three commonplace answers to these questions suggest themselves. Perhaps this poem makes sense, one might argue, because it expresses pictures with words. These pictures are restored, the argument continues, through a cognitive act of word recognition that associates literal input with visual output, with pictures that are readily stored up in the visual cortex of the reader’s brain. Written words trigger memorized pictures: that is the quintessential mechanism of poetry and literature altogether, according to this argument. Cognitive scientists have argued in that fashion, though the underlying pictorialist notion—*ut pictura poiesis*—is much older. Grünbein’s poem, self-conscious as ever and ironically aware of the age-old pictorialist claim, purposefully mentions a camera moving through the “lacunae of a split brain” (l. 20–21). Nonetheless, how would one see the “picture” of a “lukewarm aquatic night” (l. 2), and how relate it to the bizarre image of, say, “rhapsodies in black” (l. 18)? Even with the figural and typographic splendor of the poem, it would be hard to see such expressions as
a sequence of pictures. Rather, the sensations and perceptions that “Unten am Schlammgrund” induces seem akin to those indistinct visceral feelings and corporeal states of being “in-between” [zwischendrin]. The lines “Auf den Boden gesunken / Dieser lauwarmen aquarischen Nacht” could be read as an emblematic expression of these instinct feelings.

Another position holds that the feelings and perceptions induced by a poem are misleading subjective illusions. On this view, the sensuous grip of literary texts is considered to be merely the aftereffect of certain rhetorical mechanisms and figures, each of which is deemed thoroughly inhuman. The perception of phenomenal scenes is thus a delusion on the reader’s part, a deception by means of which the text-machine conceals its objective specificity as a medium:

A literary text is not a phenomenal event that can be granted any form of positive existence, whether as a fact of nature or as an act of the mind. It leads to no transcendental perception, intuition, or knowledge but merely solicits an understanding that has to remain immanent because it poses the problem of its intelligibility in its own terms.9

For that reason, one might add, any poem, any literary text always already operates indeed in a “no man’s land” [Niemandsland] (l. 81–82)—the imperceptible and self-referential simulacrum beyond the senses in which texts negotiate the conditions of possibility of their intelligibility. What really happens, then, also in Grünbein’s poem, is determined by the self-referential properties of the letters on the page. Apparently phenomenal descriptions such as “Müde in einer U-Bahn […] / Schaukelnd zwischen Erinnerungsschlieren: / Ein deutscher Wachtraum” (l. 8–13)—without doubt the main
substance of the poem—are thus identified as means of betrayal and deception, luring the reader into the trap of phenomenal semblance.\textsuperscript{10}

The third position hinges on the generic distinction between what counts as a “poem” and what does not. The disparate sequence coheres and makes sense, the argument runs, precisely because we read the text \textit{as} a “poem.” The nature of this generic distinction has been conceived over time in an ontological, “logical,” structuralist, or a pragmatic way; most recently it has been conceived in terms of either constructivism or systems theory.\textsuperscript{11} Grünbein’s text obviously conforms to typical generic features of a poem. For example, it has a title and is organized into lines that begin with capital letters; hence it does not look like a newspaper article or a cooking recipe or a novella. Thus fundamentally, the basic argument can be expressed by the distinction poem \(\neq\) no poem, or more specifically, “Unten am Schlammgrund” \(\neq\) \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung}.

But unlike computers, readers are hardly content with abstract distinctions per se. To clarify this statement, consider for a moment the inglorious \textit{Was gesagt werden muss}, a “poem” that Nobel laureate Günther Grass published in April 2012. Here Grass urges the German government to stop the sale of submarines to Israel and exposes the state of Israel as a threat to the “already fragile world peace” [den ohnehin brüchigen Weltfrieden].\textsuperscript{12} How relevant is it, really, that Grass’s text looks like a poem and might be called due to its political intent a \textit{Zeitgedicht}? No doubt, literary genre is an important category with regard to certain questions. The fact that Grass’s text was introduced as “a poem” certainly amplified its impact on the press and public debates, since in accepting this generic premise, it became difficult for commentators to simply dismiss Grass’s “poem”—a piece of art claiming “aesthetic autonomy”—as the misguided opinion of a
senior citizen. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to say that this classification influences or even amplifies the sensuous grip of the poem (if it has any at all). Treating Grass’s piece under a different generic rubric and consequently with a different set of distinctions—as an op-ed with line breaks, for example—would hardly make a difference in that regard. Similarly, the recognition of “Unten am Schlammgrund” as a poem due to its material parameters explains in and for itself very little of the poem’s sensuous grip. Its apparent generic nature no doubt influences our reading in several ways. But taken as the a priori truth of a text or the solely determining law of reading, “generic terms such as ‘lyric’ (or its various sub-species […] as well as pseudo-historical period terms […] are always terms of resistance and nostalgia.”\(^{13}\)

Regardless of their many discrepancies, the abstraction from conscious readerly experience is the common denominator of these three positions. They abstract from the dynamic process between reader and text. This abstraction is decidedly not the route the following dissertation will take. It will insist on the sensuous worldliness of literary texts and the corporeal and cognitive activity of the reader that actualizes this sphere, yet without dissolving this precarious connection in either the objective positivity of the textual medium or the physical procedures in the reader’s brain. Reading Grünbein’s poems, we also delve into a stream of sensations and feelings, a manifold we recast and, as it were, “orchestrate” in choosing certain features and privileging them over others and endowing these with attributes, contexts, relationships. We make sense of their textual discourse by representing, by retelling these poems as a perceptual experience—as a phenomenal scene. At least I did so in my readings, precisely in attempting to transform the poems—selectively, even arbitrarily—into scenes to be felt, heard, seen. The analysis
of their scenic setup, together with close attention to their textual form, assisted me in this endeavor to understand the sense that these two poems bring to my senses and to my mind.

**Readerly aesthesis and diegetic form-giving**

The preceding discussion of two poems by Durs Grünbein related their story—their narrative, and more specifically scenographic, form—to acts of perception. This relation can be reversed, in which case the starting point is not a textual narrative but sense perception. To do so, I now turn to two suggestive remarks by Nietzsche and Hegel. In a note of 1885, Friedrich Nietzsche writes:

> Der Mensch ist ein Formen- und Rhythmen-bildendes Geschöpf; er ist in nichts besser geübt und es scheint daß er an nichts mehr Lust hat als am Erfinden von Gestalten. […] In allem Wahrnehmen, das heißt dem ursprünglichsten Aneignen, ist das wesentliche Geschehen ein Handeln, strenger noch: ein Formen-Aufzwingen: — von ‘Eindrücken’ reden nur die Oberflächlichen.14

Nietzsche claims that the act of perceiving involves the imposition of a “form” or “shape” [Gestalt] as well as a “rhythm” onto the thing of perception; we must “invent” [erfinden] it as an object. This imposition of both a formal and a temporal, rhythmic structure on our perceptions is described more closely as a creative “act” [Handeln] of form-giving, indeed as the “Formen-Aufzwingen” on our so-called sensory “impressions.” Perception, to put it differently, requires for Nietzsche an Apollonian imposition on a shapeless bundle of indistinct sensory-neurological stimuli, the Dionysian chaos that characterizes living matter. Oddly enough, Hegel (whom Nietzsche ridiculed as the state philosopher of Prussia)15 offers a similar view. In the *Phenomenology* he had already presented a related,
perhaps even more radical, line of thought. For him, the sensory apprehension of an object is, in the most fundamental sense, the “story of its movement” [Geschichte ihrer Bewegung].\(^1^6\) To make perceptions means to comprehend the “story” that informs the act of perceiving. According to Hegel, then, sense perception is based on a cognitive narration, the telling of its “story”—an odd proposition that Part One will explain.

In my reading, then, both Nietzsche and Hegel allude to a necessary interaction between perceptual process and narrative form, or in other words, to a fundamental belonging-together of \textit{aesthesis} and \textit{diegesis}. By the former term I mean the activity of perceiving and also its embodiment; the latter term I employ henceforth to signify \textit{both} the processual form of narrative articulation (\textit{diēgēsis} according to Plato) \textit{and} the narrated totality (\textit{diēgèse} according to Gerard Genette), the representational world that emerges by means of narrative articulation.\(^1^7\)

The belonging-together of, and interaction between, aesthesis and diegesis is the theoretical question that this dissertation pursues, if and how it exists—not only in theories of perception but also, and indeed even more so, in literary texts. With regard to literature, then, the primary question is: How does, how \textit{can} the sensuous figure in literary texts? By what linguistic means and conceptual devices is the process of perception narrativized? Recalling the reading of the two poems by Grünbein, one might add the question: What are the “stories” by means of which literary scenes correlate aesthesis and diegesis?

Assuming as a working hypothesis the entwinement of perceptual procedures with narrative activities has two major ramifications, depending on which term of the dyad is foregrounded. First, it would suggest that sense perception (aesthesis) involves narrative
articulation (diegesis) and representation (diegesis) so as to make sense of our sensations. This point is made not only by Hegel but also suggested, Part Two will argue, by Novalis, Rilke, and Proust, yet on their own terms. If, instead, the primary objective were to flesh out the material involvement of narrative processes in actual sense perception, a very different, and certainly less literary, set of texts and discourses would be invoked here.\footnote{With regard to literary texts—which is to say, poetic speech or diegesis proper—the hypothesis would suggest, second, that the more or less immediate impression we form as we read (or listen to) a literary text is not a merely intellectual result, predetermined by factors such as textual form, presumptive historical and discursive contexts, as well as private memories. It would also be connected to, and fundamentally depend on, our sensuousness—that is, our bodily feelings, sensations, perceptions. For as our reading transforms text into a narration, a diegetic world opens up to the inner sense; a perceptible scene or a series of scenes emerge to be observed and perceived. In lending our bodily senses and feelings to this evolving scene, we actualize the phenomenal potential that is outlined—and to a certain degree also circumscribed—by a given literary passage. By means of this readerly aesthesis—that is, through the cognitive recasting of the sensuous potential outlined by the text into a perceptible scene—the passage would assume rudimentary cohesion. In the next section, these passages will be defined more closely as “scenographies”; these textual ensembles of poetic form, of more or less determinate descriptions, and of possible conceptual underpinnings objectively specify and partly restrict the sensuous potential to be actualized through readerly aesthesis. Bringing these “scenographic” passages to our senses in such a way, we would start...}
making sense of the letters on the page. The sense of the passage—in the double meaning of the word—would thus emerge between readerly perception and textual structure, which is to say, within the recast scene. The recast scene could therefore be considered the intermediary link between text and reader, the sensuous bond that unites them both.

Construing literary reception as fundamentally involving a perceptual process on the reader’s part—aesthetic, sensuous recasting or readerly aesthesis—obviously requires a move away from a referential paradigm of mimesis. With regard to literary texts, mimesis is often understood as an act of representation that is pre-established and prescribed by some prior and external, transcendent source (real persons and things, authorial intentions, preconceived plots, philosophical ideas, historical-discursive formations, etc.) and then carried out by the textual discourse in perfect autonomy from its reader. This move away from literary mimesis consequently shifts critical attention to the experience and cognitive activity that I have just described as readerly aesthesis.\(^{19}\)

The earlier readings of the two poems by Grünbein sought to demonstrate precisely this move from textual mimesis to a mode of reading that foregrounds readerly activity and perceptual involvement in the text. It is this aesthetic activity—the creative process of form-giving through sensuous concretization—on part of the reader that this dissertation would fathom, in dialogue with Hegel, Novalis, Rilke, and Proust.

This point is of course not entirely new. Romantic poets and authors have expressly stated the necessity of readerly participation and form-giving with regard to literary texts. Contemplating the coherence of the final book of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Friedrich Schiller gives the following advice to Goethe:

Dem Inhalte nach muß in dem Werk alles liegen, was zu seiner Erklärung nötig ist, und der Form nach muß es nothwendig darin liegen, der innere
Goethe’s subsequent paraphrase of Schiller’s eloquent observation about the reader’s productive involvement in a literary work is as dry as it is succinct. Three months later, in November 1796, Goethe concedes in a letter to Schiller “daß sich der Leser produktiv verhalten muß, wenn er an irgendeiner Produktion teilnehmen will.” Novalis will go on to radicalize Goethe’s and Schiller’s point. He highlights not only the need for form-giving on part of the reader but also proclaims the priority of the reader’s activity over both authorial intention and textual material. In one of the Vermischte Bemerkungen, a collection of posthumously published fragments originally written between 1797 and 1798, Novalis notes:

Der wahre Leser muß der erweiterte Autor seyn. Er ist die höhere Instanz, die die Sache von der niedern schon vorgearbeitet erhält. Das Gefühl vermittelt dessen der Autor die Materialien seiner Schrift geschieden hat, scheidet beim Lesen wieder das Rohe und das Gebildete des Buchs – und wenn der Leser das Buch nach seiner Idee bearbeiten würde, so würde ein 2ter Leser noch mehr läutern, und so wird dadurch, daß die bearbeitete Masse immer wieder in frischtätige Gefäße kommt, die Masse endlich wesentlicher Bestandteil – Glied wirksamen Geistes.
“Denn ein Kunstwerk […] verstehen, heißt, es gewissermaßen erschaffen”: this might be the maxim to which Novalis’s astonishingly technical account of literary works as workflow between texts and readers could be reduced. In any case, the “operative spirit” [wirksamer Geist] of a literary work is actualized, the fragment proposes, through a series of individual recastings: “[dadurch] daß die bearbeitete Masse immer wieder in frischtätige Gefäße kommt”—by virtue of these readerly concretizations. This process of forming and transforming the textual material naturally involves all kinds of selections, contextualizations, and interpretative choices, however conscious or unconscious the “feeling” [Gefühl] may be that instructs these choices, and so “distinguishes” [scheidet] and determines the raw textual material. The fragment refers, not at all by coincidence, to this transformative process with the verbs bearbeiten and bilden, thus alluding to the programmatic idea and imperative “mission” of the epoch: Bildung. For Novalis, who claimed to be “unable to read properly” without pen and paper ready at hand, the formation and concretization of the textual “mass” [Masse] would not only require mental acts of imagination and interpretation but usually also involve writerly operations: markups, note-taking, commentary, or even a re-formation, a re-writing, as in the case of the unfinished novel Henrich von Ofterdingen, which was written largely in response to and partly against Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. In light of Novalis’s disposition, this fragment would ultimately suggests that literary reception and authorship, reading and writing, are two reciprocal functions, two sides of the same coin.

If, however, reading implies as an operation the selective concretization of the text through acts of imagination, interpretation, and contextualization, possibly even
through written articulations, reading must be to a certain degree a “free operation,” as Novalis writes in a later fragment:

/Ist nicht jeder Leser ein Philolog?/
Es gibt kein allgemeingeltendes Lesen, im gewöhnlichen Sinn. Lesen ist eine freye Operation. Wie ich und was ich lesen soll, kann mir keiner vorschreiben.27

Much like the critical interpreter and philologist, the reader ultimately “makes of a book whatever he wants,” the fragment supposes: “Der Leser setzt den Accent willkürlich – er macht eigentlich aus einem Buche, was er will.” But naturally, Novalis does not envision this “free” concretization of the literary work as an arbitrary flight of fancy, as free-floating associations on the reader’s part. Rather, the readerly concretization is bound up with certain “determinate” prescriptions of the text: “Ein Buch bewirckt, wie alles, tausendfältige Sensationen und Functionen – Determinirte, bestimmt – und Freye.”28

Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis’s like-minded friend, similarly construed the relation between authorial text and reader as an inextricable community of production, as “the holy relationship of innermost sympifthosophy or sympoesy.”29

This arbitrary freedom of reading—the individual choices and textual prescriptions on which it is inevitably based—still resonates in Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu. After many pages spent ruminating on his “vocation” to become a writer and how to transform, finally, that sense of a calling into an actual piece of writing, a book, the narrator concedes in the final volume that his book concerns in effect much less his own experiences and dispositions than those of the reader. Much like the life of Swann, which provided the narrator with, he writes, the “raw material of my experiences” and hence “my book,” the authorial descriptions and assertions ought to be the raw material for free transformations and appropriations on part of the reader:
In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer’s work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have experienced in himself.

Such a conception of literary narration as involving a perceptual process—namely, the recasting of the sensuous potential that may be inscribed in a given literary passage into a tangible, sensible scene—is shared, in distinctive ways, by all the authors examined in this dissertation.

I have termed the holistic sphere that such a process of readerly aesthesis establishes a world, within which a scene occupies a partial area or sector. This terminological choice does not simply reproduce the convention to call the sphere of immanence evoked by literature a (fictional) world. Rather, it employs an understanding that Edmund Husserl developed especially in his 1913 *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. World here denotes a sphere of immersion wherein actual, presently perceived experience is always already embedded in a larger network of potential, currently not actualized perceptions and cognitive connections. Thus formally, a world describes a “vaguely conscious horizon of yet unspecific realities” [{\em dunkel unbewußten Horizont unbestimmter Wirklichkeit}], as Husserl puts it. The individual aspects to which we perceptually and mentally attend—thus “thematizing” these aspects, as Husserl would say—are surrounded by a horizon of many more possible aspects. These possible, not yet thematized aspects are accessed above all by means of perception, Husserl argues. Specifically, this occurs through exploratory movements, whether actual or imaginary, within and through the yet unknown sectors and regions—the sites and scenes, one might say—that constitute the world in which we
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are currently immersed. Husserl makes it clear, however, that the form and configuration of experience which he terms “world” is not restricted to the encounter with the material reality—the “natural world” or, to use a later Husserlian term, the Lebenswelt in which we all exist. Husserl acknowledges the existence of other, more abstract and immaterial, hence ideational worlds, such as “the arithmetical world” [die arithmetische Welt], in which we are dwelling and perceiving as we make numeric calculations. To conceive of literary worlds that are similarly—not identically—experienced through forms of perception and spatiotemporal movement is therefore entirely consistent with Husserl’s conception of worldliness, if not intrinsic to it.31

Husserl did not specifically conceptualize literary worlds, but his student Roman Ingarden did. In his phenomenological inquiry Das literarische Kunstwerk (1931), Ingarden was perhaps the first literary theorists to elaborate on the worldliness of literary texts—just a few years before Martin Heidegger did so in Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes (1935/36),32 and decades before narratologists, prompted by Nelson Goodman rather than phenomenology, began to theorize storytelling and literary fiction altogether as an act of “worldmaking.”33 Ingarden writes:

so liegen auch die dargestellten Gegenstände [objects represented by a literary text, that is] nicht isoliert und fremd nebeneinander, sondern schließen sich vermöge der mannigfachen Seinszusammenhänge zu einer einheitlichen Seinssphäre zusammen. Sie bilden dabei – merkwürdig genug – immer einen Ausschnitt [a partial “area” one might call a scene, as I have suggested; CJ] aus einer nicht näher bestimmten, aber ihrem Seins- und Soseinstypus nach festgelegten Welt, und zwar einen Ausschnitt, dessen Grenzen nie scharf gezeichnet sind. Es ist immer nur so, also ob ein Lichtkegel uns einen Teil einer Gegend beleuchte […] Gelangt z.B. in einem kleinen Gedicht nur ein einziger Gegenstand in einem einzigen Zustand oder in einer Situation zur Darstellung, so
The phenomenological orientation of this dissertation, particularly with regard to literary diegesis, is conspicuous enough, which is why cognitivist approaches to the study of literature drawing on neuroscience, such as “cognitive poetics” or fMRI analyses of reading processes, will hardly play a role. However, the theoretical debt to phenomenology will not be as crucial as it may seem here. Textual analysis and contextualization will be equally important exegetic means in the two main parts of this study, wherein the hypothesis—the correlation of perceptual and narrative processes, the belonging-together of aesthesis and diegesis—will be confronted with a philosophical account and three distinctive literary representations of perception.

The foregoing discussion of the aesthetic recasting of text into diegetic scene, together with the references to Husserl and Ingarden, may bring to mind the positions and theorems of reader-response theory as well. The type of Rezeptionsästhetik proposed by Hans Robert Jauß and Wolfgang Iser’s Wirkungsästhetik, set forth in his Der Akt des Lesens (first published in 1976), are probably the most notable cases in point. Clearly, the claim that reading selectively, and to some extent arbitrarily, transforms and reshapes—recasts—a literary passage, thereby generating meaning, is a basic assumption of their respective theories as well. And indeed, almost all generative or interactionist theories of textuality share the conviction that textual meaning is generated—drawing now on Roland Barthes’s terms—by way of analytically dismantling and then creatively reassembling the textual discourse, thus articulating and indeed “fabricating” a “simulacrum” that expresses one possible textual meaning.
There is, nonetheless, one major disjunction between the understanding of reading that I developed on the preceding pages and Iser’s and Jauß’s “aesthetics of reception”: Neither Iser nor Jauß were particularly interested in the sensuous, corporeal dimension of readerly reception. Though it may have not been their intent, they effectively forego “that coincidence of form, feeling, and intellect” which the adjective “aesthetic” designates according to Coleridge. The belonging-together of aesthesis and diegesis—this peculiar aesthetic overlap of senses and sense (Sinn)—is neither Iser’s nor Jauß’s concern. Criticized for founding their generative models of reading on acts of sense perception, they rejected the very notion of drawing such a parallel. This rejection is somewhat plausible in the case of Jauß, because his Rezeptionsästhetik, conceived in the wake of Hans-Georg Gadamer, does not so much investigate the concrete effect (Wirkung) that literary texts may have on individual readers as it seeks to reconstruct the changing historical horizons of apprehension—the “geschichtsbildende Energie” of a mutable tradition of literary reception—which enable individual readers in turn to understand literary works and fill them with meaning. In the case of Iser, who is concerned with the Wirkung of literature and indeed elaborates on the reader’s “entanglement” [Verstricktein] in the fictional world as the “mode by means of which we are in the presence of the text,” the rejection is even stranger. Iser leans heavily on phenomenological terminology, especially that of Husserl and Ingarden, and therefore on a mode of inquiry which at its roots, as Jacques Derrida has reminded us, “is always phenomenology of perception.” But even so he completely neglects the domain of the sensuous. Instead, Iser explains literary effect (Wirkung) as the result of the reader’s semantic activity—the generation of logically consistent meaning (Sinnbildung) by way
of decoding, selecting, and combining *Satzbedeutungen*. This semantic activity, by means of which the reader gradually “realizes” and “concretizes” a literary work, not only concerns the comprehension of the manifest content of sentences—an act that is conditioned, on the one hand, by the laws of syntax and the horizons of lexical connotation and denotation, but also, Iser concedes, by socio-cultural norms, generic conventions, historical knowledge, and—last but not least—a reader’s personal disposition. Equally important in Iser’s theory is the interpretative determination (*Vereindeutigung*) of all sorts of uncertainties, gaps, and blanks (*Leerstellen*) in the text. The concretization of meaning, the generated sense of literary texts, thus resolves indeterminacies (such as sketchy or even unreliable descriptions, competing perspectives, unstable focalization) and fills in the blanks (such as chronological ellipses between episodes, omission of psychological introspection or outward action, or tacit ideological regimes that regulate the thoughts and actions of characters). All this happens through interpretative choices and, again, on the grounds of logical consistency and semantic coherence—though Iser acknowledges that this kind of *Konsistenzbildung* can hardly succeed in full, least of all in the case of poetry and modernist or postmodernist prose.43

Considering these brief recapitulations, the main difference between the process of readerly aesthesis developed here and the reception theories developed by Jauß and Iser becomes clear: their conceptions of literary reception eschew any alignment with the sensuous. Accordingly, Jauß and Iser do not seem to share the traditional conviction of the aesthete, espoused by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, the founder of modern aesthetics, no less than Theodor Adorno, that “even the discursive arts, in order to be conceptualized as such—rather than as inartistic instances of merely communicative
speech [...]—cannot be entirely abstracted from their sensuous condition.” This dissertation, by contrast, expressly affirms this alignment in modeling readerly apprehension precisely on the basis of perception—but as a generative process of form-giving and embodiment, as the recasting of an inherent sensuous potential of a given textual passage into a perceptible scene, never as a passive intake and mimetic reproduction of what the text “does,” nor, for that matter, as a historical or solely semantic act of *Konsistenzbildung*.

In addition to this fundamental discrepancy, another paradigmatic disjunction arises between my notion of readerly aesthesis and Iser’s theory of reading. Iser ascribes, in the wake of Husserl and *Gestalt* theory, an “iconic character” [Bildcharakter] to the reader’s mental representation of literary texts and so reduces the readerly perception to an “inner vision” of changing diegetic “images”—to a filmic experience, in short. My notion of readerly aesthesis employs, contrary to Iser, the terms “world” and “scene” to characterize the mental correlate that emerges from the act of reading. This terminological choice accommodates the whole intersensory and intermedial potential of scenographies of perception, because these usually activate multiple senses (hearing, taste, bodily feelings, vision, and many more mixed feelings) and involve multiple media (noises and music, rosy lips and tea-soaked madeleines, melancholy and *Sehnsucht*, blue flowers with pretty faces, and so on). As with actual sense experience, which rarely is exclusively visual, acts of seeing and images are not the exhaustive constituents of literary scriptings or scenographies of perception.

The two-sided hypothesis of this dissertation, then, is that diegetic texts are bound up with readerly perception and embodiment, and conversely, that there is a diegetic
dimension to sensuousness itself. Sense perception crucially depends on narrative acts to gain a meaningful shape, while literary narrations are made to cohere, among other things, through readerly aesthesis. Perceptual and narrative processes belong together due to their interaction. We have no meaningful access to the objects of sensory perception outside diegetic mediation, nor can we detach a literary scene—a scenography—of perception from its textual code, as if it were an eidetic image readily perceived by, as it were, an “inner eye.” On the basis of this two-sided hypothesis, it would seem possible to consider the interplay between perceptual and diegetic processes as we read texts by Hegel, Novalis, Rilke, and Proust.

Yet, in what sense, exactly, can narrative and perceptual processes be said to “belong together” and “interact”? What kind of “coherence” and “cohesion” would such an “interaction” establish? And what could it mean to designate the cognitive correlative of sense perception a “narration”? 

The following elaborations develop a twofold response to these questions. First, the narrative dimension of perception will be grounded, perhaps not unsurprisingly, in the form-giving power of language: as acts of interpretation and articulation. In a second step, the posited general “interaction” between aesthesis and diegesis will be clarified by introducing additional terms.

During the famous 1966 conference on structuralism at Baltimore, Derrida made a notorious remark about sense perception, and ever since it has been construed as a (more or less preposterous) renunciation of the category of perception on his part. This understanding, however, is the result of truncating the remark; in full it reads:

Now I don’t know what perception is and I don’t believe that anything like perception exists. Perception is precisely a concept, a concept of an intuition or
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of a given originating from the thing itself, present itself in its meaning, independently from language, from the system of reference. And I believe that perception is interdependent with the concept of origin and of center and consequently whatever strikes at the metaphysics [of presence] of which I have spoken strikes also at the very concept of perception.47

Obviously, Derrida condemns here a certain concept of perception that for him is based on “the metaphysics of presence”—but not sense perception as such. He denounces the notion that perception would be an immediately “given,” as if it were a passively received and readily available imprint. But this concept of perception (which represents commonsensical textbook Kantianism) is problematic because it regards perception “independently from language.” The subtraction of language from the process of perception is the critical point Derrida is underscoring; he alludes to the fact that the common shorthand for sense perception—immediate intuition—ignores the equally foundational role of articulation and interpretation in the perceptual process. Subtracting these linguistic, or at least quasi-linguistic, acts of form-giving from the perceptual process, it would be indeed hard to “know what perception is,” as Derrida suggests. As we shall see, Hegel elaborates on this point in the Phenomenology, declaring language to be “more truthful” than bare sensory intake.48

Granting the necessity of linguistic interpretation and articulation in all forms of sensory experience, even in the case of elementary object perception, it is still necessary to specify both the posited “interaction” between aesthesis and diegesis and the kind of “cohesion” this would generate in turn. The following model can perhaps illuminate these aspects. The form-giving narrative process that is correlated with sensory experience, which is based on a stream of heterogeneous but intermingled stimuli, could be said to consist, first and foremost, in an interplay between retention and protention. As this
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interplay connects the individual sensations through momentary acts of recollection (retention) and anticipation (protention), it could be considered the unifying correlate of perception.

Retention and protention are Husserlian terms that have the following meaning. Retention basically designates momentary recollection of previously perceived moments that consciousness retains in its (more or less implicit) working memory until this echo of past moments fades out. Protention is the complement to retention, though it proceeds into the opposite temporal direction. Protention designates momentary expectation as extrapolated from retention, hence the anticipated continuation of the perceptual experience. As in the case of retention, the implicit- or explicitness of this momentary expectation, its degree of conscious accessibility, may vary. It is this interplay between retention and protention, one could suppose, that integrates purely sequential sensations into a cohesive relational structure and so endows the experience, its temporal course, with consistency and a unified sense (Sinn). This interplay, in other words, connects the individual sensations in a way that “makes sense.”

The assumption that the interplay between retention and protention generates, through the relating of discrete moments, perceptual cohesion and so enables a grasp of a unified sense is affiliated with a number of positions, above all with Husserl, who coined these two terms, and Iser. Even Derrida, perhaps Husserl’s most critical reader, accepted this basic assumption. Additionally, one can find traces in Hegel’s work that lead in a similar direction, and the following chapters on Hegel will pursue these leads in detail. Whether employing Husserlian terminology or not, the mutual ground of these positions is the idea that the structuring of experiential time through retentional and protentional
relations represents a narrative act. Paul Ricoeur, who also belongs to the phenomenological tradition, concisely summarizes this idea of an essential connection between time and narration: “I take temporality to be that structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity, and narrativity to be the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate reference.”50 On that basis, the cohesive temporality generated through retention and protention in the course of sensory experience could be designated a narration—the narration of perception.

This narration of perception, which is generated and impelled by the interplay between retention and protention, has not only a successive dimension but creates also an expanding network of relations; it also has a “rhythm,” to recall Nietzsche’s term, that connects its successive moment. This double nature of the narration of perception implies a certain dynamic between successive unfolding and the resulting relationality. It implies, in other words, a tension between a sequential processuality (the discrete articulation of sensations) and the coherent sense (Sinn) connecting and uniting the experience. This double nature of perception as both a sequential process and a resulting relation is the fundamental subject of the first and the second chapters of the *Phenomenology* and will be analyzed in Part One.

Sometimes, when a more definitive recollection or expectation leaps out of the more or less uniform flow of experience, the said tension becomes more acutely perceptible. For in suddenly recalling a distinct moment of the past, the steady, uniform progression of perception is disrupted. In case the recollection conflicts with momentary retention and protention, the resulting disruption may even change the course and reconfigure the relationality of the sensory experience altogether. Similarly, the
emergence of a distinct anticipation out of the current interplay between retention and protention disrupts the steady progression of perception, possibly altering its future course—whether or not this anticipation is ultimately fulfilled. These dynamic interruptions of the steady course of perception through recollection and anticipation can be experienced in actual perception, of course, yet literary texts also implement this perceptual dynamic—to great effect. The narrator’s tasting of the tea-soaked madeleine in Proust’s *Recherche*, during which a sudden, involuntary memory of childhood intervenes with most profound consequences, would be one principal example; the final recognition, induced by increasing anticipation (*Ahnung*), of Mathilde’s face as the face of the blue flower from an earlier dream in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, another.

If it is true that the narration of perception amounts to more than bare chronology because it also establishes, through retention and protention as well as recollection and expectation, a dynamic network of relations, one might be entitled to place a mediating link between these two components. The narration of perception could be said to generate a “story” of its own—a logic, that is, and more precisely an *aesthesiology*. This evolving “story” or aesthesiology, then, would be the logical structure wherein perceptual and narrative procedures intersect. However, this evolving aesthesiology—the qualifying adjective says it—cannot be an a priori given but only a dynamic result, a generation. Salient disruptions of the perceptual narration, such as disappointed expectations, unforeseen turns, or sudden recollections, are the very motor of its modification.

In brief, and schematically, the preceding definitions may be summed up as follows: Aesthesis denotes the successive process of perceiving by the senses that yields a stream of heterogeneous yet intermingled stimuli. The correlated form-giving narration
(diegesis) structures and defines these yet indeterminate sensations through a process of articulation (retention and protention) and so gives rise to a coherent relationality. This relationality, wherein the process of perceiving and its diegetic articulation intersect, can be described as an evolving aesthesiology, as the “story” generated by and enacted through perception. Naturally, these three components, distinguished for the sake of analytic clarity, overlap and permeate each other in actual sensory experience at every single moment. Yet it seems to be precisely their interaction and overlap that generates—or, as often happens as well, fails to generate—experiential coherence and unified sense.

One terminological choice still calls for a brief clarification. Why employ, as I have done throughout, narration instead of “narrative” as a synonym for diegesis in its double meaning? There are two reasons for this choice. The first is that “narrative” has an objectivist connotation—as if a narrative existed prior to and outside of its articulation. Speaking, by contrast, of a “narration” of perception emphasizes the generative subjective dimension of perception. The second reason is that the term narrative is commonly understood as combining primarily the causality and sequence of events. Narratologist Monika Fludernik summarizes this common understanding of narrative—which her own “natural” narratology in fact disputes—perfectly well: “Narratives are based on cause-and-effect relationships that are applied to sequences of events.”54 Yet the narration of perception, I have argued, concerns not only sequentiality but even more the simultaneous relationality it creates. With regard to literary texts, or diegesis proper, it is even more apparent why one should want to favor a synthetic conception of diegesis or narration over a merely causal-successive notion of narrativity. Recalling Grünbein’s “Unten am Schlammgrund,” it is easy to see that an exclusively causal-successive or
linear apprehension—one line follows from the other—could hardly generate a consistent understanding. Indeed, without scenic integration through readerly recasting, without opting to ground the discontinuous sequence of events in, for instance, the scene of a fantastic “reverie” evolving during a “creepily slow fast ride” on the subway, the poem remains bits and pieces. Joseph Frank has underscored precisely this point in his early essay regarding “Spatial Form in Modern Literature”: that textual sequence (diegesis) and signified relationality (diegesis)—which Frank describes, perhaps with a somewhat misplaced metaphor, as a “spatial form”—presuppose each other, especially in modernist poetry and prose. Ezra Pound, James Joyce, or Proust, for example, “cannot be read” in a merely sequential, linear fashion, Frank holds; they “can only be re-read. A knowledge of the whole is essential to an understanding of any part; but […] such knowledge can be obtained only […] when all the references are fitted into their proper place and grasped as a [simultaneous] unity,” hence through “a unified spatial apprehension” or a “simultaneous perception.”

The preceding definitions were somewhat abstract; a few illustrations might help to clarify them. When listening to music, for example, we enact and embody aesthesiological forms—or “schemata,” to borrow Kant’s term—to organize our acoustic perceptions and so make them cohere. Some of the most elementary aesthesiological schemata by which we structure musical narrations on the smaller scale are crescendo and decrescendo, accelerando and ritardando, rhythmic and motivic repetition, variation, cadences, and so forth. Though these schemata are usually notated in the score, they need to be enacted by a listener, as Scott Burnham argues, thus becoming embodied “moments of presence.” In mapping these schemata more or less actively onto the sequence of
sonic events just heard, we concatenate this sequence on the local level, thus forming a meaningful unit or period. Besides these customary schemata organizing the musical narration, there may be other, more imaginative “modes of musical embodiment,” as Hamish Robb calls it, that generate local, momentary coherence: imagined portamenti, for one thing, and more generally the bodily imagination of being enclosed within or moving across a musical “landscape.” The rondo, the sonata, a leitmotif technique, to name just a few examples, represent aesthesiological schemata on a larger, syntactic scale to organize our musical narration, though their conscious apprehension while listening requires some musicological expertise and above all a detailed memory of the piece. As these schemata are employed to assemble and unite sonic events of the past and the present both on the local level and at the large scale, they also give a sense of sensations to come—for instance, the consonance we would expect to hear after a dissonance in a piece by Haydn. The enactment of these schemata thus determines to some extent the course of our perceptual retention and protention. Unexpected sonic events, however, may modify both the past and the future structure of our musical narration—the retentional and protentional course of listening. If such a modification has taken place, a certain repetitive chord, for instance, banal upon first impression, may sound quite significant when it recurs. Finally, the dynamic application of small-scale and large-scale schemata in and through our perceptual narration may lead to a grasp of the music’s comprehensive “story” or logic that pervaded the entirety of our acoustic experience.

Looking at visual artworks naturally calls for an entirely different set of aesthesiological schemata, yet these forms too unfold and connect our looking over time. For seeing distinct colors, tracing lines (which Kant identified as the pictorial
representation of time)⁶⁰ and discerning figures, distinguishing foreground and background, recognizing composite objects, a constellation of figures, a scene, all this implies the temporalization of the instantaneous visual impression; it implies the differentiation of the blur of color which the visual medium relays to the eye within an instant. In reintegrating these individual parts, we are enabled to see the subject matter which the image shows—though it goes without saying that this interpretative act is not a necessary but only a possible consequence of the preceding visual activity. Indeed, very often looking does not yield “the whole picture” but only shows a number of apparently meaningful “things” and visually intriguing places that do not automatically add up to a coherent whole. The way in which we apprehend representational paintings of known narratives—say, Ingres’s *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1808)—exemplifies these procedures of temporalization and narrative integration. At first, we distinguish the instantaneous image by looking more closely at specific pictorial segments so as to identify discrete shapes, objects and persons, facial expressions, postures that indicate certain actions, and so forth. Piecing these individual elements together, we possibly identify the visual ensemble as a scene within the narrative to which the title of the painting refers: the myth of Oedipus and Sphinx.⁶¹

Considering these illustrations, the supposed interaction between perceptual and narrative processes might appear unproblematic. Yet to challenge the assumption of their straightforward interaction and to complicate conventional perceptual schemata and normalized aesthesiologies is the very point of the literary readings to follow. Not the harmonious concordance between aesthetic and diegesis but the disruptions of their interplay represent the truly illuminating cases. These cases, the literary critic would want
to suppose, can be found in certain literary texts and theories that describe the processes of perceiving in puzzling and unconventional ways. It is this critical potential that this study will foreground—the unseen “things” a Rilkean poem gives to see, the unheard resonances Proust gives to feel, the foreign fusions of thought and feeling Novalis generates. Making us look, listen, feel differently and perceive afresh and anew, is that not the aesthetic promise of literary texts and the “complex pleasure” they offer?

But why should literary texts be so revealing of the intricacies of perception? The epistemological significance of textual scenes—or scenographies—of perception may be that they encode perception as a narration, as a discursive process, in the first place. They present the act of perception in reduction—in abstraction from real referents, that is. Schiller explains this odd point quite brilliantly in the final Kallias letter:

Das darzustellende Objekt muß also, ehe es vor die Einbildungskraft gebracht und in Anschauung verwandelt wird, durch das abstrakte Gebiet der Begriffe einen sehr weiten Umweg nehmen, auf welchem es viel von seiner Lebendigkeit (sinnlicher Kraft) verliert. Der Dichter hat überall kein anderes Mittel, um das Besondere darzustellen, als die künstlerische Zusammensetzung des Allgemeinen. ‘Der eben jetzt vor mir stehende Leuchter fällt um’ ist ein solcher individueller Fall, durch Verbindung lauter allgemeiner Zeichen ausgedrückt.

The epistemological advantage of literary representations over actual scenes of perception would be, precisely, the fact that they have no immediate perceptual reference and have consequently lost much of their concrete “sensory force.” These scenes come into being only by “a very circuitous detour” through the “abstract domain of words,” which is to say, by means of narration. They remain abstract text—a mere potential—until readerly aesthesis translates them again into a species of Anschauung, though an Anschauung that will bear “the stamp of language.” It is this “reduction,” the
abstraction from concrete sensory experience and reference that would enable these texts to communicate the processuality of perception. Indeed, as a textual object, literature can only communicate—or outline—but never actualize the process of perception, thus keeping these two operations apart. This marks precisely the condition of possibility for reading to be, using Novalis’s word, a “free operation.” For Niklas Luhmann, this reductive momentum is the very appeal not only of literature but works of art in general:

Das Bewußtsein kann nicht kommunizieren, die Kommunikation kann nicht wahrnehmen […] Kunst macht Wahrnehmung für Kommunikation verfügbar […] Und gerade das gibt der Kunst ihre Bedeutung. Sie kann Wahrnehmung und Kommunikation integrieren, ohne zu einer Verschmelzung oder Konfusion der Operationen zu führen.65

As opposed to the dictum of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that “the aim of art is to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject, […] to extract a bloc of sensations, a pure being of sensations,” the communicative act of the literary text transforms perceptual essences into discursive matter that remains available for future aesthetic communication.66

“Scenographies” of perception

All of the preceding considerations, definitions, and terms come together in one place: the scene. The scene is the site where narrative and perceptual processes intersect. In experiential rather than textual encounters, such scenes are always in situ: Listening always already takes place and temporally unfolds within a scene of listening, for example, inside the very red—and, in winter, rather chilly—auditorium of Carnegie Hall, or on a bustling 5th Avenue. Looking takes place and unfolds within a scene of looking,
for example, at the drowsy and poorly lit Grimm-Zentrum. Tasting takes place and unfolds within a scene of tasting: while facing the gaze of your most despised enemy, for instance, who had been seated on the other side of the table. Consequently, a scene of perception may be said to combine a simultaneous spatial arrangement or constellation with a diachronic concatenation of person(s), thing(s), and perceptual occurrences.

Unlike the actual experiences to which these descriptions refer, texts do not immediately unfold phenomenal scenes—not by themselves, not as objects. Texts cannot, recalling Luhmann’s phrase, fuse the operations of perception and communication; only subjects can do so. Texts are, of course, made up of letters, words, sentences, for which reason they can only communicate but never actualize a phenomenal potential. The primary objects of inquiry of this study—textual passages that thematically concern sense perception or actively involve it qua readerly aesthesis—are, therefore, not phenomenal scenes as such; they are, in the first place, scenographies of perception, scriptings of perceptual processes.

Accordingly, the term scenography cannot merely designate the diegetic scene therein contained, a scene that could include, depending on the descriptive specificity, persons and objects, scenery and environment, spatial configurations and movements, perceptual actions and occurrences, and so on. Equally constitutive are the formal characteristics and poetic figures as well as the conceptual devices through which the phenomenal scene is conveyed—in short, the textual coding of the scene. This includes, for example, the text’s graphic appearance and prosodic sound, syntactic and tropic structures, rhyme and meter (not only but especially in the case of poetry), as well as immanent conceptualizations and invocations of perception. It is this threefold ensemble
of textual form, possible conceptual or aesthesiological foundations, and sensuous potential or implicit diegetic scene that the term scenography of perception wants to unite.

This textual-diegetic and possible conceptual ensemble is not necessarily a scenography of perception—a scenography of looking found in a Rilkean thing poem, for example. One could also investigate, for example, scenographies of desire in L’Éducation sentimentale, Gustave Flaubert’s famous novel about an unfulfilled love, or scenographies of sovereignty in Michael Kohlhaas, Heinrich von Kleist’s novella about a horse dealer’s increasingly radical quest for justice, so as to inquire into their textual and diegetic mis-en-scène, the ways, means, and occurrences by which these invisible, and in the latter case also supersensible, forces appear and come into effect.

Yet the readings to follow are restricted to those scenographies by Hegel, Novalis, Rilke, and Proust that describe striking occurrences of sensory perception. Despite their evident generic and stylistic differences, the scenographies to be discussed in the two main parts all share four diegetic features:

- they describe a sequence of perceptual occurrences, though not necessarily in a chronological order;
- they provide more or less detailed descriptions as to the spatial setup and whereabouts of the scene;
- they at least imply the place of a diegetic perceiver, an experiential subject situated within the scene (in contrast to a telephone book, for example, or a plain newspaper report);
they map out an intersensory space within a larger world, an experiential sphere wherein potentially all readerly senses and feelings can be activated (so that the long-established term “poetic image,” including newer derivatives, would seem a misleading caption for this intersensory sphere in its entirety).\textsuperscript{67}

From these general definitions results that agenda announced by my dissertation title and pursued by the subsequent chapters. On the one hand, the readings to follow will have to individually gauge, analyze, and finally actualize the scenographies of perception taken from Hegel, Novalis, Rilke, and Proust. They will have to recast in each case the sensuous potential through concretizing acts of reading—if not quite as freely as envisioned by Novalis, yet within the relative descriptive confines set down by a given scenography. The common question with regard to these scenographies will be how the sensuous is discursively enacted and narrativized. Additionally, the reconstruction of Hegel’s dialectical theory of perception in Part One will have to further elaborate on the hypothetical basis of scenographies of perception as fusing aesthetic and diegetic processes.

This agenda thus proposes an aesthesiological mode of reading. Such a reading seeks to analyze and conceptualize precisely the perceptual structures and textual operations that contribute to the immediate force and impact of a given scenography of perception: “the force,” as Peter Brooks calls it, “that makes the connection of incident[s] powerful.” In conceptualizing the aesthesiology inscribed into a specific scenography, it may be possible to better understand the sensuous force of that scenography. In the essay just quoted, Brooks identifies this force with the “plot of desire,” which is undoubtedly another potent force of scenic cohesion.\textsuperscript{68} In the case of scenographies of perception,
however, this force would seem to be primarily based on the “story” of perception—on
the aesthesiology that endows the diegetic scene with contiguity and cohesion.

What can literary texts “know” about perception?

Though aesthesis is seldom mentioned, “perception” and “sensation” have by now
become recurrent themes in the critical study of literature. The self-understanding of
these studies is predominantly historical, since they seek to reconstruct the
epistemological and technological regimes regulating the ways in which the senses and
sense perception figure in literature and the sciences during the periods under scrutiny.
The necessary presupposition of these historical reconstructions is that literary texts
contain a certain “knowledge” about the senses, which as such pertains to a larger,
historically contingent nexus of discourses cutting across generic and disciplinary
boundaries. This view, however, in the stringent sense, is incongruent with what I
described earlier as the “possible conceptual foundations” of scenographies of perception,
as the following illustration may demonstrate. Instead of pointing out, say, the conceptual
overlap between certain passages in Musil’s Die Verwirrungen des Zögling Törless and
Ernst Mach’s psychophysical theory of perception so as to show that this novel contains
related “knowledge” about perception, this study will seek to capture the conceptual
underpinnings of a given scenography of perception in its own terms, hence as operating
within the diegetic world.

Reading—perceiving—a poem or a prose text, this dissertation holds, means to be
drawn into its scenes, its world, wherein, Stanley Corngold points out, “you would have
to feel some of the things with some of the faculties that this [text] talks about” to make
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sense of it. This is not to say that discursive background and historical context are irrelevant. I simply want to insist on the categorical difference between the discursive knowledge about perception that may have impacted the authorial conception of a given scenography and the acuity of perception that we, the readers of today, may experience in response to that scenography. Considering the former as the source of the latter would confuse the historical location and genesis of a work with readerly actuality. The sensuous force that pertains to a given scenography of perception, this study thus proposes, is nothing external to its diegetic world but a reality emerging from within that diegetic world. It is a force to be found in the diegetic processuality of this scenography and to be realized and also embodied through readerly aesthesis.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s recent essay *Stimmungen lesen* would relate to the present study if “reading” figured in its thesis and not only its title. In line with his earlier attempts to rehabilitate the category of presence against a host of poststructuralist scruples, Gumbrecht’s essay focuses on the reader’s intuitive bodily response to literary texts (“die intuitiv identifizierte Stimmung”). The deliberate lack of method, however, to which Gumbrecht admits, as well as the banality of most of the readings he presents, weakens the argument of his essay. With regard to the former point, Gumbrecht simply declares that the relationship between literary text and readerly response needs no theoretical or methodological reflection, even less a “heavy apparatus of footnotes,” because the felt Stimmung emerges spontaneously. Nor do textual ambiguities and, hence, the need for interpretative choices pose a problem, since: “Stimmungen sind gleichsam im Stande die hermeneutische Dimension zu überspringen.” The chapters on Thomas Mann’s novella *Tod in Venedig* and Shakespeare’s sonnets then reveal the type of
Überspringung to which Gumbrecht’s approach is susceptible. It is certainly true that the constant mention of the sultry Scirocco winds and weather in general means to instill the visceral Grundstimmung of Tod in Venedig, as Gumbrecht observes, and it is equally obvious that the main incidents of the novel proceed along a sequence of five different “climatic constellations” [Wetterlagen]. Gumbrecht maintains that these climatic Stimmungen felt by the reader of Tod in Venedig defy analysis and communication, because they are purely intuitive and sensual, spontaneous, preconceptual, nondiscursive—in brief, indescribable private epiphanies of corporeal presence. Once the struggle for the analysis and the communication of readerly experience is deemed both impossible and superfluous, however, the description of the corresponding Stimmung must itself turn into a vacuous platitude, as it happens when Gumbrecht finally characterizes “die Stimmung der Sonette von William Shakespeare” as a “komplexe Einheit von Tönen.”

Finally, books by Ralf Simon and Peter Utz were, by contrast, indispensible to the formulation of my own aesthesiological approach to scenographies of perception. Simon’s study Die Bildlichkeit des lyrischen Textes reappraises the traditional thought that images represent the inherent “knowledge” or content of lyrical poetry and literary texts in general. Theoretically, this study on poems by Hölderlin, Rilke, and George is based on the elaborate theory of iconicity (Bildlichkeit) that Simon expounded two years earlier in his book Der poetische Text als Bildkritik, combining phenomenological and iconological definitions of an image with structuralist semiotics, above all with Roman Jakobson’s theory of poeticity. The individual interpretations of poetry in Simon’s study rest on a crucial translation of rhetorical figures into scenic “actions”
[Handlungen], or “immanent scenes of action” [innere Szenen des Handelns]. Simon explains this translation in a dense passage:


An example for such a translation of rhetorical figures (text) into scenic actions (iconic representation) would be to understand the trope of prosopopeia—the personification or, literally, the “giving face to” some thing by addressing it verbally—as an act of looking: Someone casts a glance on an object that, in submitting an image of its shape and appearance, would seem to look back and return the gaze. Eventually, Simon also uses the term “scenography” to describe a poem as a “scripting of actions” [Handlungsskript]. 76 In his theoretical book on literary iconicity, Simon defines a “scenography” more closely as the combined “substrate” [Inbegriff] of the “site” [Schauplatz] and the “profiles of interaction” [Interaktionsprofile] between actants that are associated with this site. 77
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Obviously, there is some overlap between Simon’s definitions and my earlier definition of a scenography. Both approaches construe a scenography, the objective pole of the text-reader relation, as a synthetic ensemble of textual form and sensuous potential, which Simon terms *Bildlichkeit*. Moreover, a scenography describes, also for Simon, narrative action (*Interaktionsprofile*) and a spatial arrangement (*Schauplatz*), two elements that come together “im Begriff der Szene,” as the earlier quotation reads.

Yet there are also decisive discrepancies. On the one hand, Simon chose image instead of scene as his master term. My definition of a diegetic scene as an intersensory and intermedial space is at odds with the visual denotation of iconicity (*Bildlichkeit*). Additionally, it runs counter to common sense to describe the “image” as the “entire force field that encompasses the scene of beholder and beheld object” and so “gathers” and “controls” the movements of looking within the scene, as Simon holds. An ordinary logic would no doubt reverse this hierarchy, subordinating the individual image(s) to the scene as a whole. On the other hand, Simon conceives of literary iconicity as a purely textual property that is both “invisible and not interior” [nicht-sichtbare und zugleich als nicht-innerliche Bildlichkeit] and constantly “oscillates between an iconic and a logical pole.” Readerly aesthetics and recasting have no part in this whatsoever:

Ein naheliegendes Manöver besteht darin, den Text analog zur Musik als eine Partitur zu verstehen, die erst im Akt des Lesens Wirklichkeit gewinnt. Bilder würden dann im Lesen erzeugt, als intentionale Vorstellungskorrelate zum gelesenen Text. [...] Der Literaturwissenschaftler ist aber kein Psychologe und auch kein Kognitionswissenschaftler. Literaturwissenschaftlich relevant ist die Bilderfrage nur dann, wenn sie im Text nachgewiesen werden kann, wenn also beschreibbare Textbedingungen die Bildlichkeit möglich, wirklich oder gar unabweisbar machen. In diesem Sinne besteht bildkritische Literaturwissenschaft nicht in der phänomenologischen oder auch kognitiven Analyse der Rezeption,
Thus for Simon, poetic images are not a readerly achievement but a priori “generated by
texts” [textgeneriert]: “Textualität entwirft das Bild gewissermaßen als ihr internes
Anderes und bindet es dabei an die eigene, segmentierende und diskrete Zeichenform
zurück.” Stripped, however, of its phenomenal character, its visibility as well as its
viewer, what remains of the image? How can the image of a poetic text become
anschaulich if the reader—her sentient body and intentional agency, her interiority—is
bracketed out? How can sentences emerge as vivid images and graphic scenes before the
inner eye if not interpreted perceptually by their reader’s mind? And even if the image
could be a priori abstracted from the process of looking, what would distinguish such a
thoroughly abstract iconic entity from purely intelligible objects, from concepts, if not its
sensuous character?

In developing the idea that both actual and textual perception require narrative
recasting and active embodiment, this study evidently runs counter to Simon’s objectivist
notion of iconicity. Sense experience coheres, this study contends, by virtue of a form-
giving narration, a cognitive recasting based on various aesthesiological schemata, while
it describes readerly aesthesis as the subjective recasting of text into diegetic scenes. This
is not to say an actual or a literary scene of perception would be utterly devoid of
external, objective limitations; distinctive objective dispositions or textual stipulations
clearly delimit the freedom of perception. Nor does this negate the very possibility to
extrapolate a unifying logic or structuring relationality from a scene of perception. Yet in
contrast to Simon, who mobilizes the “force field” of iconicity to do so, this study
suggests that we conceive of this logic as an aesthesiology, as an evolving “story” that connects beholder and beheld object. A processual logic—an aesthesiology—is better suited, this study will argue, than the unmoving objectivity of an image to conceptualize the crossing of gazes and the images that appear within an actual or a literary scene of looking. It is for this reason that the term image is virtually absent from the later chapter on scenographies of looking in Rilke’s middle period, whereas Simon understands Rilke’s thing-poems exactly as a “collection” [Sammlung] of poetic images of things.83

By contrast, Peter Utz’s Das Auge und das Ohr im Text offers readings that one might qualify as aesthesiological, such as an analysis of how the “process of perception and representation” [Wahrnehmungs- und Darstellungsvorgang] are intertwined in Goethe’s early poem Willkommen und Abschied.84 Utz’s theses regarding synesthesia in Romantic texts and his chapter on Novalis have left their mark on this dissertation as well. Generally, Utz describes an attitude—the rudiments of a method—that enable the critic to retrieve the sensuous force of a literary text and return it to the senses. The following passage encapsulates at least the ethos of the aesthesiological mode of reading that my Introduction sketched out and the following chapters will attempt to put into practice:

Auf die Sinnlichkeit des Textes gravitiert diese Studie hin, und von ihr geht ihre Textarbeit aus. Sie möchte erfahrbar machen, wie diese Sinnlichkeit sich im aktiven Leseprozess herstellt. Die Sinnlichkeit des Textes jedoch zum abstrakten Begriff zu erheben, wäre ein Widerspruch in sich selbst. Als Antithese zum naturwissenschaftlichen Diskurs über die Sinne ist sie nur konkret zur Anschauung zu bringen […] Nietzsches Zarathustra treibt dieses Paradox heraus, wenn er ultimativ fordert: „Eure eigenen Sinne sollt ihr zu Ende denken!” An dieses Ende, und darüber hinaus, gelangt die Literatur, wenn sie die Sinnlichkeit
That process of readerly aesthesis will be examined with reference to four distinctive authors of the long nineteenth century. Part One discusses Hegel’s theory of sense perception in the *Phenomenology*, which, by means of exemplary scenographies, conceives of sense perception not as an instantaneous event but rather as a narrative activity. Defining sensuous perception as the dialectic “story of its movement” [Geschichte ihrer Bewegung], Hegel speculates that perception requires a medium capable of stabilizing and storing (aufheben) its various moments. At first, the substantial thing seems to be the natural medium into which perception congeals. But thinghood proves unfit, so that Hegel introduces a processual notion of objecthood that sublates the perceptual movement precisely by means of narrative discourse.

Analyzing fragmentary notes by Novalis and passages from his two unfinished prose works, *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the opening chapter of Part Two explores how, for Novalis, the poetic activity—dichten—is entwined with, and in fundamental regards identical to, sense perception. This relation between perception and poetry can be described more closely as *Wechselbestimmung*, a Fichtean concept that Novalis freely appropriates and “poeticizes” especially in his *Fichte-Studien*. Finally, the emergence of the blue flower at the beginning of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is analyzed in detail. I conclude that the blue flower is the figure wherein perceptual and narrative processes converge in that this flower solicits aesthesiological series that endow the narration at once with poetic cohesion and sensuous force.
Introduction

The next chapter analyzes scenographies of looking in works of Rilke’s middle period. My main contention here is that looking proceeds in these works according to a reciprocal yet paradoxical exchange of glances between beholder and perceived object, the paradox being that this arrangement severs the spatial as well as temporal origin of looking from the beholder and thereby calls into question anthropocentric notions of vision. This aesthesiological reading casts a new perspective on Rilke’s frequent employment of anthropomorphisms, thus challenging views that regard this tendency as either the result of urban alienation and childhood trauma or a chiefly rhetorical device.

The final chapter of Part Two analyzes the scenographic entwinement of the musicality of the semiotic discourse and the narrated scenes of Proust’s Recherche. I propose that the very first utterance of the Recherche—“longtemps”—functions as a leitmotif, since it entwines sound and scene, or more precisely, an acoustic logic of recurrence with a mutable diegetic setup. In a second step, I show that the main storyline—the narrator’s becoming a writer—is connected by the leitmotivic recurrences and transmutations of Vinteuil’s music.

Thus, Part One continues to develop the hypothesis that aesthesis and diegesis depend on each other by conceptualizing the “story” of perception, while the readings offered in Part Two seek to actualize the distinctive sensuous potential—or literary senses—inscribed into texts by Novalis, Rilke, and Proust.
Part One: The “Story” of Perception
Hegel in the Swiss Alps

In July 1796, Hegel went on a week-long hike through the Bernese Alps. This trip, for which he teamed up with three fellow tutors from Germany teaching at Bern, gave rise perhaps to his finest literary achievement, the so-called Bericht einer Alpenwanderung.² Hegel had been working for the past years in Bern, serving as tutor to the children of local patricians, the Steigers. It seems he wanted to—or felt he should—seize his last chance to enjoy the magnificent landscape, the natural treasures surrounding Bern, before leaving for Stuttgart and Frankfurt. Christoph Meiner's Briefe über die Schweiz, a popular volume at that time and part of the Steigers’ library, encouraged these plans. Meiners praises above all the “irresistible magic” [unwiderstehliche Zauberkraft] of Bern and its surroundings, and the traveling party used Meiners’s book as their guide.³ But unlike Meiners, and all the other ardent lovers of the Swiss Alps (from Rousseau and Goethe to Wordsworth, Byron, and the Shelleys), Hegel found the Alpine landscape quite boring. The much vaunted mountains and glaciers were especially disappointing. In his Bericht, composed during or shortly after the trip and possibly intended for publication, he writes that Aiger and Jungfrau, the two main summits of the Bernese Alps, made no impression on him at all. Seeing them gave no “feelings of greatness and sublimity” [das Gefühl der Größe und Erhabenheit] (384), just as the close encounter with a “famous glacier” nearby, on the way to Meiringen, gave no more satisfaction than “jetzt einem solchen
Gletscher so nahe zu sein, daß ich ihn berührte und sein Eis anblicke“ (386).

Apparently, Hegel was more fascinated by local customs and culture, which he discusses in some detail, than those selfsame mountains, altogether “bleak desserts” [öde[ Wüsteneien] (391) of stone.

What is it exactly that Hegel finds so boring and dissatisfying about the Alpine landscape? His experience of the Grindelwald glaciers provides one possible answer.

Looking at these formations causes the intellect to go blank: “Man kann es nur eine neue Art von Sehen nennen, die aber dem Geist schlechterdings keine weitere Beschäftigung gibt” (385). Far from seeing “something lovely,” the only, and rather profane, thing to notice is the broad “filthy street” [kothige Straße] formed by meltwater trickling downhill (385). Generally, Hegel explains later, the problem is that

Mountains are dead masses of stone, and unlike local customs, their appearance does not provide very much to think about. Their selfsame appearance brings nothing else to mind—thus the boredom of the hike.

Obviously, this verdict speaks against writers who romanticize the “sublime Alps.” But it also deflates the anthropomorphization of nature in general, a tendency inherent to a certain teleological worldview, as Hegel argues (390–91). Apart from
anthropomorphic or otherwise mythical tales, which Hegel deems a ludicrous thing of the past,\(^4\) the only manner in which human understanding can relate to these mountains is to describe them scientifically, as mineralogists do, for instance. The only idea to be had from nature is that of causal necessity, such as one discovers in observing waves of the river Aare crashing against the rocks: “Nirgend erhält man einen so reinen Begriff vom Müssen der Natur, als beim Anblick des ewig wirkungslosen und ewig fortgesetzten Rasens einer hervorgetriebenen Welle gegen solche Felsen” (390).

The disappointing lack of intellectual content is one reason for Hegel’s boredom with the Alps, but another looms in the Bericht as well. It concerns the uniform rigidity of these mountains—the tiresome “it is so”-and-not-otherwise of their image. Hegel expands on this issue in comparing the dynamic of a certain waterfall, a natural spectacle he for once calls “majestic,” to the static nature of a painting. Looking at this waterfall, he states, affords a charming sight because of its tumbling waves:

\[
\text{[welche] den Blick des Zuschauers beständig mit sich niederziehen und die er [der Zuschauer] doch nie fixiren, nie verfolgen kann, denn ihr Bild, ihre Gestalt, löst sich alle Augenblicke auf, wird in jedem Moment von einem neuen verdrängt, und in diesem Falle sieht er ewig das gleiche Bild, und sieht zugleich, daß es nie dasselbe ist.} \text{[388]}
\]

The interplay between continuity and change that the waterfall places before the eyes—the tension between a permanent Gestalt and a perpetual movement that constantly alters this Gestalt—is fascinating. A painting depicting the waterfall, by contrast, appears as the same at all moments:

\[
\text{Die sinnliche Gegenwart des Gemäldes erlaubt der Einbildungskraft nicht, den vorgestellten Gegenstand auszudehnen, sondern sie faßt ihn so auf, wie er sich dem Gesicht darstellt. […] im besten Gemälde [muß] das Anziehendste, das}
\]

54
Looking at the painting would deprive one of seeing the spectacle (Schau-spiel) presented by the actual perception of the waterfall: the dynamic interaction of continuity and change, or identity and difference. Not even the imagination can overcome the concreteness of the painting, Hegel argues, because it is rigidly delimited by the permanent shape of the image—“by definite contours” [in bestimmten Umrissen]. The panorama of the Alps disappoints in a similar manner, displaying a static image of “permanence” [Dauer] without change and “play” [Spiel], as the earlier quote reads (391–92). In both cases we only see selfsame permanence without perceptible, indeed without conceivable, change.

The early Bericht thus can be seen to raise dual philosophical issues that will persist throughout Hegel’s thinking. On the one hand, the Bericht highlights the severe opposition between the natural, physical world and the realm of spirit (Geist)—and it seems that it took Hegel a couple of years to figure out that philosophical thinking about nature amounts to more than a “theoretical fancy” [eine theoretische Müßigkeit], which “not without reason” [nicht mit Unrecht] does not yet appeal to young people, as the middle-aged school director Hegel notes in 1812. On the other hand, the Bericht casts a first light on the interplay between self-identical continuity and change that Hegel attributes to sense perception. Despite its traditional meaning of “the science of the
The Dialectic Force of the Sensuous

sensuous, of sensation” [die Wissenschaft des Sinnes, des Empfindens], it is not in
Hegel’s so-called Ästhetik that the dynamic of this interplay is worked out. Instead,
Hegel treats the dynamic of sense perception in the inaugural chapters of the 1807
Phänomenologie des Geistes [Phenomenology of Spirit], to which I turn now.

The status of sensory experience in the Phenomenology

The two opening chapters of the Phenomenology on “sense-certainty” [sinnliche
Gewißheit] and object “perception” [Wahrnehmung] serve to demonstrate the deficiency
or “untruth” of knowledge immediately derived from sensuous experience. Their two
principal insights are as follows. Although sense-certainty, the most elementary form of
sensory apprehension, at first feels like the “richest” truth of all, as if it were an identical
representation of the object in its full being, it “in fact” [in der Tat] turns out to be the
“poorest” and “most abstract” truth of all. For, if you stop feeling and start thinking about
that kind of certainty for just a moment, Hegel argues, it becomes apparent that it hardly
knows anything: “sie sagt von dem, was sie weiß, nur dies aus: es ist” (PdG 82). The
essential knowledge of sense certainty could be thus characterized precisely with the
tautological phrase that Hegel uses in his early Bericht: “it is so.” This phrase holds true
no matter what it specifically means to designate, be it a certain tree, this one night, or a
Swiss glacier.

The knowledge of a perception, though more specific with regard to its content, is
in other regards even more spurious. Although sense perception purports to take in the
whole truth of the object, the object it really obtains seems to be nothing but pure
“contradiction” [Widerspruch], indeed a self-induced “deception” [Täuschung], Hegel
explains. Such “contradiction” concerns, roughly speaking, the dualism between the
particularity of the object and the universality of its attributes, which figures on the level
of concrete perceptual experience as paradox that the perceived thing appears to be “both
one and many, discrete and continuous, at the same time,” as Stephen Houlgate puts it.9
The perceiving consciousness can defend this contradiction only “by means of sophistry”
[die Sophisterei des Wahrnehmens] (PdG 105). Juggling various, fundamentally
contradictory aspects of a single perceptual object, this kind of sophistry indicates for
Hegel the opportunism practiced by “so-called common sense” [der wahrnehmende, oft
so genannte gesunde Menschenverstand] (PdG 105). Indeed, on Hegel’s account the
same sophistry is still operative in the writings of his great precursor. Later on, in the
1830 *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* [*Encyclopedia of the
Philosophical Sciences*], Hegel explicitly claims that the contradiction supposedly
inhering in sense perception represent the main defect of the Kantian system as well as
the shortcoming of empirical science in general.10

At first, this whole line of reasoning may seem quite abstruse. Many readers
might consider Hegel’s assertions a grotesque violation precisely of sound reason and
common sense, if not “bombastical nonsense […] bordering on madness,” the conceit of
“a mere swaggerer and charlatan,” or even more plainly “a brain-damaging and
stupifying pseudo-philosophy” [geistesverderbliche und verdummende […]
Afterphilosophie].11 For Hegel, however, the deficiencies of sense-certainty and
perception just indicate the very necessity for consciousness of turning away from
sensuousness in favor of the supersensible realm of thinking so as to solve the
contradictions that arise with sensuous experience. In Hegel’s words:
Dem Bewußtsein ist in der Dialektik der sinnlichen Gewißheit das Hören und Sehen usw. vergangen, und als Wahrnehmen ist es zu Gedanken gekommen, welche es aber erst im unbedingt Allgemeinen zusammenbringt. [PdG 107]

Seeking this “absolute universal,” the true fundament and principle of all knowing, consciousness explores the world of the understanding (Verstand). But once the understanding has also failed in clarifying the earlier contradictions, consciousness discovers this universal to be that which it has been all along: self-consciousness. Hegel articulated this point, the a priori reflexive nature of all forms of consciousness, with unusual clarity in the 1822 lecture on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit: “Es gibt kein Bewußtsein ohne Selbstbewußtsein,” he said. Hegel considers the a priori reflexive nature of consciousness a crucial insight, established by his Phenomenology, to have first originated, on the one hand, in Kant’s famous recognition that the transcendental “synthetic unity of apperception” marks the “highest principle” of all cognition, and, on the other, in Fichte’s insistence that consciousness must reflexively posit its existence before it can have cognition of an object. Fichte is explicitly mentioned as a source in the same context of the 1822 lecture. The enormous debt to Kant’s idea of the transcendental unity of apperception is acknowledged at the outset the Part Two of the Wissenschaft der Logik, the so-called “Begriffslogik,” where Hegel praises this idea as the “deepest and most accurate insight” of the Critique of Pure Reason.

Discovering its fundamentally self-reflexive nature, consciousness understands that sense perception cannot succeed without conceptual activity. Sensuousness, that is, is not exempt from the “absolute synthetic activity” [absolute synthetische Tätigkeit] of thinking, as Hegel notes as early as 1802 in the essay Glauben und Wissen. This argument undoes the radical difference between intuition and concept, sensuous
receptivity and cognitive spontaneity, as set down by Kant in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [Critique of Pure Reason]. Yet Hegel had already concluded in 1801, in his so-called *Differenzschrift*, that a philosophical system must aim at describing “the totality of empirical consciousness as the objective totality of self-consciousness” [die Totalität des empirischen Bewußtseins als die objektive Totalität des Selbstbewußtseins] if it is to lay claim to rigorous coherence and validity, or in short, truth.\(^\text{14}\)

From that standpoint, sensuousness cannot be considered an autonomous faculty. As in that early judgment, so in the later *Phenomenology*, all possible forms of knowledge, including the empirical knowledge of objects, require increasingly more self-reflexive formations of consciousness and not, as in Kant, a dualistic constellation of concepts and intuitions, the synthesis of which, Kant believed, remains an indecipherable “art hidden in the depths of the human soul” [eine verborgene Kunst in den Tiefen der menschlichen Seele].\(^\text{15}\) Instead of conceiving knowledge as a “bipolar relation” between external reality (object) and subjective representation, “the speculative goal [of the *Phenomenology*],” Robert Pippin states, “can only be a knowledge by reflective subjectivity of its own criteria of knowledge, and hence of objectivity.”\(^\text{16}\) Thus it is that self-consciousness—a consciousness that is in itself the truth for itself, internalizing and finally reconciling the *Entzweiung* of objective facts and subjective knowledge—is pronounced by the *Phenomenology* “the genuine home of truth” [das einheimische Reich der Wahrheit] (PdG 139).

A later characterization sums up this general trajectory of the *Phenomenology* exceptionally well in describing true knowledge—the *telos* of consciousness—precisely
as a process of self-determination. According to Hotho’s record, Hegel proclaimed in the
course of his 1822 lectures on the philosophy of subjective spirit that

Der Geist ist ewiger Proceß, ewige Bewegung. Das Wissen hat den Punkt[,] sich
die Voraussetzung seiner selbst zu machen […] Der Weg zum Ziel, der selbst ein
absolutes Moment des Geistes ist, dieser stellt sich am endlichen Geist dar, er ist
die Erfüllung des Geistes […] Man hört oft sprechen, daß es Thatsachen des
Bewußtseins gäbe, und daß diese das Erste des Geistes wären. Auf dem
Standpunkt des Bewußtseins ist diß in Wahrheit der Fall, aber der Geist muß die
Thatsachen des Bewußtseins erklären, zeigen, daß der Inhalt der Thatsachen
Thaten des Geistes sind, keine Sachen, die dem Geist nur gegeben wären. Die
Stufen des Geistes sind also die Bestimmungen des Objects so, daß diese
Bestimmungen durch den Geist gesetzt werden.17

These remarks may suffice to introduce the general trajectory of the

Phenomenology’s first section, concerning the three basic shapes of consciousness sense-
certainty, object perception, and understanding. In that teleological perspective,
especially the chapters on sense-certainty and object perception must appear as
transitional passages, “rather murky” and hardly “begging significant questions,” as
Pippin sees it, since they only initiate the long quest for the truly unconditioned universal
without indicating the final goal, however, their totally self-conscious and entirely self-
determining or, in a word, free spirit.18 Taken as a segment of its own accord, however,
the chapters on sense-certainty and object perception might be more original, but also
more convoluted, contradictory, and refracted.19 The stakes of these initial chapters are
much higher than Hegel conveys in those moments when he belittles sense-certainty and
perception. The sheer amount of critical commentary on these two chapters, including
studies in book length, no doubt indicates their central import.20 And indeed, Hegel
concedes in retrospect that the one and only method on which the Phenomenology
rests—the “self-fulfilling skepticism” [sich vollbringende[r] Skeptizismus] enacted by consciousness, its persistent self-doubt (PdG 72)—manifests itself primarily in the form of both sense-certainty and perception. This skeptical method (the seeds of which Hegel found in the work of philosopher Wilhelm Traugott Krug, whom he liked to mock during his Jena years)\(^2\) proceeds by way of a negative or “dialectic movement” \([\text{dialektische Bewegung}]\) (PdG 160). It is this negative or dialectic movement, as we shall see, that obtains, on Hegel’s account, primarily in sensuous experience, the most elementary form of conscious experience. Since this negative or dialectic movement also entails the development of the more sophisticated forms of conscious experience, such as self-conscious reflection, moral introspection, even truly philosophical or “absolute” reasoning, he can assert, without contradiction, that these forms always remain “the reflection out of the being of the sensuous and perceptual world” \([\text{die Reflexion aus dem Sein der sinnlichen und wahrgenommenen Welt}]\) (PdG 138). Consequently, the \textit{Phenomenology} chapters on sense-certainty and perception do not just pave the way for the emergence of self-consciousness and all the other, more sophisticated formations of spirit but in fact constitute the actual, corporeal experience thereof, as well as their dialectical foundation. Hegel here exemplifies the idea of the dialectic in and through perception and simultaneously derives a rudimentary theory of sense perception from that negative “movement” which constitutes a Hegelian dialectic as such. It is the force of the sensuous that impels the dialectic movement as such, and so it is indeed inevitable that certain key conflicts of sense experience, as Ryosuke Ohashi observes, will be “repeated […] until absolute knowledge is attained.”\(^2\)
To illuminate this point, it will be necessary to grapple primarily with two interconnected issues. On the one hand, one needs to fathom the deficiencies that Hegel detects in sense-certainty and perception, because they are by no means evident. It will take considerable terminological efforts—*die Arbeit des Begriffs* in Hegel’s terms—to understand that sense-certainty should be undermined by, roughly speaking, a problematic relation between objective being and subjective intention, whereas object perception should be marred by the “contradiction” between objective unity and the diversity of properties, that arises, Charles Taylor explains, if one tries “to combine these two dimensions in order to form a stable static image of the thing” as an either/or.  

The other issue to grapple with concerns Hegel’s mode of presentation, the ways and means by which Hegel renders the dialectical *process* of perception. This issue may at first seem trivial, because the communication of abstract ideas always raises the question of their adequate linguistic representation. But in Hegel’s case, this problem is aggravated by the fact that he construes the movement of perception chiefly as a “logical” process, which is to say, as a movement and a relation that gains shape in language (*logos*), through acts of articulation that are simultaneously acts of thinking (*logos*). The explicit articulation and reflexive observation of this logical procedure coincides with the task of the philosopher, Hegel, in that he claims to portray (*darstellen*) the operations and relations by which consciousness determines (*bestimmen*) its immediate sensations. In doing so, Hegel furnishes the reader with scenes—with textual scenes, to be precise, or with scenographies—that introduce her in a phenomenal, indeed staged way, to the most fundamental categories and methods of philosophy. In the case of sense-certainty and perception these are, first and foremost, the categories of time and space (which in
contrast to Kant are real attributes for Hegel), particularity and universality, being and essence, as well as the methods of positing, negation, opposition, and relational division through reflection. It is this odd fusion of representational and conceptual components that needs clarification. The obvious yet fundamental question is how the staged illustrations, which always involve both a spectatorial position and a certain phenomenal imagination, relates to the plain conceptual content of the chapters, which is neither spectatorial nor phenomenal but discursive in kind.

According to Hegel, the specific concept at which sensory perception naturally and unwittingly aims is substantial thinghood. But over the course of the two chapters, Hegel will conceive thinghood much less as a substantial matter than as an activity, indeed a dynamic “structure” that seeks to incorporate both the processual and the relational aspects of perception. This activist notion of thinghood results in a concept of objecthood generated through cognitive operations and cohering as a “story” or “history” (Geschichte). It is this concept of objecthood that establishes the kind of relationality that for Hegel reconciles the conflicts that emerge even in the most elementary stages of sensuous experience. Critically, this notion of objecthood emerges through sensuous perception, yet it remains in effect throughout the Phenomenology, serving to describe not only material objects (including living matter, such as masters and servants) but also increasingly abstract structures (family, state, religion, and finally world history). A static notion of thinghood, by contrast, according to which every thing is either one selfsame substance with no internal differentiation or merely an association of diverse qualities without permanent unity, will prove unfit to mediate the conflicts that emerge already in sense perception. Demonstrating the deficiencies of these static notions of thinghood is
The Dialectic Force of the Sensuous

an extremely critical step for Hegel’s entire enterprise. For if either notion of thinghood could resolve the conflicts and contradictions that, according to Hegel, obtain in sense experience, it would not be necessary for consciousness to recognize itself first as self-consciousness and, subsequently, as *Geist*. A metaphysics of substance would prevail, according to which the world can be sufficiently explained by dividing all things into causally interacting substances that are either simple or compounded. Hegel could not declare that “substance must become subject,” as he famously does in the preface of the *Phenomenology*, and there would be no need to break with Spinozism, which is for Hegel the pinnacle of a monistic metaphysics of substance.25
Certainty obtained through immediate sensation

The first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, entitled “Die sinnliche Gewißheit oder das Diese und das Meinen,” conceptualizes the initial moment when consciousness becomes a *knowing* consciousness. Therefore, it investigates the moment when consciousness becomes aware of some thing and so notes its current existence, the fact that “this” thing “is,” right here and right now. This moment apparently establishes an immediate contact, an immediate relation between an individual consciousness, “me,” and an individual item, “this” thing:

[W]eder Ich noch die Sache hat darin die Bedeutung einer mannigfaltigen Vermittlung, Ich nicht die Bedeutung eines mannigfaltigen Vorstellens oder Denkens, noch die Sache die Bedeutung mannigfaltiger Beschaffenheiten, sondern die Sache ist; und sie ist, nur weil sie ist; sie ist, dies ist dem sinnlichen Wissen das Wesentliche, und dieses reine Sein oder diese einfache Unmittelbarkeit macht ihre Wahrheit aus. [PdG 82]

It is this immediate *relation* between a receptive subject and the noticed sense datum that Hegel calls sense-certainty. Naturally, this immediate certainty—which already in this early definition appears dangerously tautological: “sie ist, nur weil sie ist”—is obtained by means of sensation, while the certainty *that* the object “is” can be repeatedly confirmed through further acts of sensation. Therefore, sensory intention or “meaning”
[Meinen], as the chapter title terms it, is the way to confirm and also retain the gained certainty about “this” thing.

It should be noted that Hegel employs the German word *meinen* in the sense-certainty chapter in three different senses, only two of which are similarly invoked by English “to mean.” First, this word characterizes the relationship between subject (perceiver) and object (perceived “this”) and the corresponding noun, Meinung, could be translated as “intention.” Second, *meinen* can in certain contexts also assume the meaning of “to mean” or “to intend to convey,” though this denotation is seldom invoked by the chapter. Third, *meinen* and Meinung have in German also the meaning of “to opine” and “opinion.” This meaning is somewhat antithetical to the primary meaning of *meinen* as “to intend.” However, the differences that these meanings convey are critical to the process of arriving at sense-certainty itself. For upon reflection, my immediate intention (Meinung) may turn out to be a mere opinion (again Meinung) that does not match up with the truth of the matter. This discrepancy introduces a moment of uncertainty and self-doubt. It was Kant’s *First Critique* that introduced the term *meinen* into the philosophic discussion in precisely that sense: as “ein mit Bewußtsein sowohl subjektiv, als objektiv unzureichendes Fürwahrhalten.”²⁷ It seems likely that Hegel’s deployment of *meinen* departs from that definition, since the aim of the sense-certainty chapter is to demonstrate precisely the epistemic insufficiency of sensory intention on both objective and subjective grounds. That is, sense-certainty will be proven mistaken with regard to both its knowledge of the object and the intentional procedures that furnish such knowledge.
The occurrence of sense-certainty as initially defined—as an immediate sensory apprehension of “this” object—does not, however, last much longer than the blink of an eye. You open your eyes and ears and, taking in the scene, immediately notice “this” thing over there. Being confronted with that particular thing in such a purely receptive way, you seem therefore to have obtained an immediate and certain record, its identical picture. Hegel calls the noticed particular “the This” [das Diese], an odd locution for an as yet unspecified particular that goes back to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, where it is termed τόδε τι, “some this.” The noticing or apprehension (*Auffassen*) of the particular object through bare sensory receptivity is presented as the simplest act of consciousness and hence as the most elementary form of knowledge. The seeming immediacy of the impression seems to put consciousness “in a position to grasp a thing as an individual,” as Robert Stern puts it, “without any abstraction from its unique specificity or pure particularity,” thus providing “the most important kind of knowledge, which is of things as concrete, singular entities.”28 Yet for Hegel, such a claim to immediate knowledge is misinformed by the opinion (*Meinung*) that one can directly intend (*meinen*) a particular. Exploiting the polysemy of *meinen*, the chapter thus converts the word into what Hegel calls a “speculative” term, one which, according to Hegel’s definition, unites at least “two opposed determinations” [zwei entgegengesetzte Bestimmungen].29

The notion of sensuousness or sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) which is operative in the sense-certainty chapter might be said to stem from Kant’s *First Critique*, because there Kant defines sensibility as “receptivity”—against a hunch to the contrary.30 Similarly, Kant’s *Anthropology*, first published in 1798, still defines sensibility as “receptivity” [Empfänglichkeit] that bears the “character of passivity” [Charakter der Passivität].31 Yet,
even as the chapter overrides Kant’s notion of sensibility as merely passive and receptive, it simultaneously underscores the absolute validity of another Kantian doctrine, namely his famous dictum that intuitions (Anschauungen) without concepts (Begriffe) remain blind. The sense-certainty chapter will demonstrate that felt sensuous immediacy, supposedly the result of pure receptivity, always already involves nonreceptive, conceptual mediation. This position not only expands on Kant’s dictum but in fact radicalizes it. For the dialectic of sense-certainty will undermine the clear distinction between spontaneity and receptivity, or conceptual activity and sensory apprehension, on which Kant insists throughout, even as he postulates their belonging-together.

Now, in what sense can sense-certainty be considered the most elementary form of knowledge? What is the epistemic content of any given sense-certainty? The moment of pure sensory receptivity establishes an immediate relation to the object of apprehension, by means of which a type of knowledge is produced that would seem to take in that object “in its complete entirety” [in seiner ganzen Vollständigkeit] (PdG 82). But in doing so, sense-certainty also introduces a distinction, namely, the difference between the noticing subject and the noticed object, which one could also call, in Hegel’s terms, the difference between the being-for-consciousness and the being-in-itself of the object (cf. PdG 78). As consciousness confronts this “main difference” [Hauptverschiedenheit] (PdG 82) obtaining in all experience, it assumes the basic structure of knowledge. For according to Hegel, this structure consists precisely of two discrepant, antithetical facets, such as truth versus knowledge or being versus appearance, hence of a dualism between ontological and epistemological truth claims. In the case of sense-certainty, the critical difference concerns the discrepancy between the noticed
particular (*das Diese*) on the one hand and the subjective intention, the intending (*das Meinen*) of that object on the other.

The acquisition of knowledge consists precisely in the cognitive processing and resolution of these dualisms and discrepancies. Hegel posits in the *Phenomenology* that knowledge is established by the comparison, indeed the contest between the supposed in-itself (*An-sich*) of an object (its supposed objective truth and ontological reality) and the object’s being-for-consciousness (its actual appearance and epistemological truth). Consciousness is the site where these mutually dependent relata—two equally valid truth claims—meet and the exact nature of their relationship is negotiated. Yet this negotiation does not concern the question of which truth claim takes precedence over the other, the ontological (objective) or the epistemological (subjective). Rather, it aims at a constellation that can combine the validity of both claims such that their difference, the “double nature” of truth, is still preserved.

Hegel outlines this comparative method (*Vergleichung* and *Selbst-Prüfung* are his terms) which consciousness employs to obtain absolutely true knowledge in a terribly convoluted passage of the Introduction (PdG 75–80). The way towards true knowledge involves not only one but many such discrepant meetings—it is the “path of *doubt*” [der Weg des Zweifels], after all (PdG 72). These in turn give rise to new discrepancies, to more self-estrangement and “oppositional doubling” [entgegensetzende Verdopplung] (PdG 23), which obtains according to Hegel not only within consciousness but also within reason and spirit itself. Even “absolute spirit” itself remains subject to this double nature of truth, as Walter Jaeschke points out, its manifest double or material other being
Sense-Certainty according to the *Phenomenology* (Processuality)

world history. Absolute spirit, too, must actualize itself in order to be something rather than nothing.\(^{34}\)

Conscious knowledge remains subject to similarly antithetical disjunctions up until the last chapter of the *Phenomenology*. The method of consciousness for progressing in its knowledge is to juxtapose, compare, and finally sublate (*aufheben*), in the threefold meaning of cancelling, surpassing, and yet preserving that Hegel may have derived from Schiller’s eighteenth letter on the *Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* and briefly glosses in the chapter on object perception (*PdG* 94).\(^{35}\) Only as conscious knowing is finally elevated to “absolute knowledge,” to the unconditioned philosophical concept, are the previous binaries sublated in the full, threefold sense of the term, Hegel claims, which is to say, not only canceled out and elevated but also persevered (*aufbewahrt*).

Even though this first chapter of the *Phenomenology* is concerned with sense-certainty as the most elementary form of knowledge, Hegel stipulates that no intellectual activity, no apperception may intervene in obtaining this certainty (“von dem Auffassen das Begreifen abzuhalten,” *PdG* 82). By excluding “apperception” [Begreifen] from the scene, it isolates a “simple,” that is, a purely immediate and exclusively receptive instant of aesthesis, which supposedly produces the certainty that “this” thing exists right here, right now. The analytic work of the sense-certainty chapter is the closer definition of this instant of simple aesthesis and its claims to supplying an immediate certainty. To do so, Hegel distinguishes three moments or phases of sense-certainty. These he illustrates by means of three examples or, indeed, by means of three exemplary scenes that he shows to “us,” the readers of the *Phenomenology*. Each of these scenes (or, given that they are in
fact written rather than shown, scenographies) represents an abstraction in that they isolate, even “freeze” specific parameters for analytic purposes.

In the first phase of sense-certainty, Hegel isolates the emerging certainty delivered by the senses as pure *Ein-fall*, as absolutely passive “in-come” or intake (PdG 83–86). The noticed particular—“this” thing over there—is imagined to be apprehended without any losses and no activity on the part of the subject, which thus functions as a merely passive, receptive medium. Indeed, the perceiving subject is bracketed out altogether so as to isolate the pure spatiotemporal existence of “this” particular object.

In the second phase, he shifts the attention to the subject pole (PdG 86–87). Subjective noticing comes to the fore, that is, the fact that “I” must intend the object with my senses to see it. The object’s existence—its being “here” and “now”—then appears to depend primarily on “me,” on “my” perceiving it, on “my” sensory intention. This phase is also conceived as one instant with no real temporal extension. Still, in so noticing the object the subject for the first time becomes aware of “the main difference” [die Hauptverschiedenheit] (PdG 83) into which any instantiation of sense-certainty at once dissolves: percipient versus objective datum, or more generally knowing subject (consciousness) versus objective truth (the object in itself).

The third phase connects both poles (PdG 87–90). Unlike the two previous phases, however, this third phase involves temporal extension. It comprises the entire “movement” [Bewegung] of sense-certainty, hence entails a prolonged noticing of the object. Because of this temporal extension, and, specifically, the retentional procedures that necessarily go together with it, sense certainty finally becomes, on Hegel’s account, a
“story” or a “history”: “die einfache Geschichte ihrer Bewegung oder ihrer Erfahrung” (PdG 90).³⁶

It is this “story” of perception or aesthesis that, each in his own way, the authors analyzed in this study tell—or rather allow to be read.

Deixis, negation, and abstraction

To illustrate the experience of “a real sense-certainty” [eine wirkliche sinnliche Gewißheit] (PdG 83), Hegel comes up with an infamous first example. Exemplification is necessary because the essential content of sense-certainty always concerns a concrete sensible “this.” But if it is true, as Hegel also postulated, that the epistemic content of this certainty reflects nothing more than bare spatiotemporal being, much of the example’s concrete specificity is set aside. Distinct sensations, the properties of the apprehended object, and the very act of perceiving—elements that Hegel does not discuss until the following chapter—are thus cut off.³⁷ Accordingly, there is a noticeable, indeed sensible difference between the abstract epistemic content of sense-certainty as bare deictic indication (this is…) and the concrete example Hegel gives thereof (…the night, for example). Beiherspielen is Hegel’s word for the surplus of sensory information that comes into play or, literally, “plays along” with sense-certainty, a word he obviously links to the German Beispiel.³⁸ Consequently, the word Beispiel denotes in Hegel’s usage not only “example” but also “instantiation,” the instantiation of a certain universal epistemological principle that allows for the apprehension of a concrete sensible “this.”³⁹

As mentioned before, with his first example, Hegel attempts to illustrate or portray (darstellen) the spatiotemporal form of existence of a particular “this” as such,
hence in abstraction from the noticing subject. Yet, can such existence be adequately absorbed at all? What kind of “truth,” Hegel asks, does sense-certainty “in effect” [in der Tat] acquire if it is construed as the passive result of pure receptivity? To clarify this question, Hegel addresses sense-certainty itself, thus framing the example as though sense-certainty was immersed in a scene of which “we,” his readers, are the spectators:

*Sie [sense-certainty]* ist also selbst zu fragen: *Was ist das Diese?* Nehmen wir es in der gedoppelten Gestalt seines Seins, als das *Jetzt* und als das *Hier,* so wird die Dialektik, die es an ihm hat, eine so verständliche Form erhalten, als es selbst ist. Auf die Frage: *was ist das Jetzt?* antworten wir also zum Beispiel: *das Jetzt ist die Nacht.* Um die Wahrheit dieser sinnlichen Gewißheit zu prüfen, ist ein einfacher Versuch hinreichend. Wir schreiben diese Wahrheit auf; eine Wahrheit kann durch Aufschreiben nicht verlieren; ebensowenig dadurch, daß wir sie aufbewahren. Sehen wir *Jetzt,*40 *diesen Mittag,* die aufgeschriebene Wahrheit wieder an, so werden wir sagen müssen, daß sie schal geworden ist. [PdG 84]

Naturally, Hegel’s example—or, rather, its written record—is flawed. The way he writes down the concrete instantiation of sense-certainty is already carefully devised. Standard grammar dictates that the sentence, “das Jetzt ist die Nacht,” should read: “jetzt ist Nacht.” “The Now,” by contrast, is not and never the night, not even during the night. The substantivized “Now” designates a universal concept, whereas “the night” names an empirical state, so that they differ as to their category. Yet it would appear that, in doing so, Hegel attempts to objectify and to freeze the intended moment in time—“this” moment, Now—so as to seize that individual moment in its pure spatiotemporal being, thus imitating the attitude of sense-certainty in its initial stage as it seeks to take in this one moment completely.

The question, “Was ist das Diese?,” performs the same type of substantivization, transforming the demonstrative pronoun “this” into both a conceptual noun and an
absolute, fixed ontological state, hence into “the This.” In fact, the entire chapter is based on this seemingly tiny but, in truth, weighty practice to substantivize and, thereby, reify demonstratives and indexicals, a step that necessarily obstructs their regular adverbial and pronominal, hence their ontic usage. Without even the faintest attempt to justify his aberrant substantivizations, Hegel declares “this” object to be “the This” and turns here and now into “the Here” and “the Now.” These substantivizations make it structurally impossible to produce a valid predication. These substantivized indexicals will always produce an incongruity, namely, the contradiction between a concrete predicate (“…is the night”) and a universal subject (“the Now”). It is precisely because of their functional universality, because they are conceptually independent of any particular referents, that indexicals can indeed indicate anything we mean and so fulfill their task of singling out a specific sense datum.41

To recognize this contradiction means to follow the argument which Hegel unfolds in the subsequent paragraphs. For the collision between particularity and universality that we observe in the example sentence renders the problem with which sense-certainty is confronted, namely, the disjunction between a noticed particularity—“this” individual moment—and the universal form by which the apprehended content of “this” moment—“night”—is intended or meant (meinen). Sense-certainty cannot be an immediate, direct rendering of a particular because the very act of seizing that particularity always already involves the articulate use of universally applicable deictics (this, here, now, etc.)—even as it is arrested by means of sensation only. In brief, sense-certainty can notice and apprehend a concrete, perceptible something only by way making use of universals, which, however, make no sense if employed as self-sufficient
reifications, as “the This,” “the Here,” “the Now,” hence as subjects that are independent from their transitory empirical reference.

But this first example of sense-certainty suggests something even more radical, since it profoundly disturbs the common understanding of the fundamental categories of time and space not only on subjective but also on objective or ontological grounds. Indeed, Hegel seems to propose that, even if it could behave as pure receptivity, hence without the need to intend (meinen) the sense datum by means of a deictic operation, sense-certainty cannot apprehend an individual “now” because this individual point in time has no positive objective being in itself. Any “now,” writes Hegel, depends as such on a certain negativity: “Das Jetzt selbst erhält sich wohl, aber […] als ein negatives überhaupt” (PdG 84).42 A certain point in time “maintains itself” [erhält sich] only as that which it is not, hence through negation. It is night “now” only because something else is not taking place at this very moment, namely the day. For that reason, any specific “now” exists “as a non-being” [als ein nicht seidendes] (PdG 84). This is true not just in subjective terms, with regard to “my” particular intention—which, again, is bracketed out in this first scenography anyway—but with regard to the temporal reality of the object as well. For the concrete temporal reality of an object, its “nowness,” is determined, Hegel states, by way of negation:

Dieses sich erhaltende Jetzt ist daher nicht ein unmittelbares; sondern ein vermitteltes, denn es ist als ein bleibendes und sich erhaltendes dadurch bestimmt, daß anderes, nämlich der Tag und die Nacht, nicht ist. Dabei ist es […] gleichgültig gegen das, was noch bei ihm herspielt; sowenig die Nacht und der Tag sein Sein ist, ebensowohl ist es auch Tag und Nacht […]. [PdG 84–85]
It is the fact that any now-point, or nowness as such, is independent of both concrete intentions and particular objects that enables the apprehension of “this” night, be it in utterance or merely in thought. However, since nowness—the objective category that enables the noticing of any object as existing “just now,” at this very moment—comes into being and endures “through negation,” it would be appropriately designated a negative universal:

Ein solches einfaches [Jetzt], das durch Negation ist, weder dieses noch jenes, ein nicht dieses [Jetzt], und ebenso gleichgültig, auch dieses wie jenes zu sein, nennen wir ein allgemeines [Jetzt]; das allgemeine [Jetzt] ist also in der Tat das wahre [Jetzt] der sinnlichen Gewißheit. [PdG 85]43

The generality or universality of any now-point, the “true now” [wahre Jetzt] that sense-certainty wants to take in, is based in the “negation” of any individual “this or that” [dieses wie jenes], thereby rendering an objective determination of deictic “truth” impossible. Hegel returns to this problematic, the negativity of nowness, in more detail in the third phase of sense-certainty, though this time not on objective grounds but from the perspective of the intending subject.

Hegel’s example demonstrating the objective, ontological negativity of any given point in space works in exactly the same way. The scene to be envisaged is written down as follows: “das Hier ist z.B. der Baum” (PdG 85). The tree can stand “here” only in not standing over there, for example, where the house is standing. Any particular here-point, too, or hereness as such designates a negative universal that is indifferent to, and independent of, any particular here. It is this negative universality of hereness, as Hegel will show also with his third phase of sense-certainty, that enables the subject to apprehend a particular here-point.
By virtue of these two examples, “the Now is the night” and “the Here is the tree,” Hegel highlights the fundamental discrepancy between the general “truth” and the felt concreteness of every object. We cannot absorb an individual “here” or “now”—“this” thing—in its pure objectivity or immediate spatiotemporal being because both denominators are always already afflicted with negativity, the products of negation. However, is it not the case, still, that we can intend or mean exactly this sense datum? This question anticipates precisely the conclusion that sense-certainty derives from its “experience” of these first exemplary scenes, so that subjective intention assumes the primary role in the second phase of sense-certainty.

In addition to demonstrating the negative universality of any given “here” or “now,” Hegel makes yet another fundamental point in the course of the chapter’s first phase. This point concerns the import of language and discursive articulation with regard to sense-certainty. The remark at first sounds somewhat offhand:

> Als ein Allgemeines sprechen wir auch das Sinnliche aus; was wir sagen, ist: Dieses, d.h. das allgemeine Diese, oder: es ist; d.h. das Sein überhaupt. Wir stellen uns dabei freilich nicht das allgemeine Diese oder das Sein überhaupt vor, aber wir sprechen das Allgemeine aus; oder wir sprechen schlechthin nicht, wie wir es in dieser sinnlichen Gewißheit meinen. Die Sprache aber ist, wie wir sehen, das Wahrhaftere; in ihr widerlegen wir selbst unmittelbar unsere Meinung; und da das Allgemeine das Wahre der sinnlichen Gewißheit ist und die Sprache nur dieses Wahre ausdrückt, so ist es gar nicht möglich, daß wir ein sinnliches Sein, das wir meinen, je sagen können. [PdG 85]

The discursive articulation of the content of sense-certainty disproves (widerlegen) the ostensible specificity and concretion of sense-certainty because the negative universality pertaining to the words “here” and “now” is readily understood by any speaker. The example sentences were of course deployed to precisely that end: to make visible the
The very nature of linguistic demonstratives and indexicals—the possibility, that is, to use them both as adverbs or nouns—directly reflects, on Hegel’s account, the objective nature of “here” and “now,” namely, their double function as particulars and universals. It is for this reason that language is “closer to the truth” [das Wahrhaftere] (PdG 85) than the felt concretion of sense-certainty, which can only privately “represent” the particular object.

That language should be “closer to the truth,” is certainly an unsurprising finding for a thinker who by definition aligns discursive language (logos) with conceptual thinking (logos).45 Nor is it surprising that a Christian philosopher would attribute to
language “the divine nature [die göttliche Natur]” (PdG 92), as Hegel explicitly does in the *Phenomenology*, for according to the famous preamble to the Gospel of John the word (*logos*) represents the very essence of God himself. Karl Löwith as well as Heidegger noted this so-called “onto-theological” dimension of Hegel’s philosophy: “Es gehört aber zum alles durchdringenden und doppeldeutigen Wesen der Hegelschen Philosophie, daß sie eine Philosophie des Geistes auf dem Standpunkt des christlichen Logos, daß sie überhaupt eine *philosophische Theologie* ist.”

However, one should not be mislead by the subcutaneously Christian rhetoric of the earlier quotations. Hegel here postulates much less an “onto-theology” as he makes a case for language being the primordial, the “divine” litmus test for any truth claim. Discursivity, says Hegel, is the one and only medium to evaluate truth claims. This methodological presupposition remains intact throughout the *Phenomenology*, perhaps indeed in all of Hegel’s works. Language is both the means of indicating and solving those discrepancies between epistemological presuppositions and ontological realities that arise in the course of the *Phenomenology*.

This methodological presupposition, which came to light in the first phase of sense-certainty, has a radical consequence with regard to the very nature of knowledge, of truth as such. Thoroughly condemning mystical reverie (*Schwärmerei*) as well as the notorious intuition of the absolute—the night “in which all cows are black,” as he calls it in the Preface (PdG 22)—Hegel firmly places the criteria of objective truth *between* two subjects. Truth becomes an intersubjective structure, a discursive procedure that Hegel characterizes, with a famous shorthand, as the “*I that is we* and the *we that is I*” [*Ich, das *Wir*, und *Wir*, das *Ich* ist*] (PdG 145). This phrase, no doubt, provides not only the
elementary “concept of spirit” [Begriff des Geistes] and therefore absolute truth but, moreover, a metaphorical shorthand for the intersubjective nature of language as such, wherein and whereby the respective matters of truth are at once constituted and identified. 48 Indeed, “only explicit articulation is speculative conveyance” [nur das Aussprechen […] ist spekulative Darstellung] (PdG 61), the preface declares towards the end, while “agreement with others” [Übereinkunft mit anderen], the felicitous outcome of a dialogue, counts as the sole valid philosophical proof, indeed as the “root of humanity” [Wurzel der Humanität] (PdG 64). For Hegel, then, objective experience is always bound up with language, its own divided—universal and particular as well as intersubjective—structure, even when this experience is construed as being “purely” and “immediately” sensuous in kind. Without the mediation of language or, at least, quasi-linguistic articulation, there is no “this,” nor “now” or “here,” and even less a consciousness thereof. The “truth of an object (Gegenstand) is only to be found in the discourse about it,” as George di Giovanni sums it up,

so that any opaqueness as to what that object is, or whether it is at all, must be resolved from within the original discourse itself by developing it according to rules internal to it. There is no exit from language. This is the central point of Hegel’s position and the meaning of his repeated claim that the content of discourse is generated by its form. 49

This methodological presupposition has profound consequences for the Phenomenology’s mode of presentation: Hegel’s discourse must reflect the intersubjective being of knowledge and truth—a method that applies also as knowledge is construed in its most elementary form, as sense-certainty. The Phenomenology enacts this intersubjective, indeed dialogic method by portraying (darstellen) the various formations
of knowledge precisely in the form of different dramatic scenes, as was mentioned earlier on. This means, more precisely, that the internal developments that consciousness supposedly undergoes as it strives for absolutely true knowledge, including the self-reflections by which a consciousness would internally observe its epistemic becoming, are externalized for the sake of illustration—put, as it were, on the “phenomenological stage.” Consciousness is functionally divided within these scenes of illustration. A “natural consciousness” personates the epistemic striving, the pure but also naïve will to knowledge, while the place of observation and reflection is kept vacant, allowing the reader to take this open seat. Accordingly, the basic diegetic setup of these scenic illustrations consists in the following scenography: The “naïve” part of consciousness assumes the role of the actor on stage who variously represents the dramatis personae that emerge and perish on its progressive Bildungsweg, while the reader takes the role of the analytic spectator or, in Greek, theōros. The reader becomes the phenomenological spectator or, literally, theoretician who oversees and judges the actions as well as the shortcomings of consciousness. The passages with narratorial explanations and definitions that connect the countless scenic illustrations of the Phenomenology provide “us,” the phenomenological spectators, with additional details so as to come to informed conclusions. The narrator then often addresses the reader-spectator in a conspiratorial manner, reminding him of what counts as truth “for us,” in contrast to the current and often spurious convictions of consciousness. The Phenomenology thus presents its doctrines as a series of scenes of action that are epically interconnected, as Friedrich Kittler summarizes:

Die philosophische Interpretation hat folglich die Aufgabe, ihrem dialektischen Drama wie ein Dramenzuschauer zuzusehen, ihrem Selbstaussprechen ebenfalls
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wie ein Dramenzuschauer zuzuhören und schließlich zu registrieren, daß die Geistesgestalten alle am Widerspruch zwischen dem, was sie tun, und dem, was sie von ihrem Tun wissen oder sagen, zugrundegehen. Ich möchte Sie nicht mit Hegelischen Begriffen, die diese Dramatik in eine Mischung aus alter Philosophensprache und Alltagsdeutsch übersetzen, langweilen, weise aber doch darauf hin, daß die Selbstaussprache der Geistesgestalten An-sich-Sein und ihre Rezeption durch den Dramenzuschauer Für-uns-Sein heißt. Dramenzuschauer besagt dabei allerdings nicht mehr dasselbe wie in Goethes und Schillers Gattungsführung, wo Zuschauer vor lauter Spannung in die reine Gegenwart einer Handlung abstürzten; es heißt ganz im Gegenteil, durch Vor- und Rückgriffe Übersicht zu wahren und insofern wie ein Epenzuhörer zu agieren.  

Evidently, Hegel’s first illustration of sense-certainty—“the Now is the night”—stages a phenomenological scene or, to use Kittler’s expression, a “dialectical drama” in the sense as specified above. Since especially the first, but also the second, chapter of the *Phenomenology* show many such scenes in order to convey or represent (darstellen) their conceptual points; indeed, their scenic mode of presentation is inextricably entwined with the conceptual arguments of these chapters. In other words, the main arguments of these chapters are scenographic in mode.

If it is true that sense-certainty as conceived in this first phase—as passive receptivity—cannot absorb “the This” in all the riches of its concrete existence, as initially expected, but only as a negative universality, only as “the empty or indifferent Now and Here” [diesem leeren oder gleichgünigen Jetzt und Hier] (PdG 85), this certainty actually consists in the “abstraction” [Abstraktion] that Hegel simultaneously calls “the purely universal” [das rein Allgemeine] (PdG 84). Unable to immediately incorporate objective existence as it is, sense-certainty is related to the object solely through “negation and mediation” [Negation und Vermittlung]:
This insight—which necessarily follows from the negativity of both Here and Now as examined above—gives rise to the second phase of sense-certainty. As the concrete spatiotemporal being of an object cannot be directly taken in but only intended through “our meaning” [unsere Meinung], so meaning must play the primary role in noticing a particular “this.” My particular intention must be the determining source of concretion, as the second scenography presumes:

Die Kraft ihrer Wahrheit [viz., the truth of sense-certainty] liegt also nun im Ich, in der Unmittelbarkeit meines Sehens, Hörens, und so fort; das Verschwinden des einzelnen Jetzt und Hier, das wir meinen, wird dadurch abgehalten, daß Ich sie festhalte. Das Jetzt ist Tag, weil ich ihn sehe; das Hier ein Baum, eben darum. [PdG 86]

Yet felt certainties do not gain general validity from their basis in a subject. Any subject can contradict “my” sensory intention, as when, Hegel goes on to argue, one sees “here” not a tree but a house. Both instances of sense-certainty are based on the method of “authentication”—“Beide Wahrheiten haben dieselbe Beglaubigung, nämlich die Unmittelbarkeit des Sehens und die Sicherheit und Versicherung beider über ihr Wissen; die eine verschwindet aber in der anderen” (PdG 86)—yet they produce different results. Consequently, it cannot be just “my” private seeing and hearing that authenticates objective existence. A purely subjective definition of sense-certainty thus runs into
troubles analogous to those encountered in the first phase, for “my” intention is not immediately definite and unequivocal but presupposes an abstract universal—the functional or indexical “I”—that becomes concrete and particular only through negation. What “I,” my body, feels and means must be specified by contrasting “my” intention in utterance or thought with that other intention that is not mine. Again the necessity for abstraction—or negation and mediation—subverts the immediate givenness and seemingly self-contained specificity of “my” sense-certainty:

Was darin [viz., in my subjective meaning] nicht verschwindet, ist Ich, als allgemeines [Ich], dessen Sehen weder ein Sehen des Baums noch dieses Hauses, sondern ein einfaches Sehen ist, das, durch die Negation dieses Hauses usf. vermittelt, darin ebenso einfach und gleichgültig gegen das, was noch beiherspielt, gegen das Haus, den Baum ist. Ich ist nur allgemeines, wie Jetzt, Hier oder Dieses überhaupt; ich meine wohl einen einzelnen Ich, aber so wenig ich das, was ich bei Jetzt, Hier meine, sagen kann, sowenig bei Ich. [PdG 86–87]

This passage raises problems regarding the universal prerequisites for any particular intention. The dependency of intentionality on indexical reference—hence on language—is what has chiefly interested philosophers with regard to Hegel’s sense-certainty chapter.53 Since Hegel insists in this chapter on the absolute necessity of universals—specifically the universal, but negative notions of hereness, nowness, and self—in the foundation of intentional reference, his main philosophical opponent comes in the form of an atomistic “philosophy of immediacy” [Unmittelbarkeitsphilosophie], as Matthias Kettner notes, an ultra-nominalism that conceives reality as a multitude of “radically individuated particulars.”54

Yet more important with regard to the present study is Hegel’s allusion to retention in the earlier quote, the fact that I must “retain” or “hold fast to” specific
intentions: “das Verschwinden des einzelnen Jetzt und Hier, das wir meinen, wird dadurch abgehalten, daß Ich sie festhalte” (PdG 86). The mention of retention represents sense-certainty no longer as one static instant but as a process that must necessarily unfold in time. But what does it mean, exactly, to “hold fast to” a certain moment in time or a specific point in space given that their objective reality as well as their subjective intention arises from negation? The third phase of sense-certainty responds to this question in representing the act of sensory apprehension precisely as a diachronic process.

Just as sense-certainty, construed either as passive intake of objective being or private sensory intention, has been revealed to be essentially abstract and also negative in kind, both objective being and subjective intention (Meinung) are posited to be equally essential aspects of sense-certainty in the third phase of sense-certainty. Moreover, the relation between the two gains temporal extension.

Die sinnliche Gewißheit erfährt also, daß ihr Wesen weder in dem Gegenstande noch in dem Ich und die Unmittelbarkeit weder eine Unmittelbarkeit des einen noch des anderen ist; denn an beiden ist das, was Ich meine, vielmehr ein Unwesentliches, und der Gegenstand und Ich sind Allgemeine, in welchen dasjenige Jetzt und Hier und Ich, das ich meine, nicht bestehen bleibt oder ist. Wir kommen hierdurch dahin, das Ganze der sinnlichen Gewißheit selbst als ihr Wesen zu setzen, nicht mehr nur ein Moment derselben, wie in den beiden Fällen geschehen ist, worin zuerst der dem Ich entgegengesetzte Gegenstand, dann Ich ihre Realität sein sollte. Es ist also nur die ganze sinnliche Gewißheit selbst, welche an ihr als Unmittelbarkeit festhält und hierdurch alle Entgegengesetzung, die im vorherigen stattfand, aus sich ausschließt. [PdG 87]

This stipulation lays out how sense-certainty would seem still enabled to “hold on to immediacy” [an Unmittelbarkeit festhält], despite the previous lessons about negation
and abstraction. Firmly attending, for example, to a certain “here” identified as a tree, without turning away, sense-certainty seems to finally attain “One immediate relationship” \([Eine\] \[unmittelbare\] \[Beziehung\] \(\text{PdG 88}\) that is not tainted with negativity but persists and endures as a stable, unchanging bond.

Yet the negative universality upon which any such relationship depends—namely, the negative universality of “here,” “now,” and “I”—undermines its immediacy. Negation and mediation prevail in a synthetic conception of sense-certainty as well. “The determinateness of the purest form of awareness […] is already mediated by other factors” also in this third phase, as Terry Pinkard points out.\(^{55}\) However, in contrast to “us,” the phenomenological spectators, who have by now understood the negative nature of sense-certainty, consciousness stubbornly insists on the immediacy of its certainty. For that reason, the narrator asks “us” to enter or step into \((\text{hinzutreten})\) the dramatic scene so as to confront sense-certainty with its illusions.

To finally disprove the immediacy of any sense-certainty, “we” ask the naïve consciousness to “point out” \([\text{zeigen}]\) one particular “now” that it thinks it has apprehended in a purely immediate way. But even though the perceiving consciousness
in this scene tries very hard to “stand by” [dabei bleiben] and “hold fast” [festhalten] to that particular “now,” negation becomes absolutely necessary in order to first indicate “this” moment in time and then keep it present or retain it in memory:

Es wird das Jetzt gezeigt, dieses Jetzt. Jetzt; es hat schon aufgehört zu sein, indem es gezeigt wird; das Jetzt, das ist, ist ein anderes als das gezeigte, und wir sehen, daß das Jetzt eben dieses ist, indem es ist, schon nicht mehr zu sein. Das Jetzt, wie es uns gezeigt wird, ist es ein gewesenes, und dies ist seine Wahrheit; es hat nicht die Wahrheit des Seins. Es ist also doch dies wahr, daß es gewesen ist. Aber was gewesen ist, ist in der Tat kein Wesen; es ist nicht, und um das Sein war es zu tun. [PdG 88]

The powerfully negative, differential conception of diachronic time introduced here confirms Derrida’s view that “Hegel is also the thinker of irreducible difference.”

Rather than considering the “now” a self-same continuity that simply endures, the quote situates every “now”—even as it “is presently indicated” [indem es gezeigt wird]—within a necessarily self-negating sequence. In doing so, it applies, mutatis mutandis, the abstract notion of “nowness” of the first scenic illustration of sense-certainty to a prolonged moment of sense-certainty. Throughout this moment, then, the indicated “now”—let us call it n₁—remains a “non-being” that exists only insofar it has always already taken place, as “ein gewesenes Jetzt.” The concrete existence as well as the retention of n₁, in other words, are both subject to negativity: I intend (or “point out”) n₁ through acts of negation and hence through differentiation (...n₀ ≠ n₁ ≠ n₂...), while I can retain n₁, that is to say, the intention thereof, only by means of an expanding differential sequence (...n₀ ≠ n₁ ≠ n₂; n₁ ≠ n₃; n₁ ≠ n₄...). Any particular “now” therefore marks a negative event. As an instant of presence, it partakes in a differential movement that interlaces past, present, and future moments of “now” through self-
negation. Yet it is precisely on the basis of such differentiation and negativity, Hegel concludes, that we can retain a certain point in time without losing it. For nowness is that which “im Anderssein bleibt, was es ist: ein Jetzt, welches absolut viele Jetzt ist […] ein Resultat oder eine Vielheit von Jetzt zusammengefaßt” (PdG, 89).

This reading is supported by another Hegelian text. In an 1805 draft manuscript that contains both a philosophy of nature and a philosophy of spirit, Hegel unfolds exactly the same argument. Since this manuscript served at least once as the basis for lectures on these subjects during the summer term of 1806, this manuscript has the advantage of presenting the negativity of nowness in a more plainspoken way.57 In strict accordance with the Phenomenology, the section describing the nature of time and space defines a present point in time, a “now,” as “schlechthin ausschliessend, das heißt anderes negirend […] in seinem Begriff ist daher absolut das Negiren, d. h. es ist an sich selbst negiren, es ist diß Andre, welches von ihm negirt wird.” It is because of such negativity, that any present “now” necessarily mobilizes both a following and a preceding moment in time and so interlaces the future and the past, the two remaining dimensions of time, with its very being. “Die Zukunft ist daher unmittelbar in der Gegenwart, denn sie ist das Moment des Negativen in derselben,” Hegel asserts, while the preceding past is the other determinant that is mobilized by the present “now.”58 The Encyclopedia of 1830 maintains the conception of nowness which both the Phenomenology and the Jena manuscript of 1805 propound:

Die Dimensionen der Zeit, die Gegenwart, Zukunft und Vergangenheit, sind das Werden der Äußerlichkeit als solches und dessen Auflösung in die Unterschiede des Seins als des Übergehens in Nichts und des Nichts als des Übergehens in Sein. Das unmittelbare Verschwinden dieser Unterschiede in die Einzelheit ist die Gegenwart als Jetzt, welches […] ausschließlich und zugleich schlechthin...
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kontinuierlich in die anderen [...] ist. [...] Die endliche Gegenwart ist das Jetzt als seidend fixiert, von dem Negativen, den abstrakten Momenten der Vergangenheit und Zukunft, [...] unterschieden; allein jenes Sein ist selbst nur das abstrakte, in Nichts verschwindende.⁵⁹

Speaking from a historical perspective, this conception of nowness as a result of differentiation proved fundamental, first, for Husserl, and then, even more so, for Derrida, who, unlike Husserl, was well aware of Hegel’s contribution to his own thought.⁶⁰ Reversing this chronology, one could also say, and perhaps even more aptly, that thanks to Husserl and Derrida, it has become a lot easier to make sense of Hegel’s partly bizarre remarks about “the now,” as well as “the here.”⁶¹

In his next step, Hegel applies the logic of negativity and difference to the intention and retention of a certain “here.” The example again takes the shape of a scene. A person intends a spatial location by means of his gaze and then immediately points it out in front of the observing phenomenologist. But recalling the negative universality of hereness it is readily understood that the intended location remains, from the very start, a merely negative coordinate, indeed “a negative this-here” [ein negatives Dieses] (PdG 90). For the specificity of the spatial location rests on an implicit network of spatial differences, or, at the very, least on the comparison between two different locations. The indicated place is located to the right, not the left, not above but below the tree, and so forth. The successful intention of a specific location—having seen precisely “this” place which “I” mean—thus involves an ensemble or, using Hegel’s term, a “complexion” of different spatial points [eine einfache Komplexion vieler Hier] (PdG 90). It invokes in effect an “ensemble of many heres” [Zusammen vieler Hier] (PdG 92) which are differentiated against each other in order to determine the one point intended.
Consequently, “every demonstration is essentially dependent on a complex system that includes other possible demonstrations” and so “possesses its determinacy in virtue of its place in a complex system of possibilities,” as Willem de Vries describes the differential procedure that Hegel ascribes to the intention of a specific point in time or space.62

From this follows that the retention of a certain location demands the temporal unfolding of this “complexion” or “ensemble of many heres.” The moment “this” location is indicated, the synchronic network of differences on which the indicated “here” depends immediately dissolves into a diachronic sequence of differences, thereby loosing its “initial” synchronic integrity. Once the first distinguishing operation has been carried out in order to concretize the intended “here”—such as the mental or articulate distinction “this here I mean, not that here!”—the permanence of that spatial location is retained by means of temporalization, that is to say, again through a negative sequence or differentiation.

Taken together, these two final illustrations of sense-certainty indicate a fundamental dialectic of sensory perception. Simultaneous space and sequential time, synchronicity and diachronicity, appear not severed and purely contradictory but entwined forms of perception, for perceiving a concrete point in time or space means to necessarily explicate the one by means of the other.63 Space must be temporalized in order to articulate its concrete differentiability, that is, the “being apart” [Auseinandersein] of individual points, because otherwise it would be a mere “continuity without difference” [unterschiedslose Kontinuität] or abstract space as such. Analogously, the formal negativity of time—the self-negating sequence of nonexistent “now”-points—realizes itself as a continuous flow, that is to say, as “the undifferentiated extension” [das
ununterschiedene Außereinander] that as such pertains to the abstract continuity of space. Additionally, the aforementioned Jena philosophy of nature of 1805 unfolds, in the very first section expounding the “concept of time and space,” the same dialectic. It describes—by way of a somewhat labyrinthine deduction—the reality of time as “the result” of space, and vice versa.

**The “story” of sense-certainty**

With the conclusion of the third phase of sense-certainty, Hegel finally arrives at a definition of sense-certainty that sums up not only the two final examples but ultimately the entire chapter:

> Es erhellt, daß die Dialektik der sinnlichen Gewißheit nichts anderes als die einfache Geschichte ihrer Bewegung oder ihrer Erfahrung und die sinnliche Gewißheit selbst nichts anderes als nur diese Geschichte ist. Das natürliche Bewußtsein geht deswegen auch zu diesem Resultate […] aber vergißt es nur ebenso immer wieder und fängt die Bewegung von vorne an. [PdG 90]

This speculative definition states that sense-certainty (the result of simple aesthesis) essentially contains the “story” [Geschichte] of a dialectic “movement [Bewegung]. But in what sense does sense-certainty emerge through “movement”? What does it mean that the content produced by this “movement” takes the form of a “story”? And why does this movement turn into a “dialectic” that restarts again and again?

Recalling the earlier findings, these questions can be clarified. Above all, Hegel has shown that sense-certainty demands a temporal process of negation in order to specify the intentional object. The object is apprehended as a concrete spatiotemporal being through the continual articulation of what it is not; it is a “here” that is not “here,”
not “there,” and so forth and simultaneously a “now” that is not the earlier “now,” not the later “now,” and so forth. Hegel demonstrated this eminent negativity of nowness and hereness partly in the first phase, and especially in the scenic illustrations pertaining to the third phase. The process composed of such negativity is an unfolding sequence of differences. At the same time, this sequential kind of differentiation designates the movement of temporalization as such. The basic logic, or more specifically *aesthesiology*, of sense-certainty, is therefore negativity, the negative articulation—indeed disarticulation—of the intended content. This is the first meaning of calling sense-certainty a “movement.”

The second meaning invokes the specific connotation that the term “movement” assumes in the Hegelian lexicon. As sense-certainty concerns immediately a “this,” it must effectively conflate a spatial and a temporal datum. Indeed, it must mediate the double nature of a particular, the somewhat contradictory poles of time and space. The Hegelian lexicon early on associates precisely the term “movement” [Bewegung] with that kind of mediation. Movement, as the Jena philosophy of nature of 1805 defines it, is “die unmittelbare Einheit der Zeit und des Raumes […], welche Einheit eben die absolute Vermittlung an ihr hat […] sie ist die durch den Raum reale, bestehende Zeit, oder der durch die Zeit erst wahrhafft unterschiedene Raum.”

Unaware of this manuscript (for it was not published until 1931, when Hoffmeister’s edition of the *Jenenser Realphilosophie* came out), Wilhelm Purpus has explained the term “movement” by juxtaposing the sense-certainty chapter with Hegel’s much later interpretation of Zeno in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Purpur’s leading argument is that the dialectic of sense-certainty in the *Phenomenology* reflects
Zeno’s proto-dialectic entwinement of one (space) and many (time). And indeed, in his Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Hegel submits, in consonance with the much earlier Jena philosophy of nature, that already Zeno had regarded movement as the effective “unity” [Einheit] of time and space:

Das Wesen der Zeit und des Raums ist die Bewegung, denn es ist das Allgemeine […] Als Einheit der Negativität [i.e., the diachronic sequence of points] und Kontinuität [i.e. the space comprising all these points] ist die Bewegung als Begriff, als Gedanke ausgesprochen; an ihnen aber eben ist also weder die Kontinuität noch die Punktualität als das Wesen zu setzen. Für die Vorstellung sind diese beiden Momente selbst unzertrennlich. […] Die Bewegung ist das Unendliche als Einheit dieser Entgegengesetzten der Zeit und des Raums.

Even more important to the present investigation is another question that Hegel’s speculative definition prompts: What does it mean, exactly, to call the product of direct sensory apprehension a Geschichte that is at once subject to a “dialectic” of negation and forgetting? Sense-certainty appears to immediately connect subjective sensations and the objective being of a particular “this.” Since the overarching goal of the Phenomenology is to explicate the process of conceptual self-determination—or in other words, the logical process by which spirit “creates the presupposition of itself”—the critical epistemic content of such an immediate sense-certainty had to be, ideally, an entirely congruent relationship between the two relata in question. But sense-certainty does not in fact establish such an identical and immediate relationship. Instead, the immediacy of the relationship is constantly undermined, and Hegel takes great satisfaction in exposing this failure. Direct sensory apprehension can only “mean” objective being through a movement of abstraction and negation.
Consequently, the epistemic content of sense-certainty—the relationship it truly encapsulates, in other words—is not immediately given, as if it were an instantaneous impression onto the mind, but in fact a “result” [Resultat], as Hegel writes, an achievement that rests on a process of differentiation. It is this differential, and hence necessarily processual, nature of sense-certainty that, finally, illuminates the meaning of the first ambivalent term, *Geschichte*. The “story” or “history” of sense-certainty—“die einfache Geschichte ihrer Bewegung,” as Hegel writes—designates no stable and static state of permanence, such as a readily obtained and mentally arrested image of “this” tree or “that” night here, or a selfsame view on Swiss Alps. Instead, it designates the *process*, precisely, by which the relationship between sensory intention and objective being was brought about: the movement of negation, or, temporalization. In other words, the acquisition of certainty through sensation cannot consist in an absorption of a particular “this-here”—in some form of “picture-taking,” if you will. Instead, the sensory apprehension of a particular object, hence the most elementary form of perception, gives rise to a differential temporal structure—to a “story.” Hegel made it abundantly clear in the chapter that the process of negation, negativity, represents both the fundamental logical structure and the motor behind this “story.” Negativity, in other words, provides the essential aesthesiology of sense-certainty. The “story” of sense-certainty is, therefore, in the first place a *history* of perception, a diachronic movement or sequence of negations.

This brings up the double meaning of *Geschichte*, which is critical not only with regard to the sense-certainty chapter but to Hegel’s conception of sense perception in general. The English word *story* in fact carries the same ambiguity, in that it means both a

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passage of time or a temporal process and the simultaneous totality established by that process. Like *Geschichte*, story designates a totality of events—*the story* as such or the conveyed content—that needs processual, indeed historical unfolding through storytelling to emerge as such a totality. It is no trivial but, in truth, a symptomatic fact that this ambiguity of the term *story* haunts narratology to this day. Some narratologists call the signified totality of events—also known as *fabula* or plot—the “story” of a narrative, whereas others employ the term *story* to capture the discursive form and process—also known as *sjužet* or *discourse*—by which a narrative content is communicated.  

Consequently, any *Geschichte* or story has always two dimension, also for Hegel: it has a processual, historical form that gradually unfolds a simultaneous totality or content; it always is a (hi)story in short. Recalling a key term from the Introduction, this double nature could be also expressed in saying that a story necessarily comprises both diegesis in Plato’s sense (a process of narration) and diegesis in the sense of Genette (the narrated world, *the* narration as such).

As sense-certainty proceeds towards “successful” completion—namely, the generation of a stable and immediate relation between sensory intention and object—it is confounded by a “dialectic,” says Hegel in his speculative conclusion. This dialectic prevents sense-certainty from arriving at a truly stable “result,” namely, from *being* an immediate relation that knows and retains *the* story of that negative movement generated through bare sensation. Sense-certainty is thus forced to continue on its negative path as a “forgetful” movement that can only strive towards a definite result or knowledge: “Das natürliche Bewußtsein geht deswegen auch zu diesem Resultate [...] aber vergiß es nur ebenso immer wieder und fängt die Bewegung von vorne an” (PdG 90). The eminent
negativity and confusion that rings out in this sentence indicates the core of a Hegelian dialectic. According to Hegel’s succinct formula, a dialectic “dynamizes and confuses” distinctions and definitions which at first appear to the common understanding like unambiguous and self-evident facts: “Das Dialektische ist die Bewegung und Verwirrung jener festen Bestimmtheiten.”71 This shorthand deviates from the classical understanding of a dialectic as a linear mechanism in three steps, leading from “thesis” via “antithesis” to “synthesis.” These are terms Hegel hardly ever uses, as Walter Kaufmann pointed out.72 Judging from Hegel’s succinct formula, the dialectical “story” of sense-certainty, or the processual movement generated through sensation, must therefore also dynamize and confuse certain ostensibly self-evident facts. It does that on three levels, as his scenic illustrations of sense-certainty demonstrate:

Even bare sensory noticing, the most elementary form of perception, must engage in a series of differences so as to concretize and retain the spatiotemporal being of the apprehended particular (hereafter cited as dialectical proposition d1). Objective existence and subjective intention are interdependent, not dependent on each other, though consciousness has yet to find a way to transform this negative interdependency into a lasting, a permanent relationship (hereafter cited as d2). Space and time, too, are interdependent relata, in that they explicate each other (hereafter cited as d3).

Throughout each of these dialectical engagements, natural consciousness runs into a strange problem: it cannot retain and hence “forgets” the result generated by means of sensation after a very short while. The immediately felt certainty about “this” thing here, now last only for the blink of an eye—until consciousness notices “this” there afresh and anew as though it had not known it before, starting over and over again every moment
Sense-Certainty according to the *Phenomenology (Processuality)*

(“und fängt die Bewegung von vorne an,” PdG 90). Sense-certainty does not yet know how it can “preserve” or “store up”—one meaning of *aufheben*—the totality of its “story.” This impasse incites sense-certainty to act by elevating itself—the second meaning of *aufheben*—to the level of conscious “perception” (*Wahrnehmung*).73

On this higher standpoint, consciousness can readily perceive what appears to be the obvious solution to its “forgetful” dialectic: the permanence of material things or, conceptually speaking, substantial thinghood. Indeed, the thing appears to be the self-evident medium and the permanent storage for the highly unstable “story” of sense-certainty. For it promises simultaneously to preserve and “cancel out”—the third and last meaning of *aufheben*—the triple dialectic of sense-certainty. First, a substantial thing simultaneously comprises a plurality of sensory aspects. Any thing is, in other words, *one* thing that possesses *also* a number of properties to be experienced over time, thus uniting both a synchronic-spatial and a sequential-temporal dimension within one and the same place, or, “here-now.” This would seem to solve d3. Second, as the substantial thing combines spatial reality or objectivity with sensible properties, it seems to materialize, indeed reify the link between objective being and “my” subjective perceiving that d2 prescribes. Finally, the substantial thing precludes negation and mediation as it seems to have positive, permanent existence in itself, an apparent positivity that seems to revoke d1. The thing, then, seems to manifest the story of sensuous perception, its true content as well as its permanent result.
Perception as determinate negation

“This unmittelbare Gewißheit nimmt sich nicht das Wahre, denn ihre Wahrheit ist das Allgemeine; sie aber will das Diese nehmen” (PdG 93): This opening line of the second chapter of the Phenomenology, entitled “Die Wahrnehmung oder das Ding und die Täuschung,” states the immediate reason why simple aesthesis and its corresponding knowledge, sense-certainty, must eventually transform into “perception” [Wahrnehmung]. This term, it will become clear in a moment, denotes for Hegel the specification of an object and its properties by means of the senses, hence object perception. Although sense-certainty too sought to take in the sensuous thing—das Diese—in its full concreteness, it eventually means nothing but the fact that “this” particular exists here and now, thus obtaining the abstract, yet negative “universality” [das Allgemeine] of naked being. Bare receptivity misses “the truth” [das Wahre] of the object: its concrete specificity or whatness, as determined above all by sensible properties such as color, taste, feel. In this most elementary mode of perception, properties only “play along” (beiherspielen) with the naked spatiotemporal existence—the universal but thoroughly abstract thatness—of the apprehended object.

However, it is precisely this most universal “principle” [Prinzip] of all, pure spatiotemporal existence (Dasein), that “has emerged for us” [ist uns entstanden] through sense-certainty (PdG 93). Nonetheless, the operations of negation and differentiation,
which in effect brought this “principle” into being, thus far remain opaque, which is to say, these operations were not yet understood by consciousness—in contrast “to us,” the phenomenologist-spectators. Indeed, construed as passive receptivity, sense-certainty can merely register the incoming sense data as an indistinct stream regardless of their quality without the ability to discriminate.

As perception, by contrast, consciousness is able to discriminate distinct sensations and ascribe them to one specific thing as properties, which is why it has a cognizance of the essence of a thing or knows its whatness. This is possible because it “has the means of negation,” Hegel notes: “Der Reichtum des sinnlichen Wissens gehört der Wahrnehmung, nicht der unmittelbaren Gewißheit an, an der er nur das Beiherspielende war; denn nur jene hat die Negotiation, den Unterschied oder die Mannigfaltigkeit an ihrem Wesen” (PdG 94). Perception thus gives rise to that element which sense-certainty cannot retain: difference. Only perception has the active capacity to make distinctions, thus recognizing a certain “this” as “the thing of many properties” [das Ding von vielen Eigenschaften] (PdG 94). Therefore, perception concerns as much “the difference” [den Unterschied] of individual properties as it concerns “the diversity” [die Mannigfaltigkeit] of the many properties belonging at once to the same object (PdG 94).

In portraying the process of perception as differentiation, the chapter officially introduces the very fundament of Hegel’s system: distinction itself (der Unterschied), defined in the Wissenschaft der Logik emphatically as “originary basis of all activity and self-movement” [Urgrund aller Tätigkeit und Selbstbewegung].

Though operative in sense-certainty, as “we” readers could observe, negation and difference must remain an implicit, unconscious presupposition for that first shape of
consciousness because of its self-conception as sheer immediacy. Perception, the more sophisticated form of consciousness, has, by direct contrast, full cognizance of negation and difference. This allows in turn for a comprehension or, more accurately, a perception of the object’s essence, its whatness. This happens through determinate negation, Hegel claims. In contrast to the commonsensical conviction that “something is what it is,” which Hegel depreciates throughout the *Phenomenology*, the perception chapter advocates the exact opposite, arguing that a thing is primarily identified by what it is not.

The process of perception materializes this principle. As perception, consciousness discriminates and specifies a particular property, “this” salty taste of a certain grain, for example, by contrasting this yet unrecognized taste with oppositional flavors—sweet, peppery, sour, for instance. Rephrasing this procedure in Hegel’s terms, the perception of “a distinguished, determinate property” [eine unterschiedene, bestimmte Eigenschaft] is the result of positing (setzen) this—at first indistinct—perception “as not this” [als nicht dieses]. However, Hegel proposes that such a not-this represents “not nothing but a determinate nothing, or, a nothing of a specific content” [nicht Nichts, sondern ein bestimmtes Nichts, oder ein Nichts von einem Inhalte], hence a “sublated” [aufgehoben] nothing (PdG 94). Accordingly, perception proceeds not only as determinate negation but also follows the logic of “sublation” [das Aufheben], in that it effectuates “simultaneously a negation and a storing-up” [ein Negieren und ein Aufbewahren zugleich] (PdG 94).

This thoroughly abstract proposition needs illustration. Some object—a certain grain, for example—noticed as “this” sensation on your tongue is determined, first, by contrasting it with its antithesis (or antitheses), with a “not-this.” The noticed taste differs, for example, from the sugary taste of some other grain, or the peppery taste of
certain corns. In a second step, the initial negations are once more negated or “canceled” 
(\textit{aufgehoben}) so as to identify the positive nature of the noticed property. While the first 
negation temporarily suspends the positive identity of “this” taste, which thus becomes a 
“not-this” that is recognized only in relation to its opposite(s), the second negation 
establishes—and re-establishes—the specificity of the taste by once more negating all 
that which the taste is not. “This” current sensation tastes as it does precisely because it 
does \textit{not} taste like an oppositional “not-this.” This double negation then does not amount 
to “nothing” [Nichts], as the earlier quote reads, but to a “determinate nothing, or, a 
\textit{nothing of a specific content}.” In the act of negating or “canceling” (\textit{aufheben}) the initial 
negativity a new “content” is produced that thus assumes a positive identity. Nonetheless, 
since the taste was in effect determined by way of negation, specifically through 
opposition(s), the positive result, the discerned objective property, remains afflicted with 
such negativity. Knowing this property as different from those it is not at the same time 
recalls these, and so preserves (\textit{aufheben}) and retains a knowledge of its negative others. 
The epistemic result of perception, the perception of a specific objective property, thus 
requires a sublation in both senses of the term.

But if it is so thoroughly suffused with the logic of determinate negation and 
sublation, then perception unwittingly actualizes an extremely versatile relation. Hegel 
describes this relationality as combining “some kind of determinate mode of being for 
itself” with a “relating itself to others” (“irgendeine bestimmte Weise, für sich zu sein, 
[die unbedingte absolute Allgemeinheit] (PdG 104) is the enigmatic name by which he 
calls this relation between negative, oppositional moments and positive, self-identical
thing. It is this sophisticated relationality, Hegel will argue, that emerges with and through sense perception.

If it holds true that the procedure of perception corresponds to the logic of sublation and so gives rise to a relationality that relates self-identity and opposition, the remaining question is: Which is the object that properly corresponds to this procedure? As the triple dialectic of sense-certainty indicates and the chapter title, “Perception or the thing and deception” [Die Wahrnehmung oder das Ding und die Täuschung] literally announces, the chapter operates on the hypothesis that the immediate object of perception is the material thing. However, the subtitle at the same time alludes to the possibility that this hypothesis may be based on a “misconception” [Täuschung], that is, on the false belief that substantial thinghood would by itself relate identity and opposition, thereby embodying the “unconditioned absolute universality.”

Having established that the perception of objects (Wahrnehmung) generally follows the movement of sublation, the chapter introduces the real, physical elements which are involved in a scene of perception, the perceptual object and the perceiving subject. Subsequently, Hegel defines the main logical attributes of a thing as “the Also” [das Auch] and “the One” [das Eins], the former effectuating primarily the thing’s being-for-itself, while “the One” essentially represents the thing being in relation to other things. Equipped with all these terms, Hegel finally stages again three scenes of perception so as to illustrate and analyze the possible tensions between both the physical and the logical elements of perception.
The recursivity of object perception

The two physical elements of a scene of sense perception, says Hegel, are the material “object” [der Gegenstand] and the “perceiving” consciousness [das Wahrnehmen], meaning the subjective activity of gathering information about the object by means of the senses (PdG 93). The act of perceiving involves above all the diachronic registration or “unfolding” [Entfaltung] as well as the “discrimination” of sensory qualities or “moments” [Unterscheidung der Momente] (PdG 93). Hegel describes this procedure of unfolding and differentiating as a “movement of pointing out” [Bewegung des Aufzeigens] (PdG 93) by means of which the incoming sense data are separated into distinct sensations. If the act of perceiving denotes chiefly separation and differentiation—and hence determination—of sensations, the object, being the source of the sensory differences, must concentrate these differences in a simultaneous unity. For that reason, Hegel regards the object as the locus of their synthetic togetherness, their “Zusammengefaßtsein” (PdG 93). This definition of the object as a synthetic unity of distinct elements appears to be the sublated correlative of what Hegel in the previous chapter called an “ensemble [Zusammen] of many heres” (PdG 92).

Perception as such (die Wahrnehmung) relates these two elements, the subjective act of perceiving and the material object; it is the form of knowledge that results from their interplay. For that reason, any perception must coordinate operations of negation and differentiation with an objective state of simultaneous unity. Whether these aspects can be coordinated without contradiction is the major crux around which the second chapter of the Phenomenology revolves. The antithetical tensions between objective being—its simultaneous togetherness—and the act of perceiving—its diachronicity—
persists in perception. Neither of the two can take precedence over the other, and so their synthesis demands an interrelation established not through agreement but opposition. The act of perceiving and the perceptual object “relate to one another” [sich […] aufeinander beziehen] precisely as “oppositional” [entgegengesetzte] elements (PdG 93).

Nor can that opposition itself remain undifferentiated, Hegel continues: “indem sie [both the object and the act of perceiving] aber sich als entgegengesetzte aufeinander beziehen, so kann in der Beziehung nur das eine das Wesentliche sein, und der Unterschied des Wesentlichen und Unwesentlichen muß sich an sie verteilen” (PdG 93).

To gloss the eventual solution, indicated by the first clause, but then immediately retract it is no doubt a strange rhetorical maneuver. However, statements such as this—of which there are many in the Phenomenology—are not so much a lapse of clarity on Hegel’s part as an exemplification of the Phenomenology’s nonlinear mode of presentation, namely, its constant oscillation between extradiegetic prolepses provided by the omniscient narrator and diegetic scenes or dialectical “mini dramas” to be observed by “us,” the readers. In any case, since the consecutive clause insists on the essential dualism between perceiving subject and perceptual object, perception is bound to give rise to serious conflicts and contradictions.

Having introduced the physical elements of perception, the perceiving subject and the material object, Hegel goes on to explain the distinct terms of perceptual relation, “Also” [Auch] and “One” [Eins], terms that should not be reduced to the numeric concepts of “many” and “single.” Nor should they be exclusively identified with the notions of “plurality” (the thing as a bundle of properties) and “unity” (the thing as one single unit). One should think that Hegel would have chosen other terms—precisely the
pair unity/plurality or one/many—if he meant to address primarily the numeric contradiction obtaining in perception. While this classic crux of the philosophy of perception also plays a leading role, as most commentaries point out, it by no means exhausts the matter. Instead, I will show that, in Hegel’s chapter on perception, Also and One function as processual and relational terms with which consciousness seeks to capture the simultaneous diversity and the particular identity that characterizes its experience of object perception. Unlike quantifying terms, then, One and Also describe for Hegel the reality (Wirklichkeit) of perception in that they determine that “logic of perception” [Logik des Wahrnehmens] (PdG 105) which correlates the act of perceiving with the perceptual object. These terms thus conjoin epistemological (subjective) and ontological (objective) categories of perception. Additionally, Also and One represent the concrete reflections of those “thoughts” [Gedanken] of “universality and particularity” [Allgemeinheit und Einzelheit] (PdG 106) that emerged through the experience of sense-certainty.

At first sight, the function of the One seems to match up with the diachronic act of perceiving (Wahrnehmen), the differentiation of particular sensory qualities in a sequence “one by one,” while the Also appears to be the corresponding logical function of the object’s synthetic unity (Zusammengefaßtsein). But unfortunately, the relation between the logical terms and the physical terms is much more confusing, that is, dialectical, as Hegel will eventually demonstrate by means of three exemplary scenes of perception.

Now, how is the term Also (which some consider Hegel’s most original contribution to the philosophy of perception) initially defined? Unlike the negative universality of “this,” or “here” and “now,” the Also of perception is said to represent a
“positive universality” [positive[] Allgemeinheit] (PdG 95) in that it simultaneously coordinates particular qualities, various perceptible “theses.” The Also of perception connects this ensemble of sensible particulars, gathering it permanently within one and the same place both in a material-spatial and a logical-structural sense. Consequently, the Also functions as the universal “medium” of perception, wherein particular qualities relate to each other “indifferently” [gleichgültig]:

Die einfache sich selbst gleiche Allgemeinheit selbst aber ist wieder von diesen ihren Bestimmtheiten [viz. properties] unterschieden und frei; sie ist das reine sich auf sich beziehen oder das Medium, worin diese Bestimmtheiten alle sind, sich also in ihr als in einer einfachen Einheit durchdringen, ohne sich aber zu berühren; denn eben durch die Teilnahme an dieser Allgemeinheit sind sie gleichgültig für sich. – Dies abstrakte allgemeine Medium […] ist nichts anderes als das Hier und Jetzt […] nämlich als ein einfaches zusammen von vielen [Hier und Jetzt] […] Dieses Auch ist also das reine Allgemeine selbst oder das Medium, die sie so zusammenfassende Dingheit. [PdG 94–95]

In defining “thinghood” [Dingheit] as an ensemble coordinated by operations of Also, Hegel posits this ensemble as cohering without contradictions. Otherwise, the thing as a whole, as Hegel writes, could not persist as a “simple unity” [einfache[] Einheit] whose subsidiary parts—the properties—are indifferent to one another. Accordingly, the quote describes the togetherness of thinghood, the Also, as a non-contradictory, “self-identical universality” [sich selbst gleiche Allgemeinheit]. Importantly, in gathering at once “many heres and nows” in a “pure self-relation” [das reine sich auf sich beziehen], the Also gives rise to an understanding of thinghood as a “continuity” [Continuität] or a permanent “community” [Gemeinschaft] (PdG 97). Indeed, it would be impossible to conceive of thinghood as a “self-identical” ensemble of qualities without permanent, or at least continued, existence, since such a conception undermines the defining character of self-
identity: that a certain being remains the same to itself and also to others. This definition of thinghood as a permanent “self-identity” \[\text{Sichselbstgleichheit}\] (PdG 97) effected by the Also-function is the primary source of contradiction in the chapter on perception.\(^{81}\)

To illustrate the manifold self-identity of thinghood, the Also of perception, Hegel submits to the reader’s imagination the perception of a grain of salt:

Dies Salz ist einfaches Hier und zugleich vielfach; es ist weiß und auch scharf, auch kubisch gestaltet, auch von bestimmter Schwere usw. Alle diese vielen Eigenschaften sind in Einem einfachen Hier, worin sie sich also durchdringen; keine hat ein anderes Hier als die andere, sondern jede ist allenthalben in demselben, worin die andere ist; und zugleich, ohne durch verschiedene Hier geschieden zu sein, affizieren sie sich in dieser Durchdringung nicht; das Weiße affiziert oder verändert das Kubische nicht, beide nicht das Scharfe usw., sondern da jede selbst einfaches sich auf sich beziehen ist, läßt sie die anderen ruhig und bezieht sich nur durch das gleichgültige Auch auf sie. [PdG 95]

Hegel’s grain of salt is self-identical as a material object in that its properties are recognized as occupying the same place, the simple and unseparated space circumscribed by the shape of the grain. This guarantees that many properties go together and “permeate” without “affecting” each other. Therefore, the individual properties themselves can be said to stand in a relationship of identity insofar they belong to the same thing, that is to say, insofar as they are concatenated by the same Also within the same place.

Hegel’s definition of the Also of perception calls to mind a passage from the Preface of the Phenomenology. Hegel here characterizes substantiality as follows: “Das Bestehen oder die Substanz eines Daseins ist die Sichselbstgleichheit; denn seine Ungleichheit mit sich wäre seine Auflösung” (PdG 53). Substance, just like the Also of perception, is here defined as self-identical “permanence” [Bestehen]. Consequently, the
perceptual experience of things as an Also-concatenation is consciousness’s first
encounter with substance both as a material reality (permanence) and a logical principle
(self-identity). Considering the overall intent of the Phenomenology to think substance as
subject, this encounter must reveal precisely the shortcoming of a traditional concept of
substantiality as a criterion of truth, as already indicated in the passage quoted. It
prohibits internal differentiation in prescribing that a substance is either simple or
compounded, but never both at the same time. This finding, however, does not result in a
repudiation of the objective reality of substantial permanence and identity. In contrast to
such associationist conceptions of thinghood as David Hume’s, who renounces the
category of substance and, with it, those of substantial permanence and identity as
“fictions” fabricated by the human mind, Hegel reinterprets substantial things as complex
subjects of relations that possess in themselves both simultaneous identity (Also) and
internal as well as external differentiation (One).82

In order to subsist as a simultaneous ensemble of various qualities, the thing of
perception requires internal differentiation. Hegel’s term for that operation which
differentiates and distinguishes is “the One” [das Eins]. By means of the One, not self-
identity but the “negation” of “other” identities is effected:

Nämlich wenn die vielen bestimmten Eigenschaften schlechterdings gleichgültig
wären und sich durchaus nur auf sich selbst bezogen, so wären sie keine
bestimmt, denn sie sind dies nur, insofern sie sich unterscheiden und sich auf
andere als entgegengesetzte beziehen. Nach dieser Entgegensetzung aber können
sie nicht in der einfachen Einheit ihres Mediums zusammen sein, die ihnen
ebenso wesentlich ist als die Negation; die Unterscheidung derselben, insofern
sie nicht eine gleichgültige, sondern ausschließende, Anderes negierende ist, fällt
also außer diesem einfachen Medium; und dieses ist daher nicht nur ein Auch,
gleichgültige Einheit, sondern auch Eins, ausschließende Einheit. – Das Eins ist
Clearly, the properties of a thing are discerned by contrasting them with mutually excluding opposites: “denn sie [Eigenschaften] sind dies nur, insofern sie sich unterscheiden und sich auf andere als entgegengesetzte beziehen.” For example, the leaf I see is recognized as being green because it contrasts with the red berries hanging next to it.

The remainder of the quote is more complicated, because it concerns the vexed relation between One and Also. Essentially, the One is said to effectuate the negation of other(s) as its opposite(s), hence through exclusion. Such exclusion takes place on two levels. On the one hand, it makes us recognize inherent differences among properties within one and the same thing. The perfect greenness of a leaf, for example, is recognized in contrast to the redness of the berries next to it. The greenness excludes redness from the leaf, since green and red cannot coexist within the same place without affecting each other; if combined, they would look yellow to the eye. On the other hand, the excluding function of the One enables us to distinguish things as such, as a discrete unit: “wodurch die Dingheit als Ding bestimmt ist” (PdG 96). The entire leaf—a green thing that is also flat, also smooth, also bitter, etc.—counts as a One as well, as one specific concatenation or Also of different qualities. Accordingly, the One designates an “excluding unity” [ausschließende Einheit] (PdG 95) on the level of both the singular property and the thing taken as a particular concatenation of properties. The antithesis to such exclusion is of course the inclusion brought about by the “indifferent unity” [gleichgültige Einheit] (PdG 95) of thinghood.
The definition of the One as “the moment of negation” recalls the foundational faculty that Hegel ascribes in the Preface to consciousness and to subjectivity in general. There, the subject was defined as “pure simple negativity” [reine einfach Negativität] (PdG 23) that “distinguishes and posits” [das Unterscheiden und das Setzen] (PdG 52) the concrete being of something. In light of this, the perception of a thing not only stages the conflict between the essential logical functions of Also and One, the simultaneous diversity and discrete individuality of properties, but, more generally, the contradiction inherent in Hegel’s definition of substance (self-identical permanence) as subject (negation). This contradiction, the Preface intimates, can be resolved only through mediation: Substance must be turned into subject, thus revealing the true basis of identity, difference, while subject, pure negativity and exclusion, must transform itself into substance, thus reconciling itself with its opposite. Object perception is the first and most concrete manifestation of precisely that problematic. Only a truly synthetic constellation of One and Also, as well as perceiving subject and perceptual object, would be able to achieve that mediation.

Despite their different effects (exclusion as opposed to inclusion), Hegel regards both One and Also as a form of “unity” [Einheit]—as “oneness.” This terminological intersection is no coincidence. It shows that these operations are perhaps not as independent from one another as Hegel’s initial definitions may have suggested. With this observation we enter the dialectic of perception, wherein—to recall Hegel’s shorthand for a dialectic—seemingly evident oppositions are “dynamized and confused.” The dialectic of these terms is roughly the following: As a unit that essentially excludes others, hence as a One, the thing of perception depends on an “ensemble” [Zusammen] of
many others, hence on the Also of thinghood. The thing can be recognized as this one specific unit, as this particular One, only in opposition to at least one other material unit, another One, which differs from the former precisely because it manifests a different ensemble of properties, a different Also-concatenation. Conversely, the Also of thinghood, its being an inclusive ensemble of many elements, immediately depends on internal distinction, hence on the operation of the One. The indifferent community of various qualities established by the Also—a grain of salt that is white, also cubic, also “tart” [scharf]—involves, at the same time, a distinction amongst these elements as effected by the One. Otherwise, the Also of thinghood could comprise no diversity and would be just a simple One without internal distinction.

This dialectic between the One and the Also of perception could be described more closely as a recursion. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines a “recursive” procedure as “the repeated application of a rule, definition, or procedure to successive results”; as a computational term, a recursion describes specifically “a program or routine […] that requires in general many successive executions.” In that sense, the process of perception could be described as a recursive routine that alternately renders the object either as Also or One. However, unable to generate a third term that could bring the routine to a successful completion (or sublation), perception must go in circles.85

Defenders of syllogistic reasoning might want to call Hegel’s recursive terminological design a *petitio principii*, whereas Hegel scholars might just regard this recursivity as an instantiation of the kind of holism that constitutes the metaphysical basis of Hegel’s philosophy.86 Or, one might concede, with Novalis, that there exists a logical “sphere […] wherein each proof is a circle—or an error—where nothing is
demonstrable.” At any rate, the operations of the One and the Also clearly presuppose each other in Hegel. The two terms depend on each other in order to operate at all.

Hegel reviews the logical operations defining object perception as follows:

In diesen Momenten zusammen ist das Ding als das Wahre der Wahrnehmung vollendet, soweit es nötig ist, es hier zu entwickeln. Es ist α) die gleichgültige passive Allgemeinheit, das Auch der vielen Eigenschaften oder vielmehr Materien, β) die Negation ebenso als einfach, oder das Eins, das Ausschließen entgegengesetzter Eigenschaften […] Nach der Seite, daß diese Unterschiede dem gleichgültigen Medium angehören, sind sie selbst allgemein, beziehen sich nur auf sich und affizieren sich nicht; nach der Seite aber, daß sie der negativen Einheit angehören, sind sie zugleich ausschließend, haben aber diese entgegengesetzte Beziehung notwendig an Eigenschaften, die aus ihrem Auch entfernt sind. [PdG 96]

Hegel’s synopsis makes clear how the logical features of the thing of perception, One and Also, sublate the deficient dialectic of sense-certainty. On the one hand, the Also manifests a positive universality or an inclusive unity that preserves, unlike sense-certainty, a complexion of “heres” and “nows” in the form of an ensemble of independent, yet abstract “matters.” This inclusive unity of thinghood reflects the experience of the material object, which was defined as a simultaneous unity (“Zusammengefaßtsein,” PdG 93). The One, on the other hand, furnishes the perceived thing, by means of negation, with specificity, that is, with a concrete essence or distinct properties. A merely receptive sensuous apprehension could not obtain such specificity because it lacks the explicit capacity for negation. The attributes of the One reflect the act of perceiving, which was defined earlier on as a diachronic “unfolding and differentiation” [die Entfaltung und Unterscheidung der Momente] (PdG 93).
Uniting these two moments, the dialectic of perception that the *Phenomenology* thus sets up proceeds along these lines: The act of perceiving (subject) realizes substance (Also) as a set of differences, while the object (substance) simultaneously stabilizes the differences perceived by the subject as an enduring self-identity. The “thing of perception” [das Ding der Wahrnehmung] is supposed to function as the result of this dialectic constellation, specifically its “many property” [vielen Eigenschaften], thus indicating

Hegel had already employed the term “property” [Eigenschaft], yet not until now does he explicitly define it.\(^8^9\) Thing and property are both a result of a sublation, that is to say, both are the result of a determinate negation: the excluding One undermines the inclusive universality of the Also, thus determining objective properties and, consequently, the specific nature of the thing as such. But although the perception of properties “entwines” [miteinander zusammenschließt] Also and One and so annuls their contradictory opposition, this perception nevertheless preserves them as “two distinct” moments [voneinander unterschieden]. Otherwise, the perceived thing would remain either an indistinct plurality of sensations or it would dissolve into an incoherent sequence of discrete sensations.
The structural demands of perception are thus quite high. For object perception, we have been told, involves an interactive relationality that neither unfolds merely diachronically, as a sequence of different sensations one by one, nor subsists merely simultaneously, as the static self-identity of thinghood. It needs to recursively integrate both conflicting moments at once, and so enact the paradoxical, indeed “antinomical” structure which Hegel considered “the deep foundation” of reason itself. Perception needs to generate, to put it in Kantian terms, a “community of reciprocity” [Gemeinschaft der Wechselwirkung] between the One and the Also of the object. The paradox of such reciprocal objecthood is the challenge to thinking that Hegel has created.

**The intervention of “reflection”**

The introductory definitions of One and Also are followed by three scenic illustrations, as the Phenomenology returns to a dramatic mode of presentation. During the first exemplary scene of object perception, consciousness is almost as inactive as before, since it proceeds still as “pure receptivity” [reines Auffassen] (PdG 96). The reason for this inaction or passivity is the concern that cognitive activity may alter the object of perception: “Wenn [das Bewußtsein] selbst bei diesem [Wahr-]Nehmen etwas täte, würde es durch solches Hinzusetzen oder Weglassen die Wahrheit verändern” (PdG 96–97). Similar to sense-certainty, perceptual consciousness supposes that it can obtain the real and direct truth of the object. Passivity is meant to safeguard precisely this commitment to the real existence of the perceptual object, which remains in effect throughout the entire chapter. From this realist commitment it follows that the material thing must have an autonomous existence. Its material being, that is, its substantiality, is “indifferent as to
whether it is perceived” [gleichgültig dagegen, ob er wahrgenommen wird oder nicht] (PdG 93). Further, the passive receptivity of consciousness seems to guarantee the identity of the object and the act of perceiving, and therefore the “criterion of truth” [Kriterium der Wahrheit] must be identical in both cases, too—namely, non-contradictory “self-identity” [Sichselbstgleichheit] (PdG 97), the main feature of substantiality. The ensuing scene of perception thus develops a vulgar notion of substantial matter and so chiefly illustrates the Also of thinghood. The perceiving consciousness, by contrast, is deemed “the changeable and inessential” [das veränderliche und unwesentliche] element in comparison to the object and may therefore be in the wrong about the object (PdG 97). On this view, possible contradictions or the “possibility of misperception” [Möglichkeit der Täuschung], as Hegel puts it, must be caused by the act of perceiving (PdG 97).

The development of the first scene of perception (cf. PdG 97–98) may be summarized as follows.⁹² The object, Hegel writes, at first “presents itself as this one concrete thing” [bietet sich als rein Einer dar] (PdG 97) and is noticed as one simple spatial “continuity” [Kontinuität]. Yet to the perceiving consciousness the thing appears at the same time as a “universal communal medium in which many properties as sensory universalities each exist on their own” [ein allgemeines gemeinschaftliches Medium, worin viele Eigenschaften als sinnliche Allgemeinheiten, jede für sich ist] (PdG 98). With perception, the Also of thinghood enters the stage. In order to maintain the specificity of the ensemble of qualities, the Also of thinghood, the perceiving consciousness feels compelled to break up this indifferent ensemble by perceiving it primarily as an “excluding unit” [ausschließendes Eins] (PdG 97). The thing thus becomes the site of a struggle between the equally important operations of inclusion and exclusion, Also and
One. Since, however, consciousness insists by the end of the scene exclusively on the
Also of thinghood, it robs the properties of their “characteristic negativity” [den
Charakter der Negativität] (PdG 98) and so ultimately relapses into sense-certainty: “und
das Bewußtsein für welches jetzt ein sinnliches Sein ist, ist nur ein Meinen, d. h. es ist
aus dem Wahrnehmen ganz heraus und in sich zurückgegangen.” (PdG 98) Perception
fails in this first scene to relate the two main attributes of the thing without contradiction.
As of now, perception can grasp the object only as an either/or. Either it is apprehended
as a yet unspecified plurality, as a pure self-relation without internal differentiation (“dies
reine sich auf sich selbst beziehen,” PdG 98); or as an “excluding unit” or rein Einer, thus
relapsing into the mode of apprehension of sense-certainty.

“For us,” the informed spectators overseeing natural consciousness on its “path of
desperation” [Weg der Verzweiflung] (PdG 72), the resulting contradiction is hardly
surprising, because it was predestined by Hegel’s terminological design. But the
conclusions generated by this failed attempt are stunning and absolutely critical for the
remainder of the Phenomenology. Consciousness realizes that it does not, indeed cannot,
behave as pure receptivity if perception is to be achieved. Instead, it realizes that a kind
of “reflection” must intervene (sich einmischen) in the perceptual process, which
demands that consciousness turn inward, thus “returning into itself”:

Es hat sich hiermit für das Bewußtsein bestimmt, wie sein Wahrnehmen
wesentlich beschaffen ist, nämlich nicht ein einfaches reines Auffassen, sondern
in seinem Auffassen zugleich aus dem Wahren heraus in sich reflektiert zu sein.
Diese Rückkehr des Bewußtseins in sich selbst, die sich in das reine Auffassen
unmittelbar – denn sie hat sich als dem Wahrnehmen wesentlich gezeigt –
einmischt, verändert das Wahre [viz. the object of perception]. [PdG 98]
With this, finally, the activity of perceiving, specifically, the acts of “reflection” that shape the sensory intake, is recognized as being just as important and essential a factor of perception as the material object. This position not only contradicts passivist notions of sense perception—which Hegel refuted already by the end of the sense-certainty chapter. It is also incompatible with empiricist and representationalist theories of object perception and cognition, because it insists on the formative intervention of reflection \textit{while simultaneously upholding} the claim that perception can apprehend \textit{das Wahre}, the object in its true reality, and not just an appearance thereof. The commitment to realism with regard to the perceptual object remains intact because consciousness recognizes the “untruth” of the either/or contradiction precisely as its own, self-generated mistake: “daß die \textit{Unwahrheit}, die darin vorkommt, in es [consciousness] fällt” (PdG 99).

Consequently, Hegel’s “reflexive” account of object perception contradicts most empiricist theories like Hume’s, according to which the permanent identity of the thing of perception, as has been noted above, is an unreal figment of the understanding. Simultaneously, it conflicts with a subjective or, with Kant’s own word, “critical” idealism, according to which substantial thinghood has no ontological reality but represents only a transcendental subjective category of the understanding. Thus Hegel’s historical contribution to the philosophy of perception, one might say with Kenneth Westphal, is to reject “the uncritical assumption that only a passive kind of cognition can be reconciled with realism” and so combines “for the first and almost the only time in the history of philosophy […] realism about the objects of knowledge with an activist account of knowledge.”
But what kind of active “reflection” and “return into itself” [Rückkehr […] in sich selbst] is it that perception essentially involves according to Hegel? In answering this question, Hegel is perfectly articulate:

Es ist hiermit jetzt, wie es bei der sinnlichen Gewißheit geschah, an dem Wahrnehmen die Seite vorhanden, daß das Bewußtsein in sich zurückgedrängt wird, aber zunächst nicht in dem Sinne, in welchem dies bei jener der Fall war, als ob in es die Wahrheit des Wahrnehmens fiele; sondern vielmehr erkennt es, daß die Unwahrheit, die darin vorkommt, in es fällt. Durch diese Erkenntnis aber ist es zugleich fähig, sie aufzuheben; es unterscheidet sein Auffassen des Wahren [viz. the object] von der Unwahrheit seines Wahrnehmens, korrigiert diese, und insofern es diese Berichtigung selbst vornimmt, fällt allerdings die Wahrheit, als Wahrheit des Wahrnehmens, in dasselbe. Das Verhalten des Bewußtseins, das nunmehr zu betrachten ist, ist also so beschaffen, daß es nicht mehr bloß wahrnimmt, sondern auch seiner Reflexion in sich bewußt ist und diese von der einfachen Auffassung selbst abtrennt. [PdG 99]

Basically, “Reflection in itself” means that perception consciously registers its own operations. Unlike sense-certainty, which consists in the unreflected ostensive gesture of “this-here-now!”, perception has acquired a reflexive awareness of its own perceiving. This is made possible because consciousness now “distinguishes” [unterscheidet] its subjective acts from the reality or “truth” of the object that it apprehends by means of the senses. This reflexive self-awareness of its own cognitive acts on the part of consciousness is traditionally termed apperception. Consciously monitoring its acts of perceiving in relation to the perceptual object, consciousness is now put in a position to assess the truth as much as the untruth and hence the consistency of its perceptions. If consciousness notices inconsistencies in its perceptions, it can “correct” [korrigiert] its sensory apprehensions as misperceptions. In the Phenomenology’s third chapter on “force and understanding” [Kraft und Verstand], Hegel restates the necessity of
apperceptive self-awareness or, with Hegel’s word, “reflection” with regard to the
cognition of objects in general, whether sensible or ideational: “Das Bewußtsein eines
Anderen, eines Gegenstandes überhaupt, ist […] notwendig Selbstbewußtsein,
Reflektiertsein in sich, Bewußtsein seiner selbst in seinem Anderssein” (PdG 135).

The Jena manuscript of 1805, whose second part—the so-called Jena Philosophy
of Spirit—begins with a detailed discussion of sense perception, develops the basic
insight that object perception demands a reflexive intervention on the part of the
perceiving subject. Hegel here argues that reflexive procedures such as “Aufmerksamkeit
[…] Fixiren, Abstrahiren, herausnehmen, Anstrengung[,] Überwindung des
unbestimmten der Empfindung” provide the necessary cognitive means of the
perception. However, in that these procedures in fact alter the apprehension of the
object, especially by way of combination and selection, they introduce a moment of “free
arbitrariness” [freye Willkühr]. He illustrates this “free randomness” with an example
concerning vision. The perceiving subject is said to create, and also to retain, the seen
image “in its inner treasury” [in seinem Schatze] by conjoining the optical manifold:

In dieser Nacht ist das Seyende [i.e. the object] zurückgegangen – […] das Bild ist
ein mannichfältiges – die Form ist an ihm als Bestimmtheit, und dadurch andre
Bestimmte, Vielheit überhaupt. Ich ist die Form nicht nur als einfaches Selbst,
sondern als Bewegung; die Beziehung der Theile des Bildes, – die Form,
Beziehung als die einzige setzen; – insofern sie einen Theil des Inhalts ausmacht
– verändert sie dieselbe – Für sich ist hier die freye Willkühr – Bilder zu
zerreissen und sie auf die ungebundste Weise zu verknüpfen. – Läßt es sich bey
seinem Hervorziehen der Bilder nach der empfangnen Beziehung gehen, so steht
es unter der Herrschaft der sogenannten Ideenassociation – ein englisches Wort,
denn diese nennen noch heutigstags, das blosse Bild von einem Hund z. B., eine
Ideec. Die Gesetze dieser Ideenassociation heissen weiter nichts, als die passive
Ordnung der Vorstellung.

119
Diesen Willkür ist die leere Freyheit, denn ihr Inhalt ist nach einander,
sie liegt bloß in der Form, und geht nur diese an.100

With this passage, Hegel subscribes most explicitly to an activist notion of perception,
which as such refers to a larger discursive formation. In *Techniques of the Observer*,
Jonathan Crary has shown that activist theories specifically of visual perception became
increasingly dominant over the course of the first three decades of the 19th century. On
Crary’s account, these activist re-interpretations of perception promote what he calls a
“subjective vision” that “endowed the observer with a new perceptual autonomy.”101
However, one should add that this activist reinterpretation of sense perception was well
under way by the turn of the 18th century, as Fichte’s *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*
(1799) and several writings of the Jena Romantics can demonstrate. These two sources
delineate a historical nexus that Crary’s influential study in fact ignores.102

But wherever its precise discursive locus, the curious and unique term of the
quoted passage, “free arbitrariness” [freye Willkühr], is attributed by the Jena Philosophy
of Spirit not only to vision but to perception in general. Importantly, this term ascribes a
kind of “freedom” to perception that concerns not so much the diachronically received
“relation” [Beziehung] and the “passive order” [passive Ordnung] of perception, in other
words, the sensations successively imprinted by the external thing. Rather, this “free
randomness” refers to the necessary moment of form-giving in object perception by an
“I” (Ich)—hence to the “reflexive” procedures of consciousness. The immediately
ensuing sentence clarifies at once the “freedom” of these procedures and their limitations:
“Diese Willkühr ist die leere Freyheit, denn ihr Inhalt ist nach einander, sie liegt bloß in
der Form, und geht nur diese an.”103 This received “content” is given in that it consists of
a fixed “sequence” of sensations [nach einander], whereas the “empty freedom” of
perception lies precisely in the reflexive application of a network of relations intrinsic to the perceived content.\textsuperscript{104}

The Jena Philosophy of Spirit likens these formative procedures of reflection to a “primordial creativity” [erste Schöpferkraft], namely, language.\textsuperscript{105} Recalling the “divine nature” that was attributed to language in the case of sense-certainty, it should come as no surprise that the Jena Philosophy of Spirit considers “logos” or “language, being the name-giving power” [Sprache, als die Nahnengebende Krafft] to be the ultimate source of the generative powers of perception, and hence of its “freye Willkühr.” The identification of the sequentially perceived content by its name(s) translates the manifold sequence of “this, this, this…” sensation into a totality representing these sensory differences at one and the same time. In Hegel’s words:

[Die Sprache] gibt ihm [“this” particular object] einen Namen, und spricht diß als das Seyn des Gegenstandes aus; was ist diß? antworten wir, es ist ein Löwe, Esel u.s.f. […] d. h. es ist gar nicht ein gelbes, Füsse und so fort habendes, ein eignes selbstständiges, sondern […] etwas ganz anderes, als es in der Anschauung ist, und diß sein wahres Seyn. […] Durch den Nahmen ist also der Gegenstand als seyend aus dem Ich heraus gebohren. – Diß ist die erste Schöpferkraft, die der Geist ausübt […] Die Welt, die Natur ist nicht mehr ein Reich von Bildern, innerlich aufgehobne, die kein Seyn haben, sondern ein Reich der Nahmen. […] Im Namen ist erst eigentlich das Anschauen, das Thierische, und Zeit und Raum, überwunden; das angeschaute ist ein verflüchtigtes; seine Ganzheit […] aus dem Gefühl emporgehoben in den höhren geistigen Sinn; Individualität, Wirklichkeit überhaupt.\textsuperscript{106}

When a thing of perception is identified by its name and therefore “counts as sign” [gilt als Zeichen], the “sign” expresses its relational structure: both its specific identity (as \textit{this “lion,”} for instance) \textit{and} diversity (as a being that is yellow, also brown, has also feet and mane, etc.).\textsuperscript{107}
The *Phenomenology* generally adheres to this line of reasoning, defending throughout the necessity of form-giving reflection in order to generate perceptual content. The sense-certainty chapter made it already very clear that even the most elementary form of perception is based on deictic, quasi-linguistic acts of articulation. At the beginning of the *Phenomenology*’s third chapter, Hegel goes even further. Reviewing his critical findings about object perception, he writes that the necessity of reflexive form-giving “eradicates” [vertilgt] the “self-sufficiency of the thing” [Selbständigkeit des Dinges], the consequence being that “nämlich der in der Wahrnehmung für wahr gehaltene Inhalt in der Tat nur der Form angehört” (PdG 109).

This activist conclusion comes dangerously close to a radical subjectivism. If the thing’s “self-sufficiency” is indeed “eradicated,” it might appear that the subject has all the power and unlimited creative freedom to generate the object that it wants to perceive. Fichte exemplifies like no one else this ultra-subjectivist stance, and it can be summed up with a catchphrase from the original *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), which reads: “all reality is produced solely through the faculty of imagination [Einbildungskraft].”108 In that view, external perception would result primarily from acts of self-determination.109

Yet the *Phenomenology* argues against a radical subjectivism, not least to safeguard its realist commitment vis-à-vis the perceptual object. The first step in doing so was, as we have seen, to ascribe the “truth” or the consistency of the act of perceiving to consciousness, yet decidedly not the truth of the object as such: “[Das Bewußtsein] unterscheidet sein Auffassen des Wahren von der Unwahrheit seines Wahrnehmens, korrigiert diese, und insofern es diese Berichtigung selbst vornimmt, fällt allerdings die Wahrheit, als Wahrheit des Wahrnehmens, in dasselbe” (PdG 99). The ensuing second
illustration of perception takes the next step (cf. PdG 99–101). This scenic illustration has no other objective than to ward off a subjectivist notion of perception, according to which the objects “becomes a mere surface” [zu einer bloß umschließenden Oberfläche wird] that contains only a diversity of free matters without synthetic unity or exclusive “oneness” [Einssein] (PdG 101). If this were the case, only consciousness would possess the One, hence the capacity to “unite” [das in eins setzen] the thing’s sensible diversity (PdG 101). The object’s specific unity would be no real attribute but could only be “imagined” [vorgestellt] (PdG 101). Similarly, “the permanence” [das Bestehen] of material thinghood as a specific set of properties would be an illusion (PdG 100). The thing would dissolve into a series of merely subjective sensations, so that it would be “in der Tat nur weiß, an unser Auge gebracht, scharf auch, an unsere Zunge, auch kubisch, an unser Gefühl” (PdG 99).

The second chapter of the Phenomenology presents no elaborate speculative argument against such subjectivism but for once resorts to common sense, as Hegel argues that it is counterintuitive to consider the external world a pure machination of the self. And indeed, by the end of the second illustration of perception, consciousness recognizes that the material thing is “in and for itself” [an und für sich] the true because permanent bearer of properties, not the subject (PdG 100). With this conclusion, the experience of consciousness overrules for the first but definitely not the last time even “the most judicious philosophers.”

The observations that conclude this second and lead into the third scenic illustration of perception are absolutely crucial, since they spell out the relational and at the same time processual structure that specifies, for Hegel, a perceptual object. Hegel
here translates the contradiction of the One/Also double into one unified relational term—“reflection”—that has two interdependent dimensions. The perceptual object, Hegel claims, is “reflected in itself” [in sich reflektiert], which means it has a being “for itself” [für sich]; but it also has a being “for another” [für ein Anderes] (PdG 101–2). Transforming the material thing into a two-sided relationality, reflection-in-itself and reflection-in-other(s), the object thus appears to assume a double nature, namely: an internal and an external mode of existence. This move obviously replicates the doubling that occurred when consciousness noticed that it has to distinguish its external sensations and its perceptual acts of perceiving. However, in contrast to this internal reflection or apperception of consciousness, the double reflection that characterizes the object “is afflicted” with an “opposition” [mit einem Gegensatze affizierte Allgemeinheit] (PdG 104), by which Hegel means the discrepancy between the object’s internal and external mode of being, its inclusivity and its exclusivity.

In a way, this conclusion replays the recursive dialectic between One and Also, yet there is one crucial difference. Conceiving of objecthood in purely relational terms—as a correlation of reflection-in-itself and being-for-other(s)—the numeric contradiction associated with the terms One and Also is finally superseded. From here on, consciousness starts to apprehend its objects—whether sensible or supersensible, historical or theoretical—no longer in static numeric terms but instead as a network of relations that needs to be determined through a strangely circular movement—the process of reflection.

The experience of perception gave rise to this insight. As perception, consciousness begins to understand (begreifen) its content through acts of reflection that
determine by forms of negation and articulation the relationality of the perceived content, thereby generating the very form of the object itself. Or, as Hegel states directly: “Für uns ist dieser Gegenstand durch die Bewegung des Bewußtseins so geworden, daß dieses in das Werden desselben verflochten und die Reflexion auf beiden Seiten dieselbe oder nur Eine ist” (PdG 108). “For us,” the type of reflection that emerged within consciousness so as to monitor the consistency of the perceptual process is identical with the double reflection that characterizes the real being of the perceptual object, in that the logic—reflection—is in both cases the same. The concrete being and the perception of an object does not consist in a passive impression, as “we” have seen, but is always interwoven reflexive acts of form-giving, wherein language functions as the “divine” and indeed “primordial” means. Objecthood is formed and transformed by the reflexive actions, and ultimately, the language of consciousness.\textsuperscript{111}

**Conceptualization as narration, concept as “story”**

At the end of the third chapter of the *Phenomenology*, its narrator describes the main faculty of the understanding—the power to “explain” [erklären]—as a “narrative” movement:

> Es ist also nur die eigene Notwendigkeit, was der Verstand ausspricht; einen Unterschied, den er also nur so macht, daß er es zugleich ausdrückt, daß der Unterschied kein Unterschied der Sache selbst sei. Diese Notwendigkeit, die nur im Worte liegt, ist hiermit die Hererzählung der Momente, die den Kreis derselben ausmachen [my emphasis]; sie werden zwar unterschieden, ihr Unterschied aber [wird] zugleich, kein Unterschied der Sache selbst zu sein, ausgedrückt und daher selbst sogleich wieder aufgehoben; diese Bewegung heißt *Erklären*. [PdG 125]
This “movement” of discoursing with itself, the “movement” of “explaining” that originates only with “the word,” provides the means to reconcile the contradictions of objecthood. For this type of discursive reflection, Hegel states, can draw “necessary” analytic distinction that need not pertain to “the thing as such,” which is why that distinction is “immediately sublated”—at once revoked and preserved—by that discourse. This is exactly what Hegel did at the beginning of the Phenomenology’s second chapter. The distinction between the Also of thinghood and its exclusive oneness, or the distinction between reflection-in-itself and being-for-other(s), was introduced and explained as a recursion, as a dialectic relation wherein the function effected by the former immediately presupposes the latter term. Yet the three scenic illustrations showed that as a matter of fact or experience this recursive relation can be perceived only as a rigid either/or: either the thing presents itself immediately as this One; or it is experienced as a bearer of diverse properties. Only an explanation, then, can say that the thing of perception presents both aspects at the same time, that it exhibits a necessary difference which is, precisely, no real difference, thereby capturing that synthetic objective unity which, although contradictory in experience, we know—or at least take—to be true.

Eventually, consciousness itself realizes that the reflexive but not real distinction between the One and the Also of objecthood holds true only in a verbal discourse; it realizes, as Hegel puts it at the end of the chapter on perception, that it perceives “eine Unterscheidung, welche nur noch in den Worten liegt” (PdG 104)—a distinction, to be sure, that can be made and maintained only with words, through reflection.

Consciousness comes to understand that “[t]he origin of the unity and order of appearances,” to borrow Pippin’s phrase, is “not some beyond […] but the self-conscious
activity of the understanding itself.”¹¹² This form-giving activity, one should still add, consists in self-conscious acts of articulation and reflection, we have seen, and ultimately in an explanatory discourse that Hegel characterizes in the above passage as a form of “narration” or “narrative articulation” [Hererzählung]. But how is such explanatory discourse “narrative”? This choice of word demands clarification, and I shall try to offer some in these concluding pages.

Still in the third chapter but a few pages later, Hegel continues his exposition of “explaining” as a “narrative” process. Recognizing the object as the result of its own explanatory reflections, consciousness finds “a great deal of self-satisfaction,” as Hegel puts it:

In dem Erklären ist eben darum so viele Selbstbefriedigung, weil das Bewußtsein dabei, [um] es so auszudrücken, in unmittelbarem Selbstgespräche mit sich, nur sich selbst genießt, dabei zwar etwas anderes zu treiben scheint, aber in der Tat sich nur mit sich selbst herumtreibt. [PdG 134]

“The explaining” in which consciousness tells itself how, by which operations and differentiations, it cognizes its objects is deemed a source of its satisfaction in this passage. But what is it that makes this “soliloquy” [Selbstgespräch] so “satisfying”? The answer, Hegel characteristically suggests, lies in its determination not of the self but of “objectivity.” In the Second Part of the Wissenschaft der Logik, the so-called “Begriffslogik,” he writes:

Das Begreifen eines Gegenstandes besteht in der Tat in nichts anderem, als daß Ich denselben sich zu eigen macht, ihn durchdringt und ihn in seine eigene Form […] bringt. […] das Denken hebt seine Unmittelbarkeit, mit der er zunächst vor uns kommt, auf und macht […] sein An- und Fürsichsein oder seine Objektivität. Diese Objektivität hat der Gegenstand somit im Begriffe.¹¹³
The *Phenomenology* articulates the same thought with the concise formula: “das Bewußtsein [muß] ihn [den Gegenstand] als sich selbst wissen” (PdG 576).

Now, what is the most elementary form by which consciousness apprehends and knows itself? What is the most elementary concept or knowledge that it can have of itself? The *Phenomenology* has taught “us,” its readers, that this form or concept is, most fundamentally, the “story” of its movement or experience (“die Geschichte ihrer Bewegung oder ihrer Erfahrung,” PdG 90). But this “story,” like every narrative, turned out to be a twofold (hi)story: at once a processual history and a resulting totality, at once a narration and the story. This crucial discrepancy or “Hauptverschiedenheit” (PdG 83) between process and result emerged for consciousness as soon as it confronted its senses. Consequently, consciousness had to acknowledge the inevitably diachronic constitution of knowledge, even in the case of sense-certainty. By the same token, the initial chapters of the *Phenomenology* inculcated the necessary correlation between process and result, becoming and being, negation and relation, reflection and percept, movement and content in sensory experience. Sense-certainty seemed like a pure, instantaneous result—the immediate knowledge of *this* here; yet it turned out to be such only by virtue of a process of negation and abstraction. Similarly, the being of the perceptual object seemed to manifest a simple unity or *Zusammengefaßtsein* of heres and nows; yet the relational form of objectivity itself, its contradictory unity of One and Also, turned out to be “entwined” with the process of perception, with its acts of differentiation and reflection. The fact that sense-certainty and perception describe both a process of apprehension and an epistemic result underscores and reproduces the major Hegelian doctrine that there are no pure results, that the epistemic outcome cannot be subtracted from the process of its
The (hi)story of conscious experience, its movement, “cannot be described from a sideways-on or third-person point of view” but “must in a sense be re-enacted, […] as a kind of dramatic exercise.” And the *Phenomenology* does just that: it narrates the epic (hi)story of consciousness, its gradual transformation into fully self-conscious spirit and self-determining reason, in such a way that “we,” the phenomenological spectators, can recognize the story that informs these transformations. “For us,” therefore, the narration of the (hi)stories of conscious experience—sense-certainty, perception, understanding, desire, and the like—coincides with their conceptualization, while the stories conveyed by and contained within these narrations coincide with their respective concepts.

To tell the (hi)story of conscious experience naturally requires temporal action: narration, *Herauszahlung*. Taken as a pure result, however, as a content to be grasped at once, the story identifies a holistic ideational structure that transcends its diachronic articulation. Hegel calls this holistic and simultaneous grasp the absolute concept or unconditioned knowledge. In contrast to the (hi)stories of conscious experience narrated by the *Phenomenology*, which represent “concepts” that have actual—that is, temporal—existence (*Dasein*), as Hegel writes in the final chapter of the Phenomenology, this absolute concept “sublates,” indeed “eradicates” [tilgt] its temporal form” [seine Zeitform]. The *Hauptverschiedenheit* that characterizes the (hi)story of consciousness breaks down; process and result are finally re-united. Consciousness returns to a

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secondary immediacy and simplicity and so regains that “certainty” [Gewissheit] which characterized its very first experience, sense-certainty.\footnote{119} The final chapter of the *Phenomenology* proclaims that such sublation were possible and so confirms the possibility of what Hegel terms *Wissenschaft*, or, speculative philosophy. However, one might wonder, still, whether the double nature of the (hi)story of conscious experience can be fully sublated, whether the discrepancy between process and content can be eliminated, whether absolute spirit can replace narrative explanation. The supposed product of this final sublation has, in any case, no actual existence, as Hegel says himself.

The primary instrument, the *organon* allowing the readers to grasp the (hi)stories of consciousness are scenographies. Though the *Phenomenology*’s narrator tends to introduce the conceptual issues and terms by way of an “argumentative”\footnote{120} discourse, these issues and terms achieve tangible existence only through scenographies. In the Preface, Hegel explains the necessary primacy of this textual form of presentation. It is, in Hegel’s words, solely “die Darstellung des erscheinenden Wissens,” the presentation of “knowing” as it comes to “appearance” that can illuminate and justify the “standpoint of science” [Standpunkt der Wissenschaft] (PdG 72)—the standpoint of conceptual thinking. However, these scenographies of conscious experience and the “appearances of spirit” that they outline require readerly aesthesis and recasting, indeed re-enactment. “We” must transform these appearances into perceptible scenes to be in a position to observe—or, literally, “theorize”—their (hi)stories; “we” must stage the dialectical dramas of sense-certainty, perception, desire and all the other scenographies in order to extract their actual and existent, their phenomenological concepts. Thus, in these recast scenes, experience and understanding, process and result, narration and story, meet—not
Thing Perception according to the *Phenomenology* (Relationality)

once and for all, as in absolute knowledge, but temporally and recursively, as in the formations of sense perception themselves.
Part Two: Literary Senses
The poetry of sense perception

“Die Poësie ist das ächt absolut Reelle. Dies ist der Kern meiner Phil[osophie]. Je poëtischer, je wahrer,” states Novalis in 1798 (N II: 420 #471). This “truly absolute” reality and unconditioned truth is no ready-made fact but created by the mind through acts of poetry. For “poetry” [Poesie] or “poetry-making” [das Dichten]—both are used nearly synonymously by Novalis—is “the mind’s inherent way of acting” [die eigenthümliche Handlungsweise des menschlichen Geistes], as Klingsohr, the arch-poet in Heinrich von Ofterdingen, pronounces (N I: 335). Poetry (in the sense of both Poesie and Dichten) thus signifies for Novalis at once the most fundamental activity of the mind—its generative spontaneity—and the operation to realize that which is thought and known outside the mind, the real.

Taken together, these two definitions of poetry bear directly upon Novalis’s conception of sense perception, the basic modality by which the mind relates to the real, external world. Not simply the result of passive reception, sensory perceptions would need poetic formation to acquire and retain cognitive shape and meaning. Aesthesis, or sense perception, would necessarily involve acts of poiēsis (the Greek word for “making, creating”), specifically the form-giving acts that poets perform with words. One would have to make perceptions, in short. Yet this link between perception and poiēsis would hold also in reverse: the acts of poiēsis that generate poetry (Dichtung) would, no less
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than those of thinking, involve acts of perception as well. The activity of poetic formation
\textit{(Dichten)} would be, in either case, intertwined with the “willful, active and productive
use of our [sensory] organs,” as Novalis puts it:

\begin{quote}
Dichtkunst ist wohl nur – willkürlicher, thätiger produktiver Gebrauch unserer
Organe – und vielleicht wäre Denken selbst nicht viel anders – und
Denken und Dichten also einerley. Denn im Denken wenden ja die Sinne den
Reichtum ihrer Eindrücke zu einer neuen Art von Eindrücken an – und was
daraus entsteht, nennen wir einen Gedanken. [N II: 759–60 #56]
\end{quote}

Consequently, thinking and the composition of poetry are “identical” [einerley] for the
single reason that both derive their results from the same source: both originate in acts of
perception that transform the “wealth” of sensory impressions into a “new type of
impression,” namely, into “thoughts”—whether prosaic or poetic in kind.

The relation between sense perception and poetry (\textit{Poesie, Dichten}) that Novalis
thus proposes (and which current developments in the cognitive sciences in fact support)\textsuperscript{3}
can be paraphrased with a pithy note by Friedrich Schlegel, itself a “striking example” of
what Novalis once called the “inner symorganization and symevolution” between his and
Schlegel’s way of thinking.\textsuperscript{4} In this note, written in 1798, Schlegel observes: “Alle Bilder
d[er] Dichter sind buchstäblich wahr; alles unser Empfinden, Fühlen, Wahrnehmen ist ein
Dichten.”\textsuperscript{5} It is this speculative link between poetry and perception in Novalis, its various
conceptual articulations as well as its poetic representations, that the following chapter
will trace. In a final step, I will consider one poetic consequence of this link, namely, the
emergence of the blue flower at the beginning of \textit{Heinrich von Ofterdingen}. Analyzing
the aesthesiological cohesion of this unparalleled scenography of perception, I will argue
that the significance of this flower cannot be abstracted from its perceptual nature, for
which reason this flower would represent the literary emblem of the interconnection between perception and poetry.

The unfinished prose work, Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs, offers an excellent introduction to the significance of perception for poetry, and of poetry for perception, in Novalis. The task of the apprentices is, precisely, to learn to recognize and decipher the “script” of nature: the “wunderliche Figuren […] die zu jener großen Chiffernschrift zu gehören scheinen, die man überall […] erblickt” (N I: 201). This figural script can be “seen” in animate as well as inanimate objects, in clouds and crystals as well as plants and animals, and even in “accidental combinations of events” [sonderbaren Conjuncturen des Zufalls] (N I: 201). The perception and comprehension, or the seeing and deciphering, of this “wondrous script” [Wunderschrift] of nature is what the apprentices aspire to learn from their “teacher” [Lehrer]. Inspired by their teacher’s exemplary development—whom even as a child “der Trieb die Sinne zu üben, zu beschäftigen, zu erfüllen, keine Ruhe ließ” (N I: 202)—the apprentices, too, seek to sharpen and employ their senses. As Peter Utz has commented, the Lehrlinge is indeed a story about and of the senses, a “Sinnengeschichte.” Yet given the nature of sense perception for Novalis, that story must be twofold. On the one hand it is a story in which, not unlike other texts by Novalis, perception is itself represented “as an act of reading.” On the other, the Lehrlinge tells the story of learning to enhance one’s ability to perceive, an apprenticeship in sensing that Friedmar Apel calls a “Sehschulung”:

This elaborate training of the eye and the senses in general includes the devising and development of mental techniques that serve to transform perception as a whole, so that perception becomes a productive, creative faculty, or, as Novalis paradoxically names it in a fragment, “active receptivity.”

The natural goal of these exercises to enhance the acuity as well as the creativity of all sensory modalities (exercises that are in fact not without historical precedent, as Utz has helpfully shown) is to make the figural script of nature “visible and intelligible” [sichtbar und verständlich] (N I: 202). This, however, presupposes the cultivation of a new type of vision, indeed a general transformation of the modality by which one perceives and thus interacts with the world. Through acute practice and sustained observation, the teacher has completed this transformation, the result of which is described as follows:

Nun fand er überall Bekanntes wieder, nur wunderlich gemischt, gepaart, und also ordneten sich selbst in ihm oft seltsame Dinge. Er merkte bald auf die Verbindungen in allem, auf Begegnungen, Zusammentreffungen. Nun sah er bald nichts mehr allein. – In große bunte Bilder drängten sich die Wahrnehmungen seiner Sinne: er hörte, sah, tastete und dachte zugleich. Er freute sich, Fremdlinge zusammen zu bringen. Bald waren ihm die Sterne Menschen, bald die Menschen Sterne, die Steine Thiere, die Wolken Pflanzen, er spielte mit den Kräften und Erscheinungen, er wußte wo und wie er dies und jenes finden, und erscheinen lassen konnte, und griff so selbst in den Saiten nach Tönen und Gängen umher. [N I: 202]
Having acquired this new mode of perception, the teacher sees and understands the universal network—or the wondrous script—connecting all things, beings, and incidents. Rather than passively receiving empirical givens, his senses willfully convey to him their complementarity in the form of synesthetic “images,” or simultaneous “conjunctures” [Zusammentreffungen], that are at once perceptible to the senses and intelligible to the mind, or visible and intelligible.

The teacher, in short, now perceives the world as a poet, as an artist. His sense or vision reveals the poetic composition that holds the world together, so that the “fragmentation” [Zersplitterung] of perception into five distinct senses, as a late fragment by Novalis calls it, is overcome, and the world, the object fragmented by ordinary perception, likewise, unified again. In seeing as the poets do, the teacher has the additional power to modify his perceptions as he sees fit. He can “play” freely with “appearances,” blending distinct sensations together and employing the perceptions they produce as disposable signs or ciphers, combining these to “make things appear” at will or to create synesthetic “images.” As a poet of the senses, one has the ability, the teacher explains at the end of the *Lehrlinge*, to arrange “the appearances of nature” through autonomous acts of perception and imagination “in easily comprehensible and nicely illuminated compositions” [die Naturerscheinungen in leicht faßliche und treffend beleuchtete Gemählde zu ordnen] (N I: 231). It is this creative ability, in combination with the intellectual ability to communicate his observations through “known concepts and experiences” [bekannte Begriffe und Erfahrungen], that make him a “true prophet of nature” [Verkündiger der Natur] (N I: 231). The teacher has thus mastered the method of
presentation described by Novalis in a fragment as “Plastisirungsmethode”—that is, the ability to think and sense at once, to think with the senses and to sense through thought.\textsuperscript{13}

Several fragments of 1798 speculate about a transformation of the senses analogous to the change in the teacher’s perception of the world. According to these fragments, the teacher can be described as an “almighty” artist who freely and spontaneously uses his body as “an instrument” to shape the world:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

This ability to “modify” the world through the active, instrumental usage of the body and its organs, which the teacher possesses, is precisely what Novalis calls “magic”: “Magie ist = Kunst, die Sinnenwelt willkührlich zu gebrauchen” (N II: 335 #109). Indeed, for Novalis magician is but another word for poet: “\textit{Der Zauberer ist Poët}” (N II: 380 #286). Thanks to the magic “faculty to modify the impression at will” [\textit{Vermögen […] den Eindruck beliebig zu modificiren}] and “to direct sensory irritability at will” [\textit{Reitzbarkeit beliebig zu dirigiren}] (N II: 367 #235), the poet—or magician—can freely poeticize and re-enchant the world. And so his imagination functions indeed as “the wondrous sense that can replace all the other senses” [\textit{der wunderbare Sinn, der uns alle Sinne ersetzen kann}], as Novalis famously claimed (N II: 423 #479). Controlling his senses like an instrument, he can even “force” them to “produce the shape that he demands”: “Er wird seine Sinne zwingen ihm die Gestalt zu \textit{produiren}, die er verlangt […] er wird sehn[,] hören – und fühlen – was, wie und in welcher Verbindung er will” (N II: 373 #247).\textsuperscript{14}
This ability to freely “associate” and “catenate” represents for Novalis the very condition for the possibility of poetry as such: “Der Poët braucht die Dinge und Worte, wie Tasten und die ganze Poësie beruht auf thätiger Ideenassociation – auf selbstthätiger, absichtlchter, idealischer Zufallproduktion – (zufällige – freye Catenation.)” (N II: 692 #935).

The active and deliberate—or poetic—usage of the senses that all these fragments demand and that the teacher has attained is described as “inverted” in another fragment dating from 1798:

This usage of the senses is deemed “inverted” by Novalis because it transforms passive sensory reception into productive acts. The musician does not merely receive sounds but rather “poeticizes” them with his ear, while the painter “paints” with his eye rather than reproducing ocular impressions. This conversion of passive, reproductive processes into generative, poetic acts are accessible not only to artists. In principle, the fragment continues, every human perception involves an active usage of the senses:


At the close of the fragment, Novalis equates such active sense perceptions, capable of using “ideas at will” to “modify the real world,” as “poetry”: “/Thätiger Sinn des Gefühls. Poësie./” (N II: 364 #226). It is this inherently poetic potential of the human senses, their potential functioning as a spontaneous source of creation, that the apprentices must cultivate to first decipher the Chiffernschrift of nature and then, finally, compose poetic ciphers themselves, thus finding their personal Zeichensprache. Like their teacher, then, they must transform their senses into an autonomous instrument or “language” [Sprache], a term with the broad significance for Novalis of the “function of an instrument as such,” or, more precisely, an “instrument of speech” [Sprachwerckzeug]. To decipher the script of nature, they must learn to perceive poetically, using their senses as though they could be “spoken” like a verbal language. Just as a poet must practice his verbal instrument—the choice of words and figures, for instance, or the employment of
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prosody—to acquire an individual poetic style, so must the student of nature learn to control his instrument, the senses, through deliberate exercise and reflection so as to unleash, finally, the poetic potential of the senses. Accordingly, the apprentices pursue a mode of perception that requires, similar to the composition of poetry, intentional acts of “selection, reduction and combination,” as Friedmar Apel observes. This suggests in turn, Apel continues, that in the Lehrlinge, sense perception and aesthetic production share the same root, namely, “creative acts of perception that are intentionally controlled.”

The teacher never disclose[s] exactly what became of him once he fully mastered the inverted (or magical) usage of the senses. He wants his apprentices to “pursue their own path” [den eignen Weg verfolgen] instead (N I: 204). As recounted in the second part, these differ with regard to the specific field of inquiry yet still aim at the same goal: the unleashing of the poetic productivity of the senses. Indeed, one apprentice, identified as “the one” [der Eine], describes the ultimate goal of his endeavor to manipulate perception and cognition through controlled acts of attention (Aufmerksamkeit) as “a new type of perceiving” [eine neue Art von Wahrnehmungen] wherein “feeling and thinking” [empfinden und denken] coincide (N I: 220). Similarly, this apprentice envisions a “creative perception of the world” [schöpferische Weltbetrachtung] in which “making and knowing” [Hervorbringen und Wissen] stand in “the most marvelous reciprocity” [in der wundervollsten Wechselverbindung] (N I: 225). The collective conclusion of several unidentified apprentices immediately preceding the first speech of “the one” similarly aligns thinking and feeling: “Das Denken ist nur ein Traum des Fühlens, ein erstorbenenes Fühl[en], ein blaßgraues, schwaches Leben” (N I: 219).
In the apprentices’ endeavors to transform the ostensibly receptive senses into a creative faculty, poetry is both the leading language and the chief instrument. Composed of a sequence of tales and speeches that individual apprentices recount to the assembled group, the narrative structure of the second part makes the privileged role of poetry and poetic expression evident. Occasionally, the teacher adds an illustrative story of his own or, as happens at the end of the *Lehrlinge*, comments on the recounted tales (N I: 231–33). This structure is consistent with the narrator’s remark right at the beginning of the second part that the “art of poetry” [Dichtkunst] has been “the preferred instrument of all genuine friends of nature” [das liebste Werkzeug der eigentlichen Naturfreunde] since ancient times (N II: 206). “Fables and poems” [Märchen und Gedichte] (N II: 206 are described as the means of renewing and transforming human perception, and the story of Hyacinth and Rosenblüthe (N II: 214–18) exemplifies how this might work. A “lively fellow” [muntrer Gespiele] tells this story of two lovers in order to arouse feelings of love and desire in his peers who never felt them before, summoning “the spirit that inserts itself into all your senses with a thousand colors” [der Geist, der sich mit tausend bunten Farben in all deine Sinne drängt] (N II: 214). Sharpening their senses through such shared recounting of tales as well as exercises they practice individually, the apprentices may one day become “prophets of nature,” like their teacher.

The difficulty of explaining the senses

That perception should entail cognitive acts of poeticizing (*Dichten*) and is communicated best as poetry (*Dichtung*) is a conception consistent with views of poetry that were prevalent around 1800. Poetry was deemed back then a “progressive universal
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poetry” [progressive Universalpoesie], to use Friedrich Schlegel’s emblematic formulation, having the capacity not only to integrate scientific discourses and social practices but also to substitute for bodily sensations as well as sensory media. Consequently, as Friedrich Kittler has claimed, poetry can function as a universal medium of translation enabling exchanges or translations between the distinct domains of thought and life. Though not entirely pleased with Schlegel’s celebrated definition of “progressive universal poetry” in his Athenäum fragment no. 116, Novalis indeed variously represents poetry as a translational operation.

The fact that Novalis’s notion of poetry pertains to a larger discursive formation around 1800 does not mitigate, however, the semantic complications that arise if applied to perception. For the equation of sense perception with acts of poetry-making blurs the seemingly self-evident distinction between basic categories of experience as well: passivity and activity, receptivity and creativity, imitation and production, apprenticeship and invention, and even that between reading and writing, as his alternating accounts of figures to be seen in nature and created through artistic vision indicate. Still, while Schlegel’s dictum, quoted above, that “alles unser Empfinden, Fühlen, Wahrnehmen ist ein Dichten” directly equates acts of perception with poetry-making, Novalis—perhaps because himself a poet—does not make that categorical leap. With Hegel, one might instead understand the relationship between perception and poetry as it is conceived by Novalis as a series of speculative sentences, requiring distinctions in order to progress, even as those distinctions become less recognizable or, in Hegel’s terms, dialectically “confused.”
Novalis is aware of these theoretical difficulties. In a note from the *Fichte-Studien*, which conceptually aligns sense perception with the imagination—the traditional source of poetic composition—Novalis writes: “*Die Schwierigkeit ist nun die Sinne zu erklären*” (N II: 183 #568). He points out two specific issues that complicate perception. The first issue concerns the increasing exposure to and consumption of print media that characterized experience in his own time, or, as an expression from the first *Dialog* (N II: 426–29) would have it, “die nachtheiligen Folgen des Lesens.” It is the “onslaught of letters” [Last Buchstaben], the ever-growing quantity of print literature that usurps the sensory faculties. As stated by speaker A of the *Dialog*, the experience of a “world” described by his interlocutor, speaker B, as made up primarily of already second-hand “ciphers” [Chifferwelt] and “woodcarvings” [Druckerstock], printed and distributed en masse, has already replaced the irreproducible experience of sense perception, to the effect that “wir am Ende nur noch Bücher, aber keine Dinge mehr seh und unsre 5 leiblichen Sinne beynah so gut, wie nicht mehr haben.” However, the complaint about medial overkill and the resulting excess of mediated experience betrays, on its flipside, also an eminently modern addiction that is vigorously defended by Speaker B, namely, the addiction to reading, to the consumption of media in general.23 Regardless of the stance one takes vis-à-vis the widespread dissemination of pre-produced, reproduced medial contents within any present time or tense, it is hardly surprising that Novalis views second-hand ciphers critically, as directly undermining the poetic capabilities of sense perception to make and discern ciphers in the first place.

The increasing importance of mediated experience, which speakers A and B polemically debate, inevitably highlights the apparent antithesis, the bodily senses, their
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experiential potentials and empirical properties. Novalis shared this interest in the bodily senses with like-minded Jena Romantics Schelling and Johann Wilhelm Ritter, with Schiller and Goethe, and to a lesser extent with Friedrich Schlegel. All these authors partake in the epistemic reevaluation of the human senses and bodily functions taking place in Germany and elsewhere in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. Thus in a historical perspective, Novalis’s “difficulties at explaining the senses” can be placed in the context of the emerging nineteenth-century life sciences—biological anthropology, physiology, and neurology above all. This historical connection has been the object of investigation in several studies. As these studies demonstrate, and as the many fragments arranged under such subject headings as “physiology” and “anthropology” in Das Allgemeine Brouillon attest, Novalis was well aware of the then ongoing redefinition of the categories for understanding human life in general and human sensation in particular. More significantly, he understood the epochal impact of these contemporary scientific investigations and redefinitions of the human body. Almost two hundred years before Foucault concluded, at the end of The Order of Things, “that man is a recent invention,” Novalis realizes that these redefinitions of human life give rise to a new concept, “man” as such, or der Mensch in general. He sums up both the historical novelty and the discursive constructedness of that concept in a single striking Blüthenstaub fragment: “Menschen zu beschreiben ist deswegen bis jetzt unmöglich gewesen, weil man nicht gewußt hat, was ein Mensch ist” (N II: 281 #108). If “man” and the conceptual categories associated with “man” are relatively new inventions culminating around 1800, rather than transhistorical identities, Novalis takes such historicizations of the concept of “man” further still, suggesting that “man” is not now being invented once and for all, but
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is instead always in the process of becoming, and that to engage in such a process is
neither a scientific nor a conceptual development but an “art”: “Mensch werden ist eine
Kunst,” as he will later observe (N II: 348 #153).

The second and most immediate reason giving rise to the “difficulty of explaining
the senses” (N II: 183 #568) is a philosophical one. As mentioned before, this expression
is found in in the Fichte-Studien—notbooks filled with notations and excerpts
constituting a “laborious examination of Fichte’s philosophy” [mühsame[] Untersuchung
der Fichtischen Philosophie], as Novalis characterizes them in retrospect (N I: 721).

Novalis’ relation to Fichte in the context of German Idealism at large has been the subject
of considerable scholarly research.26 In the next section, I will consider Novalis’s main
criticism of Fichte and detail how he freely appropriates the Fichtean notion of
Wechselbestimmung, “reciprocal determination,” bringing it to bear on his conceptions of
sense perception. In order to do so, however, it will be necessary to first review Fichte’s
basic theorem, namely, the primordial act and constitutive deed, the Tathandlung by
means of which consciousness comes into being. Proposed as the originary activity of
consciousness, the Tathandlung, as described in the original Grundlage der gesammten
Wissenschaftslehre of 1794, consists for Fichte in two interconnected actions. First, this
deed effects the categorical opposition between “Me” [Ich] and all that is “Not-Me”
[Nicht-Ich], or “ego” and “non-ego.” Thanks to this transcendental opposition
(Entgegensetzung), subject and object—the empirical instantiations of ego and non-ego—
can be distinguished in experience. This also introduces the further possibility that the
ego may “determine itself” through such “posings against” or “op-positions” to a non-
ego, thereby gaining self-knowledge or cognizance of its contents. As Novalis succinctly
summarizes this Fichtean insight into the necessarily oppositional structure of self-consciousness: “Ich wird nur im Entgegengesetzten wirksam und bestimmt für sich” (N II: 181 #566).

Yet, in order to pose any such constitutive opposition in the first place, the ego must already be conceived as a transcendental agent capable of positing (setzen) itself. This act of self-positing—which the Wissenschaftslehre must present for reasons of causality as its “first principle” [erster, schlechthin unbedingter Grundsatz]—is the other, correlated action of which the originary Tathandlung consists. In effecting its own existence, however, the ego must precede not only all actual, empirical consciousness and cognizance but, taken as the determining ground and primordial cause, opposition itself. Given the non-demonstrability of this proposition, Fichte can only posit the logical necessity of the priority and primordial agency of the ego—thus enacting the very activity that his philosophy will pose as the foundation of thought. He does so in self-affirming propositions or Setzungen, such as “Es ist demnach Erklärungsgrund aller Thatsachen des empirischen Bewusstseyns, dass vor allem Setzen im Ich vorher das Ich selbst gesetzt sey,” and in presenting “the narration” [die Erzählung] of primordial self-positing in the first section of the Wissenschaftslehre in starkly circular terms—note, for example, “Das Ich setzt ursprünglich schlechthin sein eigenes Seyn.” At the end of the section, Fichte concludes, simply and unequivocally, “Das Ich setzt sich selbst.”

In juxtaposition, these three formulations betray a seemingly small, but in truth decisive, discrepancy that pervades Fichte’s thinking as a whole. The first formulation stipulates, with a very peculiar and hardly translatable turn of phrase, “that the ego ought to be posited [gesetzt sey] prior to all other acts of positing within the ego.” Due to the
passive sentence construction, it remains unclear what kind of subject or agent performs this prior act of positing “within”—but not by—the ego. The original cause that effectuates the ego, its existence as well as its further acts, remains—as it must—ungrounded, even as it grounds all further acts of consciousness. The second and third examples eliminate precisely this uncertainty in presenting the ego as the originary cause of its own existence. It is this oscillation between original ground and original groundlessness, between the ego as a first cause and the ego as a result, that characterizes Fichte’s understanding of the primordial Tathandlungen, especially in the Wissenschaftslehre of 1794. At moments, Fichte seems to ground all acts of positing and opposing in the ego alone, while at other moments he seems to say that the ego is preceded by a pre-reflexive instance of opposition, by virtue of which the ego emerges in the first place.28

This inseparable, but also paradoxical, combination of an ego that posits itself with a prior demarcation of opposition, these reciprocal actions of positing (Setzen)29 and being posited through opposition (Entgegensetzen),30 represent nonetheless the quintessence of the primordial deed of consciousness. Setzen and Entgegensetzen are two equally originary processes, which also means that they cannot occur as a sequence of events but only at once, at one and the same time. Dieter Henrich’s summarization of the dual nature of the Fichtean Tathandlung neatly captures the paradox that informs Fichte’s thinking throughout. Henrich writes:

Aus der noch nicht veröffentlichten frühesten Form der Wissenschaftslehre kann man lernen, daß Fichte zu seiner Theorie durch zwei Entdeckungen kam, die einander schnell gefolgt sind: Zunächst hat er gegen Reinholds These eingesehen, daß der Grundakt des Bewußtseins nicht ein Beziehen und Unterscheiden sein kann. Dem voraus muß nämlich ein Entgegensetzen
In contrast to their transcendental origin, the dual deed of consciousness, the empirical knowledge of and about a specific non-ego (objectivity) and the empirical knowledge of a specific ego as myself (subjectivity) are never a priori given states but instead dynamic achievements—forms of “Tatbewußtsein,” as Henrich puts it elsewhere. The empirical knowledge of myself and of objects thus becomes essentially temporal in kind: I know myself not so much by dint of my immediate existence—the fact that I am—but mainly through periods of perceiving myself over time. Subjectivity is essentially diachronic, and so it is, on Fichte’s account, only during the while of self-observation that I am actually acquainted with myself. Similarly, objectivity consists in a diachronic correlate rather than permanent facts of existence. The object is known only insofar as I attend to it or recall its memory, but it has no reality outside this diachronic experience immanent to consciousness. However, this insistence on the processual, diachronic nature of subjectivity and objectivity also means, paradoxically, that it is “only the [empirical] product but never the [transcendental] act” that consciousness can fully grasp, as Novalis observes. Although one must observe one’s self or an object to gain subjective or objective insight, one can never fathom this process of observation itself, let alone establish the conditions of its possibility. Fichte thus conceives subjectivity and objectivity as depending on a type of agency—that is, the agent and process that Fichte
calls *Ich* and that articulates itself through a simultaneous act of *Setzen* and *Entgegensetzen*—which ultimately “escapes our view,” as Henrich puts it.35

Though Fichte’s activist conceptualization of selfhood influenced Novalis’s work greatly, a primarily philosophical reading of Novalis’s theoretical fragments—specifically of his understanding of the poetry of perception—turns him into a self-contradictory, if not absurd, caricature of Fichte. Similarly, a philosophical comparison with Schelling and Hegel will make Novalis appear a failed idealist, a thinker whose theory lacks systematic closure or speculative sublation. Manfred Frank, perhaps the most prolific philosophical commentator of Novalis, inadvertently reveals this impasse in describing the gist of Novalis’s theories, indeed Early Romanticism in general, as the quest for “ein Ganzes […] das als solches sich nie fassen lassen will.” The philosophy of Novalis thus represents a merely negative dialectic, a Hegelianism without the “crowning closure” [krönenden Abschluß] of absolute knowledge. But even so, with or without final answers, the “tendency towards the absolute,” Frank continues, represents the dominant “Lebensgefühl” of Novalis and the Early Romantics.36 In that, however, Novalis realizes, also on Frank’s account, that the absolute foundation escapes the purview of reason, he de facto fails to illuminate the transcendental problem that he ostensibly belabors.

More recent philosophical readings of Novalis’s theoretical fragments—which are informed not only by Frank’s scholarship but also by Theodor Haering’s classic *Novalis als Philosoph*, the work that for the first time identified “the problem of the absolute” as Novalis’s “foundational aporia”—continue to seek to determine the philosophical presuppositions he shares with German Idealism.37 Typically, these readings point out how Novalis and also Friedrich Schlegel replay and develop Kantian, Jacobian,
Reinholdian, and Fichtean themes: the problem of reflection, for example, and the idea of the absolute or, rather, the “Romantic Absolute,” as current scholarship terms it.\textsuperscript{38} If the later idealisms of Schelling and Hegel are taken as the point of reference instead, the typical claim is—citing Frederick Beiser \textit{pars pro toto}—that Novalis formulated some of the basic themes of absolute idealism. That the absolute is the divine logos, the identity of the subjective and objective; that the ideal and the real are only parts of a single living whole; that thinking lapses into falsehood and contradiction in abstracting parts from the whole; that unity is not possible without difference; and, finally, that only art has the power to perceive the absolute—these themes are found in Novalis’ notebooks as early as 1796.\textsuperscript{39}

But even so, Beiser concludes, Novalis ultimately fails as a philosopher. His theoretical fragments “only very crudely” and in a rather “sketchy” and “inchoate way […]” anticipate the more elaborate and systematic ideas of Schelling and Hegel.”\textsuperscript{40} Friedrich Strack not incorrectly, if bluntly, remarks: “Eine konzise Theorie von ‘Selbstbewußtsein’ – gar eine solche, die Fichte überbieten könnte – hat Novalis weder vor noch nach dem ‘Sophienerlebnis’ geliefert.”\textsuperscript{41} Considering these conclusions, we may wonder, along with the New Critic John Crowe Ransom, whether explicitly philosophical interpretations of Novalis’s fragments are “grounded more on other generalizations, those which form [the philosophical commentators’] prior philosophical stock, than on acute study of particulars.”\textsuperscript{42}

A more fruitful approach to Novalis’s treatment of philosophical issues would examine not the ways in which it fails to emulate the philosophy it considers but, by direct contrast, how it succeeds in poeticizing its philosophical sources, idiosyncratically, eclectically, even erroneously appropriating and recasting them creatively. Like Jean Paul, who stated that what he “seeks” in “Hegel” and “contemporary philosophy is not
the truth at all,” nowhere does Novalis express the expectation to find the truth by studying Fichte and other philosophers. If Novalis can be considered to have had a philosophical ambition, it would seem to consist instead in the desire to demonstrate the primacy of poetry for philosophy, as the following fragment indicates:


Fichte’s philosophy offers to Novalis just such a conception of poetry, since the Wissenschaftslehre presents the power of “imagination” as the source of all reality: “Es wird demnach hier gelehrt, dass alle Realität […] blass durch die Einbildungskraft hervorgebracht werde.” Novalis took this Fichtean doctrine to heart—word for word: “Die Poësie ist das ächt absolut Reelle. Dies ist der Kern meiner Phil[osophie]. Je poëtischer, je wahrer” (N II: 420 #471).

Still, philosophy remained for Novalis a source rather than substitute for “his own system”: “Man studirt fremde Systeme um sein eignes System zu finden […] Ich werde meiner eignen Philosophie, Physik etc. bewußt – indem ich von einer Fremden afficirt werde” (N II: 511 #220). In a letter to August Wilhelm Schlegel, Novalis expresses a related point, though in a more facetious tone. The study of the empirical sciences is here called a preferred means of “speculation” so as to construct “an empirical world” of his own:

Ich bin ziemlich fleißig und habe freylich jetzt mit so viel empirischen Wust zu thun, daß mir oft angst und bange wird – wo ich Verdauungskraft hernehmen soll. Wie wohl wird mir nicht, wenn ich zuweilen meine liebe Speculation hervorsuchen kann und mich hier allein stark und lebendig fühle. Machen mirs
die Empiriker zu toll – da mache ich mir eine empirische Welt, wo alles hübsch nach speculativen Schlendrian geht.47

In order to illustrate his own trajectory of study, Novalis included in the Brouillon a triadic diagram (N II: 657 #767) of his progress through the disciplines that can be interpreted in the following way: The study of “logic” [Logik], the traditional organon of philosophy, and the “doctrine of rationality” [Rationalistik] constituting the core of mathematics and basis of natural sciences such as physics and chemistry provides the means to form a coherent “doctrine of fantasy” [Fantastick] that literary works put into effect.48 This trajectory corresponds exactly to the chronology of Novalis’s major projects: first the Fichte-Studien, then the Brouillon, and finally Heinrich von Ofterdingen.

While Novalis’s prolific commentary on philosophical texts reflects not least his incessant urge to annotate (which he described to Friedrich Schlegel as a need to have “at all times the feather in his hand” when reading)49 the central reason for distinguishing his fragments from the philosophies that may have inspired them is, of course, the distinctly aesthetic effect of the fragments themselves—the sudden flash of significance and the shiver of intriguing acuity that they elicit, as well as the strange repose that often emerges as these feelings fade out. Rahel Villinger has recently drawn attention to the specifically perceptual—graphic and phonic—potentials of the fragments that elicit such feelings. Drawing on a few paradigmatic examples from the Brouillon, she shows how the use of dashes and graphic markers, as of phonic devices, such as word repetition, alliteration, assonance, and internal rhyme, influence the rhythm and other sensuous aspects of the reader’s apprehension.50
Additionally, Novalis considered the transitory (or, following Beiser, “sketchy” and “inchoate”) character of his fragments not a failure but, in fact, an essential feature soliciting the participation of the reader—whom Novalis famously calls, as mentioned in the Introduction, the “extended author” (N II: 282 #125). In a letter of December 1798 responding to a reader of his Blüthenstaub and Glauben und Liebe fragments, Novalis describes the fragments not as parts of a philosophical “system” but, rather, as “texts for thinking,” many of which possess only “transitory value,” like “tokens in a game” [Spielmarken]:

Es freut mich, wenn meine abgerissenen Gedanken Ihnen einige beschäftigte Stunden gemacht haben – wenn sie Ihnen gewesen sind, was sie mir waren, und noch sind, Anfänge interessanter Gedankenfolgen – Texte zum Denken. Viele sind Spielmarken und haben nur transitorischen Werth. Manchen hingegen hab ich das Gepräge meiner innigsten Ueberzeugungen aufzudrücken gesucht. 51

Rather than expressions of a systematic thinking, the fragments, Novalis states, are “severed thoughts” intended to provide “busy hours” for their readers: “beginnings of interesting trains of thought [Gedankenfolgen],” much as “they were for him.” Thus no matter how sophisticated and elegant or inchoate and fidgety these “beginnings” may be phrased, their literal content has by definition always “only a transitory value”—whether they express Novalis’s “innermost convictions” or not. His fragments are Denkaufgaben (N II: 353), as he names them elsewhere, in every single instance. 52 By Novalis’s own description, then, the fragments are intended to engage the reader in their development, while the mode of reading that his theoretical fragments solicit is more active and subjective—and also more corporeal—than that required to apprehend the tenets of a self-defining philosophical system. For this very reason, however, the Fichtean principle
of *Wechselbestimmung* illuminates his theoretical writings particularly well, since reciprocal relations are precisely what Novalis wishes the fragments and their readers to enact.

**“Wechselbestimmung”**

Like Friedrich Schlegel (whose notion of Romantic irony, Bärbel Frischmann suggests, is largely based on that concept), Novalis embraces the principle of *Wechselbestimmung*, on which Fichte bases the self- and object-enacting *Tathandlung* described in his *Wissenschaftslehre* as a mutually constitutive interaction of *Setzen* and *Entgegensetzen*. The terms *Wechsel-Thun*, *Wechselwirkung*, and *-erweis* are synonyms Fichte uses to describe the same principle. In executing reciprocal determination, consciousness relates the ego to the non-ego and so bridges or “synthesizes,” as Fichte says, their opposition.

Novalis understood the centrality of this term, employing it and its derivatives in the *Fichte-Studien* not only to capture the reciprocity of *Setzen* and *Entgegensetzen*—in other words, the functional correlation between acts of identification and opposition—but also, we shall see, to conceptualize sense perception.

Fichte grounds the faculty of reciprocal determination in the ego, its transcendental deeds, which is indicative of the egological foundationalism that informs his system. The acts of *Setzen* and *Entgegensetzen* belong to an “absolute, unrestricted ego,” so that the empirical cognizance of subjectivity and objectivity are “accidents” issuing from this unifying ground: “Ich und Nicht-Ich, sowie sie durch den Begriff der gegenseitigen Einschränkbarkeit gleich- und entgegengesetzt werden, sind selbst beide etwas (Accidenzen) im Ich, als theilbarer Substanz; gesetzt durch das Ich, als absolutes
unbeschränkbares Subject, dem nichts gleich ist, und nichts entgegengesetzt ist.” At the beginning of the section that introduces the idea of reciprocal determination Fichte affirms this position, stating that “alle Realität ist in das Ich gesetzt.”

For Novalis, too, cognition requires its composition, we have seen, its poetic making: “Wir wissen nur, insoweit wir machen,” he notes in a fragment (N II: 218 #10). In a related reference to Kant’s First Critique, he likewise notes: “Wir erkennen es nur, insofern wir es realisiren” (N II: 220 #13). It is in this Kantian, and also Fichtean, spirit that Novalis concludes that the ego—understood as the incarnation of cognitive action as such, including the employment of concepts to perceptions—is the “universal principle” of cognition. Yet this determines that the converse must also be true, that an ego “is nothing” without content to be processed: “Hieraus sehn wir beyläufig, daß Ich im Grunde nichts ist – Es muß ihm alles Gegeben werden – Aber es kann nur ihm etwas gegeben werden und das Gegebene wird durch Ich etwas. Ich ist keine Encyclopaedie, sondern ein universals Princip” (N II: 185 #568).

In contrast to Fichte, however, Novalis rejects the quest for absolute foundations, including the notion that the procedure of reciprocal determination, wherein Setzen and Entgegengesetzten obtain simultaneously, can be grounded in, and hence reduced to, one unified origin and self-positing agent, the “absolute” ego. The following entry in the Fichte-Studien indicates that every act of Setzen is always already effected by a correlated act of Entgegengesetzten, and vice versa:

/ Setzen ist ein wirkliches Entgegengesetzten – Setzen ist also auch ein Nichtsetzen […] Ein Entgegengesetzten ist ein Nichtsetzen […] also auch ein Setzen. / [N II: 56 # 97]
As an isolated occurrence, each of these acts remains unreal and without effect—“ein Nichtsetzen,” writes Novalis. Only insofar as each is determined by its opposite, Setzen and Entgegensetzen produce a result, namely, an objective or a subjective insight. These two actions thus take place under a condition of a reciprocity that cannot be grounded in a single unified cause that escapes opposition, least of all Fichte’s “absolute, unrestricted” ego. Even the transcendental unity of the Tathandlung that Fichte attempts to secure through a purely egological interpretation of Wechselbestimmung falls prey to the spiraling effects of reciprocity early on in the Fichte-Studien. In a manner we would now identify as Derridean, Novalis’s vertiginous reasoning pulls the reader ever further from any identifiable primary foundation or primordial origin:

Nachzuholen möchte noch seyn – daß die Urhandlung mit sich selbst in Wechselwirkung steht. Ihre relative erste Handlung [i.e. Setzen of ego], ihre relative Konstituirung, ist ursprünglich die zweyete, ihre relative 2te Handlung [i.e. Entgegensetzen of non-ego], das Fortschreiten zum Was, ursprünglich die erste Handlung. Leztere ist ursprünglich absolut, Erstere relativ absolut – aber für sie allein muß es umgekehrt sein. Der relative Gesichtspunct dreht immer die Sache um – [N II: 27 #25]58

Novalis makes clear his anti-foundationalist departure from Fichte and critique of the priority of the ego from the very outset of the Fichte-Studien:

Hat Fichte nicht zu willkührlich alles ins Ich hineingelegt? mit welchem Befugniß? [...] Kann ein Ich sich als Ich setzen, ohne ein anderes Ich oder Nichtich – [...] Es muß ein Nichtich seyn, damit Ich sich, als Ich setzen kann. These, Antithese, Synthese. [N II: 12 #5, #7]

Further on in the Fichte-Studien, the priority of the ego is deemed “non-sense,” a merely “regulative idea” to avoid an infinite regress, since each state of the ego and each of its deeds presuppose a preceding step: “Jeder Zustand, jede Thathandlung setzt eine andere
voraus […] alles Suchen nach der Ersten ist Unsinn – es ist regulative Idee” (N II: 164 #472). This critique is directed not only against Fichte but foundationalist thinking in general. Novalis proposes, still in the *Fichte-Studien*, an “absolute postulate” [absolutes Postulat], which may be considered also his own. This postulate runs: “Alles Suchen nach *Einem Princip* wär also wie ein Versuch, die Quadratur des Zirkels zu finden. /Perpetuum mobile. Stein der Weisen./” (N II: 181 #566). Indeed, Novalis argues, it is “the deliberate suspension of the absolute” [das freywillige Entsagen des Absoluten], the rejection of truths existing prior to, and outside of, our experience, that enables philosophical thinking as such (N II: 180–81 #566). In a note from the *Brouillon*, Novalis puts the matter even more bluntly. It is the “unphilosophical” quest for beginnings that “leads to all errors,” in philosophy and elsewhere: “Wozu überhaupt ein *Anfang*? Dieser unphil[osophische] – oder halbphil[osophische] Zweck führt zu allen Irrthümern” (N II: 622 #634). This pronouncement continued to echo long after Novalis’s death; Nietzsche, for example, levels a similar critique against historicism.59 Thus, instead of attempting to solve Fichte’s foundationalist antinomy of which comes first—the self-positing ego or the oppositional deed—Novalis simply discards the question as “unphilosophical.” And unlike Hegel, Novalis does not attempt to reveal, in the phrase of the *Phenomenology*, the synthetic ground of “opposition as such,” thereby renouncing the monist tendency that is characteristic of post-Kantian idealism.60

Naturzustandes – eines isolirten Princips” (N II: 645 #717). At first glance, this reflection might appear far-fetched. Yet the metaphoric equation between the “scientific fiction” of the Fichtean ego and fictional “representation” of Robinson Crusoe becomes telling in combination with another note from the Brouillon, where Novalis writes:

*Der Anfang des Ich ist blos idealisch. […] Der Anfang entsteht später, als das Ich, darum kann das Ich nicht angefangen habe. Wir seh daraus, daß wir hier im Gebiet der Kunst sind – aber diese künstliche Supposition ist die Grundlage einer aclten Wissenschaft die allemahl aus künstlichen Factis entspringt. Das Ich soll construirt werden. Der Philosoph bereitet, schafft künstliche Elemente und geht so an die Construction. Die Naturgeschichte des Ich ist dieses nicht […] sondern ein artistisches – eine Kunst – ein Kunstwerck.” [N II: 485 #76]

To explicate and justify the leading doctrine of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, the primordiality of the ego, Fichte, states Novalis, “constructs” an “artificial” history, an “artwork” that makes this thought plausible. The note quoted earlier identifies this fiction as a philosophical Robinsonade. The *Wissenschaftslehre* “depicts”—to unpack Novalis’s metaphor—the original capacity of the ego, like Robinson Crusoe, as colonizing his island solely by its own volition and devices, as an unrestricted agent that disposes of the world through perfectly autonomous and self-sufficient acts. Fichte’s conception of the ego—a “beginning” that “originates later”—would be illogical on its face if not for the “artificial facts” that justify its primordiality. By substituting the discursive construction of such an ego for its logical deduction, Fichte’s own version of the Robinson fiction—the *Lieblingslektüre* of then twenty-one year old Novalis, who dubbed Defoe’s novel the “handbook of all clever men”—precludes such considerations. Yet Novalis does not take issue with the necessarily fictional character of philosophical beginnings; on the contrary, he takes this necessity as yet another indication of the close proximity between
thinking and poetry, philosophy and art. Just as the literary writer is required to choose a
beginning for his story, so is the philosopher required to construct, indeed invent the
absolute “foundation” [Grundlage] of his system. It is in that sense that poetry is
philosophy of “the highest degree,” and vice versa, as Novalis writes in the
aforementioned note. The discipline of “philology” provides the means to assess the
overlap between these two types of creative invention, or free “construction”:

Philol[ogie] und Philosoph[ie] sind Eins. / Jeder Anfang ist ein Actus d[er]
Freyheit – eine Wahl – Construction eines abs[oluten] Anfangs. […] Mit der
Bildung und Fertigkeit […] des Denkers, wächst die Freyheit. […] am Ende weiß
der Denker aus Jedem Alles zu machen – der Phil[osoph] wird zum Dichter.
Dichter ist nur der höchste Grad des Denkers, oder Empfinders etc.
Fichtens Ich – ist ein Robinson – eine wissenschaftliche Fiction – zur
[…]. [N II: 645 #717]

Considering his own explicit comparison of Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre in
particular, and philosophical foundationalism in general, with a pure, while instructive
fiction, it seems mistaken to consider the quest for “the absolute” the main philosophical
mission of Novalis, as so many commentators do. On the contrary, they articulate a logic
of reciprocity undermining all claims to primordial unity and absolute beginnings.62
Along with the notion of Wechselbestimmung, or “reciprocal determination,” Novalis
uses several synonyms to describe that dual logic, such as Wechselverhältnis, -
verbindung, -prozess, and Wechselrepräsentation, itself the key formal principle of the
encyclopedic construction of the Brouillon (discussed further below). The insistence on
duality and opposition in his critique of foundationalist philosophy already indicates how
Novalis understands the procedure of reciprocal determination. A remarkable line from
the *Brouillon* can serve as a more general definition of that procedure: “Jedes Ding ist eine allg[emeine] *Formel* des Andern – Function d[es] Andern […] eine Wechselverbindung” (N II: 623 #637). This binding of each thing to another, as each other’s inextricable “formula” or “function,” results in “no absolute,” or fully independent “form,” but rather in a “circle” composed of two forms exerting equal and mutual force upon each other: “/Jedes Ding ist im Entgegengesetzten erkennbar/ […] /Es gibt keine absolute Form, keinen absoluten Stoff. Sie bedingen sich alle wechselweise im Kreise./” (N II: 78 #226). Consequently, oppositional terms such as Me and You (Not-Me) or subject and object, reflection and perception, concept and intuition, understanding and memory, form and matter, time and space, even science and poetry or fact and fiction, would only become intelligible if understood with and against the other. The significance of these terms, in other words, derives from their complementarity, as is necessarily and evidently the case of the complementary operations of understanding and memory:


Novalis often explains this interrelation of mutually determining functions in mathematical terms. His description of the formation of one thing in “function” of another reads in full

The principle of reciprocal determination may therefore mark the point at which the later studies of functional calculus and combinatorics scattered throughout Novalis’ notebooks between 1798 and 1800 intersect with his idiosyncratic reflection on and appropriation of Fichte. However, one critical difference distinguishes a purely mathematical interdetermination of functions from the principle of reciprocal determination that both Novalis and Fichte have in mind. By definition, a mathematical function comprehends all possible cases, whereas the procedure of reciprocal determination, like its outcome, is bound to the particular instance of its application. As a formula—say, \( f(x): 4y = 3x \), to generalize Novalis’s example—a mathematical function discloses from the start the general unity relating the two values in question, the synthetic ground that simultaneously restricts their identity and interrelation. The procedure of reciprocal determination reveals, by contrast, no general, “absolute” unity that can be articulated in terms transcending the phenomena under observation. In line with Novalis’s anti-foundationalist conviction, the two reciprocal domains remain both distinct and interdependent upon each other for their identity: “Entgegengesetzte Operationen – die Eine mit der Anderen besteht und vollendet wird” (N II: 533 #328). Accordingly, there can be no single principle underwriting all instants of reciprocal determination, only instantiations of its practice.64

Novalis applies his notion of reciprocal determination also to the workings of perception—the usage of the senses. A first example is found in the *Fichte-Studien*, at the end of a fragment that I cited above to illustrate Novalis’s anti-foundationalism: “/Die Anschauung find ich nie, weil ich sie bey der Reflexion suchen muß und so umgekehrt./”
The Wechselbestimmung of Perception and Poetry in Novalis (N II: 182 #566). Stating the impossibility of ever determining a sensory intuition by itself, Novalis spells out the main principle of his poetics—namely, the reciprocal determination of the senses and the intellect—in mounting once more his argument against foundationalist philosophy. Similarly, he defines philosophy, still in the same fragment, as “originating” in an “abstraction” from the urge to discern one single determining ground, an “interruption” that enables us in turn to freely theorize the interplay or the “linkage” [Verknüpfung] between the elements in question: “Filosofie, Resultat des Filosofirens, entsteht demnach durch Unterbrechung des Triebes nach Erkenntniß des Grundes […] Abstraction von dem absoluten Grunde, und Geltendmachung des eigentlichen absoluten Grundes der Freyheit durch Verknüpfung (Verganzung) des Zu Erklärenden” (N II: 181 #566).

It may appear hardly possible, then, to say what perception means as such, in that it is always already compounded with its seeming opposite, reflection. To counter such an objection, however, Novalis cites the oppositional process by which the eye perceives: “Unser sämtliches Wahrnehmungsvermögen gleicht dem Auge. Die Objekte müßen durch entgegengesetzte Media durch, um richtig auf der Pupille zu erscheinen” (N II: 229 #9). Just as external objects must pass through opposing media—namely, cornea and lens—to produce a visible image on the retina, so must sensory experience pass through the medium of reflection to become perceptible content. The same process applies to the individual sensory modalities. The visible, Novalis writes, is always already compounded with the invisible, the audible with the inaudible, and so forth: “Alles Sichtbare haftet am Unsichtbaren – Das Hörbare am Unhörbaren – Das Fühlbare am Unfühlbaren. Vielleicht das Denkbare am Undenckbaren” (N II: 423 #479).
Reciprocal determination, then, makes it impossible to explain the workings of the senses in purely mechanical terms. Rather, a theory of the senses would have to take into account that, in order to become meaningful perceptions, the received sense data—the manifold of visible, audible, tangible sensations—require interpretation through their opposite, namely, an invisible, inaudible, intangible sense. The “ground of the senses” [Grund der Sinne] would additionally consist of “a negative matter and negative spirit” [eine negative Materie und ein negativer Geist], as Novalis notes in the fragment from the *Fichte Studien* (N II: 183–85 #568) that expresses verbatim the complications involved in explaining the senses. This negative spirit, Novalis continues, pertains “probably” to “the imagination, or the ego” [wahrscheinlich also das Element der Einbildungskraft – des Ichs], yet it is “neither material nor mental”: “Nun müssen wir uns diesen Fund nicht materiell oder geistig denken – Es ist keins von beyden, weil es beides auf gewisse Weise ist” (N II: 184 #568).

Granting that the usage of the senses—perception—effectively conjoins both moments, the positive-material and the negative-immaterial, or the perceptible and the imperceptible, perception would be an exemplary, if not the foremost, enactment of reciprocal determination. The senses, Novalis concludes still in the same entry, would be the “medium of reciprocity”:

/Gattungsbegriff d[er] Sinne/

Zu Sinnen gehört immer ein Körper und eine Seele. Ihre Vereinigung findet mittelst der Sinne statt. Die Sinne sind schlechthin nicht selbstthätig – Sie empfangen und geben, was sie erhalten – Sie sind das Medium der Wechselwirkung. [N II: 183 #568]
Perception—or “the senses,” as Novalis writes metonymically—thus represents an intermediary system that relates the organic function of the senses, their receptivity for certain matters, to an intelligible form or “sense.” Aesthesis, in other words, is the process that invests physiological sense with an immaterial, ideational “sense.” Indeed, perceived sense indicates just that: “mediated knowledge” and “mixture,” as Novalis writes in the *Brouillon*.66 Determining organic sense through intelligible “sense,” and vice versa, perception generates particular “Modificationen, Individuen der Gattung Sinn,” particular perceptions such as a recognizable shape of light or a recognizable pattern of sound (N II: 185 #568).67

Novalis’s discussions of “externalization” [Entäußerung] and “self-alienation” [Selbstfremdmachung] further specify the reciprocity between reflection and intuition. Novalis argues that, in these contexts, the apperception of the self and external perception are interdependent operations. The ego, he writes in the *Fichte-Studien*, cannot be the immediate product of self-reflection or self-positing, because it “finds itself outside itself” [findet sich, außer sich], through “externalization” [Entäußerung] (N II: 56 #98). The existence as well as the content of Me, my subjectivity, is comprehensible only through the perception of “a foreign entity” [ein Fremdartiges] (N II: 56, #97), in opposition to a non-ego. It is also for that reason that “the ego is nothing by itself,” least of all a self-sufficient “encyclopedia” (N II: 185 #568). Conversely, external perception involves, on Novalis’s account, an act of “self-alienation” [Selbstfremdmachung]. This act on the side of the perceiving subject results in a momentary “animation” [Beseelung] of the perceived object.

Ich kann etwas nur erfahren, in so fern ich es in mir aufnehme; es ist also eine Alienation meiner selbst und eine Zuneigung oder Verwandlung einer andern
Substanz in die meinige zugleich: das neue Product ist von den beyden Factoren verschieden, es ist aus beyden gemischt. Ich vernehme nun jede Veränderung der zugeeigneten Substanz als die menige und eine fremde zugleich; als die meinige, in so fern ich sie überhaupt vernehme; als eine fremde, in wie fern ich sie so oder so bestimmt vernehme. [...] Wir würden ohne diese Beseelung keine solchen Unterscheidungen in uns machen. [N II: 341 #118]

In that “something” is “only” perceptible “insofar as it is taken in by me,” by means of my sensations, the object causes an “alienation of myself.” The object causes an “alteration of the self” as it is called in a corresponding fragment from the Brouillon:

“We verstehn natürlich alles Fremde nur durch Selbstfremdmachung – Selbstveränderung – Selbstbeobachtung” (N II: 670 #820). At the same time, perceiving the attributes of the object presupposes the incorporation and assimilation of the object through sensation. These attributes become one with Me, become my lively sensations, which amounts to an “animation” [Beseelung] of the object. Novalis calls this capacity to animate the outside world in another fragment in fact “an original tendency and faculty” of human beings.68 The perceived “attributes” [Beschaffenheit] of the object thus appear “simultaneously as mine and as foreign ones” [als die meinige und eine fremde zugleich], as internal and external qualities. This blurring of boundaries undermines, on the one hand, the seeming permanence and independence of the external thing, so that substantiality is replaced by a processual network of relations.69 On the other hand, this network of relations becomes discernable as an external object only insofar as I can recognize myself in that object.70

The principle of reciprocal determination structures not only Novalis’s critique of Fichte’s foundationalism and his thinking about sense perception. It also forms the conceptual basis of Novalis’s famous definition of “romanticization” [Romantisirung] (N
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II: 334 #105). This definition further illustrates the conflation of mathematical with philosophical figures of reciprocity in Novalis. At issue in this fragment is the seeming opposition between the ordinary and the extraordinary, or the prosaic and the poetic world. To romanticize either one means to determine the one sphere through the other, either by means of *Wechselrhöhung* or *Erniedrigung* (N II: 334 #105). These operations of elevation and decent are equated with the complementary mathematical operations of “exponentiation” and “logarithmization,” which invert each other. Consequently, to recognize the true nature of the so-called quotidian reality means to raise it to a higher power, or “exponentiate” it; that is to say, one must


The world of quotidian affairs must be regarded from infinite, mysterious heights (exponentiation), while the highest mysteries must be translated into familiar scenes and incidents (logarithmization). In doing so one regains the “original meaning” of the world, as Novalis promises at the beginning of the fragment: “Die Welt muß romantisirt werden. So findet man den ursprünglichen Sinn wieder” (N II: 334 #105). Instead of keeping the domains of life separate and distinct, as the sober, prosaic mind would have it, the Romantic mind relates them, conflates them—romanticizes them—and so transforms their random contiguity into what may be called with Novalis a “magic” affinity: “the syrupth of the signifier with the signified.”

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The later idea of *Wechselrepraesentation*, “reciprocal representation,” grows immediately out of the idea of reciprocal determination. This idea forms the conceptual basis of the *Brouillon* as a decidedly “Romantic” encyclopedia, as it delineates the blueprint for a “romanticization” of the sciences, as well as the structure of knowledge as such—how a specific epistemic content is apprehended and communicated. Novalis summarizes the idea of *Wechselrepraesentation* in the following fragment:


Already a few months earlier Novalis had noted down the nucleus of this thought: “Aller Sinn ist repraesentativ – symbolisch – ein Medium” (N II: 339 #118).

Ludwig Tieck was the first to point out the pervasive logic of representation in the fragmentary notes pertaining to the *Brouillon*. Tieck writes in the Foreword to the first edition of Novalis’s works, which he published together with Friedrich Schlegel: “Er hatte den Plan zu einem eigenen encyklopädischen Werke entworfen, in welchem Erfahrungen und Ideen aus den verschiedenen Wissenschaften sich gegenseitig erklären, unterstützen und beleben sollten.” This captures quite precisely Novalis’s paradigm of “encyclopedistics” [Encyklopaedistik], since it is, as Andreas Kilcher has shown, precisely the syncretistic cross-linkage of sciences, and the non-hierarchical interconnection of knowledge that Novalis sought to achieve with the *Brouillon*. To that end, Kilcher
continues, Novalis draws on a rhetoric of simile, or a “calculus of analogy” [Calcül der Analogie]. Consequently, Novalis revives older combinatorial models of the encyclopedia and privileges them over the Enlightenment model, which is based on the arbitrary order of the alphabet.

Virtually any note from the Brouillon can be seen to exemplify Novalis’s application of the epistemic paradigm of reciprocal determination in concrete cases. One fragment (N II: 539–40 #362), for example, renders “grammatical” issues in terms of physics. Alphabetic letters, indeed the “meaningful construction of a word” [Sinnconstruction des Wortes] as a whole, are regarded here as “inflections of sound” [Inflexion des Schalls],” or “acoustic figures” [acustische Figuren], that can be experimentally converted into visible, graphic figures, maybe even “color images” [Farbenbilder]. Explaining the one domain, the immaterial grammar of language, by way of its seeming opposite, the physics of sound and light, their secret affinity comes to the fore. Novalis holds that, similar to the tokens of sound and light, “die sog[ennanten] willkürlichen Zeichen dürften am Ende nicht so willk[ührlich] seyn, als sie scheinen – sondern dennoch in einem gewissen Realnexus mit dem Bezeichneten stehn” (N II: 539–40 #362). Thanks to this and comparable reciprocal representations, one begins to discern “degrees and types etc. of similarity” [Grade und Arten etc. der Gleichheit] (N II: 599 #555).

The blue flower

In the previous sections, I sought to demonstrate and provide evidence for three main points. There is, first, a tendency in Novalis’s writings to connect perception and poetry
conceptually, such that they are often conceived analogously. The *Lehrlinge*, wherein the poetic transformation of merely receptive senses into a source of spontaneous creation—into instruments of poetry—represents a recurring theme, is perhaps the most conspicuous example of this tendency. However, the speculative coupling of perception and poetry inevitably obscures their difference. Theoretical difficulties emerge as to the workings of perception as a discrete process, at least for Novalis. These difficulties are intensified by certain historical developments, to which Novalis alludes: more reading, less sensory experience, as well as the discovery of man “as such.” But even more complicating a factor is Novalis’s eclectic reception—his poeticization—of Fichte, from which my second and third points derive.

The second point is that, although Novalis sides with Fichte as to the absolute necessity of subjective activity in all forms of cognition—even elementary perception, which, for Novalis, still requires an active usage of the senses—he clearly rejects Fichte’s egological monism. Novalis concedes that the ego is the “universal principle” of cognition that provides the very form of intelligibility. But he makes it equally plain that the ego is not and can never be a self-sufficient “encyclopedia,” because “everything has to be given” to the ego. This rejection of Fichte’s egological monism, which results in the abandoning of the notion of absolute foundations in general, makes it difficult if not impossible to explain sense perception as a purely subjective achievement. However, in siding generally with Fichte’s activist position, it becomes equally impossible to explain perception as a mechanical procedure owing solely to the properties of the object. Perception turns into a dynamic process which, though accomplished by the ego, nonetheless requires external objective determination, or the involvement of an “alien”
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element—otherness. This tension between the primacy of subjective and external activity actually reflects a Fichtean tenet that competes with that of egological monism, namely, the reciprocity and complementarity at the base of Fichte’s system. The primordial deed of consciousness, wherein the opposed acts of Setzen and Entgegensetzen, or the ego and the non-ego, determine one another, is the chief instantiation of these vexed loops of reciprocity.

This leads us to the third point. Novalis takes this pervasive logic of Wechselbestimmung out of its immediate context—Fichte’s attempt to reconcile the contradictions and dichotomies of his system—and brings it to bear especially on his conceptions of sense perception. Perception represents for Novalis the paradigmatic “medium of reciprocity.” According to the logic of reciprocity, material sensations are determined and rendered intelligible through immaterial acts of creation, poetic acts of the mind in the sense of the Greek poiēsis (“to make, to create”). Perceptions thus represent an achievement of the mind rather than an instantaneous effect that is passively endured. Reflection, conscious attention and selection, and the procedure of “self-alienation” are the chief poetic means through which the mind transforms sensations and feelings into intelligible perceptions. These cognitive procedures of determination, however, are never pure acts of self-reflection, purely subjective fabrications, but rest instead on “externalization,” which is to say that these determinations must be contrasted with “a foreign entity” to take effect. Following Novalis, perception as a whole thus relates the organic function of the senses, their receptivity for certain external or “foreign” matters, to an intelligible form or “sense,” which designates precisely the poetic faculty of the mind to make sense of sensations. In addition, Novalis applies the logic of
Wechselbestimmung to domains other than philosophy. The operation of “romanticization,” for example, is also informed by the principle of reciprocal determination, as is the notion of Wechselrepräsentation, which designates for Novalis the elementary operation that enables the understanding and integration of new knowledge. Many of the individual notes in the Brouillon are structured accordingly, which means that the epistemic domain in question is represented through its apparent opposite.

These three points or principles may well represent a summary of Novalis’s conception of the senses. But Novalis is not solely a “weaving loom of ideas” [Ideenwebstuhl] (N I: 624). He realizes his ideas in and through poetic works, and the final concern of this Chapter is to read his conceptions of the senses not merely as contributions to a theory of perception but, ultimately, as an expression of, or at least as a notion that pertains to, his poetry. As Hans Jürgen Balmes writes in his commentary to Heinrich von Ofterdingen: “Das Dichten erst [entfaltet] die Konsequenz des Denkens N[ovalis’] […] indem es seine poetologischen Reflexionen aufgreift und ihr Erkenntnisprogramm einlöst.”78 Novalis’ theory of perception as “reciprocal determination” must then be related to the scenographies of perception to be found in his poetic works. For it is these scenographies that mark the sphere wherein perception and poetry come together not only conceptually but also practically. This Chapter thus focuses on the initial appearance of the blue flower—the proverbial symbolization of the Romantic sentiment and the epitome of Romantic poetry per se—at the beginning of Heinrich von Ofterdingen.79 I contend that in the exemplary scenography at the beginning of Heinrich von Ofterdingen, perceptual process and poetic meaning, or the emergence of
sense and the comprehension of “sense,” are correlated, indeed concatenated. Their concatenation in turn solicits the reader—described by Novalis, it should be recalled, as “the extended author” [der erweiterte Autor] (N II: 282 #125)—to actualize the blue flower with his senses and mind together.\(^8^0\)

This approach diverges openly from the common practice of interpreting a great number of scenes in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* allegorically. On that view, the perceptions that Heinrich makes and the things he experiences function as allegorical vessels for concealed esoteric truths inasmuch as they prefigure the golden days to come. Detlef Kremer, for example, maintains, in accordance with older scholarship, that Heinrich’s story represents an “exemplary journey into the realm of imagination” that reveals, at last, a “vision of redemption” [Erlosungsutopie], namely, the golden age of love and poetry that Novalis devised against the “economic farce” that on his view concludes Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.\(^8^1\) Klingsohr’s Märchen is repeatedly singled out by Novalis scholars to illustrate the allegorical nature of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a whole. The Märchen is then construed either in terms of a “myth of redemption,” or else as an allegorical representation of doctrines pertaining to contemporary science.\(^8^2\) These allegorical interpretations of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* no doubt follow authorial leads. Novalis characterized Heinrich’s development as “years of transition” [Übergangs Jahre] that culminate in an “apotheosis of poetry” and, moreover, as a “transition from the real to the secret world,” which seems to suggest that Heinrich’s concrete experiences are mainly prefigurations of higher “poetic truths” to come.\(^8^3\) Additionally, Novalis variously alludes in Klingsohr’s Märchen to contemporary
discourses on galvanism, magnetism, and mineralogy, and planned to “poeticize various sciences” in the second part of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, “including mathematics.”

But even so, fantastic visions of redemption and merely allegorical representations hardly play a role in the work, at least not on Novalis’s account. Just around the same time as he is working on *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis comes to think of art as a technical or “mechanical” [mechanisch] (N II: 713 #1113) achievement, that is, as the product of skillful artistic calculation rather than poetic inspiration. In a note of summer 1799, Novalis confirms this reorientation most emphatically: “Ich bin überzeugt, daß man durch kalten, technischen Verstand, und ruhigen, moralischen Sinn eher zu wahren Offenbarungen gelangt, als durch Fantasie, die uns blos ins Gespensterreich, diesem Antipoden des wahren Himmels, zu leiten scheint.” In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, it is the arch-poet Klingsohr himself who on several occasions makes the same point. He warns Heinrich that poetry is a chiefly technical achievement, never the result of the free flight of fancy and senseless enthusiasm that generates on his account only “verworrenes Geschwätz” and “zitternde Gedankenlosigkeit.” On that account the “apotheosis of poetry” that Novalis wanted to achieve with *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* would have to be plotted out with careful craft and sobriety. And indeed, in a working note to *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* Novalis reminds himself of just that. He writes here that “Ruhe und Oeconomie des Styls” are imperative to accomplish this apotheosis, as well as the conception and application of “poëtischer Zusammenhang und Anordnung” on the macroscopic level of syntagmatic contiguity and cohesion (N I: 389). Far from being the work of wild fantasy or mythic imagination, such *Zusammenhang* results in practice from artistic calculation and “thätiger Ideenassociation.” More precisely, it
results from the creation of what Novalis variously terms “gesezesmäßige Reihe” or “Verkettungen” or “Catenation” or “reitzende Perioden Ketten” within and between words, sentences, incidents, scenes, episodes.\textsuperscript{87} By these terms Novalis means, quite simply, syntagmatic series or concatenations achieved through motific as well as prosodic resemblance and/or contiguity.

Moreover, Novalis writes, still in the aforementioned working note: “Die Poësie muß nie der Hauptstoff, immer nur das Wunderbare seyn. [/] Man sollte nichts darstellen, was man nicht völlig übersähe, deutlich vernähme, und ganz Meister desselben wäre – z. B. bey Darstellungen des Übersinnlichen” (N I: 389). The intended “apotheosis of poetry” may never directly concern a transcendent world beyond the represented scene. Only those things that one could “perceive clearly” should become the subject of literary representation in \textit{Heinrich von Ofterdingen}. The practical consequence of this maxim is articulated in another note from roughly the same period. Novalis here writes that the “narration of real scenes” is the primary literary “means” [Hilfsmittel] to be “practiced” by the aspiring novelist (N II: 780 #207).\textsuperscript{88} It would appear, therefore, that the narration of “real” or “effective scenes”—made so on the basis of poetic \textit{Zusammenhang} or “exciting periods”—represents for Novalis the chief technical means of literary composition.

Novalis applies this technical insight as he conceptualizes \textit{Heinrich von Ofterdingen}, that is to say, as he contemplates the adequate form to represent, to \textit{show}—rather than merely declare—the “apotheosis of poetry.” In the so-called “Berliner Papiere,” which predominantly record ideas for the second part of \textit{Heinrich von Ofterdingen}, Novalis stipulates: “Die epische Periode muß ein historisches Schauspiel
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werden, wenn auch durch Erzählung die Szenen verbunden sind” (N I: 396). Thus fundamentally, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is conceived as a “dramatic spectacle,” especially the second part, consisting of scenes—*wirkliche Szenen*—that are connected, in contrast to a theatre play, through “narration,” by means of a narrator’s voice.

Klingsohr deepens and expands on these critical maxims in his final lesson of poetics:

> Wenn es schon für einen einzelnen Dichter nur ein eigenthümliches Gebiet gibt, innerhalb dessen er bleiben muß, um nicht alle Haltung und den Athem zu verlieren: so gibt es auch für die ganze Summe menschlicher Kräfte eine bestimmte Grenze der Darstellbarkeit, über welche hinaus die Darstellung die nöthige Dichtigkeit und Gestaltung nicht behalten kann, und in ein leeres täuschendes Unding sich verliert. Besonders als Lehrling kann man nicht genug sich vor diesen Ausschweifungen hüten, da eine lebhafte Fantasie nur gar zu gern nach den Grenzen sich begiebt, und übermüthig das Unsinnliche, Übermäßige zu ergreifen und auszusprechen sucht. Reifere Erfahrung lehrt erst, jene Unverhältnißmäßigkeit der Gegenstände zu vermeiden, und die Aufspürung des Einfachsten und Höchsten der Weltweisheit zu überlassen. Der ältere Dichter steigt nicht höher, als er es gerade nöthig hat, um seinen mannichfaltigen Vorrath in eine leichtfaßliche Ordnung zu stellen, und hütet sich wohl, die Mannichfaltigkeit zu verlassen, die ihm Stoff genug und auch die nöthigen Vergleichspunkte darbietet. […] Die beste Poesie liegt uns ganz nahe, und ein gewöhnlicher Gegenstand ist nicht selten ihr liebster Stoff. [N I: 333–34]

Klingsohr thus instructs his student Heinrich to restrict all literary representation to tangible subject matters and meanings, hence to those “ordinary” [gewöhnlich] things that can be conveyed through—or rather shown within—real scenes. Simultaneously, Klingsohr counsels Heinrich to leave the “revelation of the first and highest truths” [die Aufspürung des Einfachsten und Höchsten] to philosophers.

All these considerations warrant serious doubts as to the adequacy of allegorical interpretations of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, since they speak, I believe, against the
divorce of diegetic scene and allegorical meaning, against the abstraction of a poetic
“sense” from a perceptible sense. Instead, they suggest that perceptible sense and poetic
“sense” ought to be regarded together when reading *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, and there
is no token that makes this imperative connection between perception and poetry more
evident than the blue flower.

The blue flower is first mentioned in the soliloquy that opens *Heinrich von
Ofterdingen*. Tossing and turning restlessly on his bed, Henrich recalls “the stranger’s
tales” and, even more acutely, ruminates on some “blue flower,” whose exact provenance
and transmission is not, and never will be, disclosed to the reader.

Die Eltern lagen schon und schliefen, die Wanduhr schlug ihren einförmigen
Takt, vor den klappernden Fenstern sauste der Wind; abwechselnd wurde die
Stube hell von dem Schimmer des Mondes. Der Jüngling lag unruhig auf seinem
Lager, und gedachte des Fremden und seiner Erzählungen. Nicht die Schätze sind
es, die ein so unaussprechliches Verlangen in mir geweckt haben, sagte er zu sich
selbst; fern ab liegt mir alle Habsucht: aber die blaue Blume seh’ ich mich zu
erblicken. Sie liegt mir unaufhörlich im Sinn, und ich kann nichts anders dichten
und denken. So ist mir noch nie zu Muthe gewesen: es ist, als hätt’ ich vorhin
geträumt, oder ich wäre in eine andere Welt hinübergeschlummert; denn in der
Welt, in der ich sonst lebte, wer hätte da sich um Blumen bekümmert, und gar
von einer so seltsamen Leidenschaft für eine Blume hab’ ich damals nie gehört.
[...] Daß ich auch nicht einmal von meinem wunderlichen Zustande reden kann!
Es ist mir oft so entzückend wohl, und nur dann, wenn ich die Blume nicht recht
gegenwärtig habe, befällt mich so ein tiefes, inniges Treiben: das kann und wird
Keiner verstehn. Ich glaubte, ich wäre wahnsinnig, wenn ich nicht so klar und
hell sähe und dächte, mir ist seitdem alles viel bekannter. Ich hörte einst von
alten Zeiten reden; wie da die Thiere und Bäume und Felsen mit den Menschen
gesprochen hätten. Mir ist grade so, als wollten sie allaugenblicklich anfangen,
und als könnte ich es ihnen ansehen, was sie mir sagen wollten. Es muß noch viel
Worte geben, die ich nicht weiß: würste ich mehr, so könnte ich viel besser alles

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begreifen. Sonst tanzte ich gern; jezt denke ich lieber nach der Musik. [N I: 240–41]

Heinrich’s soliloquy summons an object—a certain flower—that has not yet appeared, at least not for the reader. It figures herein only as a name—precisely as some “blue flower.” Heinrich has yet to witness the blue flower in actuality, which is all that he longs for: “die blaue Blume seh’ ich mich zu erblicken.” This flower, in other words, has yet to emerge as an object of perception within a diegetic scene, such that Heinrich and, by extension, the reader can witness its appearance. But Heinrich’s soliloquy nonetheless describes the flower’s irresistible effect, the spell it has cast on him. This flower has captivated his mind and his “senses” [Sinn] entirely; it has enchanted all of Heinrich’s Denken and Dichten, the latter term designating a cognitive activity that involves for Novalis largely the senses, as the preceding sections have shown. This, then, indicates the strange double nature of the flower: it is at once sensuous and abstract; it wants to be experienced as a sensuous object and simultaneously thought of as a name. As an object it appeals to the senses, whereas it preoccupies the mind as an enigmatic cipher. And it instills a “wondrous state” [wunderlichen Zustande] of being “tantalizingly well” [entzückend wohl] wherein thought and perception permeate each other. As such, therefore, the flower represents both a perceptible object and an intelligible meaning, while it gives rise to an indescribable yet delightful corporeal feeling that is compounded with an elusive sense of significance. Friedrich Kittler provides a concise formula for the strange double nature of the flower: “Unter allen Wörtern oder Dingen zeichnet es diese Blume aus, zugleich als Name und als Anschauung, als Signifikant und als Signifikat zu fungieren.”89 In Heinrich’s soliloquy, however, the sensuous appearance of the blue flower remains abstract—the mere implication of a name.
The ensuing dream, which culminates in the appearance of a “tall brilliant blue flower” [hohe lichtblaue Blume], brings Heinrich’s initial soliloquy to a completion, in two ways. First, it fulfills Heinrich’s Sehnsucht to behold that object known by the name “the blue flower.” Second, and more importantly, the dream invests this name with perceptible sense and tangible meaning by showing the flower within a scene of perception.

Endlich gegen Morgen, wie draußen die Dämmerung anbrach, wurde es stiller in seiner Seele, klarer und bleibender wurden die Bilder. Es kam ihm vor, als ginge er in einem dunkeln Walde allein. Nur selten schimmerte der Tag durch das grüne Netz. Bald kam er vor eine Felsenschlucht, die bergan stieg. Er mußte über bemooste Steine klettern, die ein ehemaliger Strom herunter gerissen hatte. Je höher er kam, desto lichter wurde der Wald. Endlich gelangte er zu einer kleinen Wiese, die am Hange des Berges lag. Hinter der Wiese erhob sich eine hohe Klippe, an deren Fuß er eine Oeffnung erblickte, die der Anfang eines in den Felsen gehauenen Ganges zu seyn schien. Der Gang führte ihn gemächlich eine Zeitlang eben fort, bis zu einer großen Weitung, aus der ihm schon von fern ein helles Licht entgegen glänzte. Wie er hineintrat, ward er einen mächtigen Strahl gewahr, der wie aus einem Springquell bis an die Decke des Gewölbes stieg, und oben in unzählige Funken zerstäubte, die sich unten in einem großen Becken sammelten; der Strahl glänzte wie entzündetes Gold; nicht das mindeste Geräusch war zu hören, eine heilige Stille umgab das herrliche Schauspiel. Er näherte sich dem Becken, das mit unendlichen Farben wogte und zitterte. Die Wände der Höhle waren mit dieser Flüssigkeit überzogen, die nicht heiß, sondern kühl war, und an den Wänden nur ein mattes, bläuliches Licht von sich warf. Er tauchte seine Hand in das Becken und benetzte seine Lippen. Es war, als durchdränge ihn ein geistiger Hauch, und er fühlte sich innigst gestärkt und erfrischt. Ein unwiderstehliches Verlangen ergriff ihn zu baden, er entkleidete sich und stieg in das Becken. Es dünkte ihn, als umflößte ihn eine Wolke des Abendroths; eine himmlische Empfindung überströmte sein Inneres; mit inniger Wollust strebten unzählbare Gedanken in ihm sich zu vermischen; neue, niegesehene Bilder entstanden, die auch in einander flossen und zu
sichtbaren Wesen um ihn wurden, und jede Welle des lieblichen Elements
schmiegte sich wie ein zarter Busen an ihn. Die Flut schien eine Auflösung
reizender Mädchen, die an dem Jünglinge sich augenblicklich verkörperten.

Berauscht von Entzücken und doch jedes Eindrucks bewußt, schwamm
er gemach dem leuchtenden Strome nach, der aus dem Becken in den Felsen
hineinfloß. Eine Art von süßem Schlummer befiel ihn, in welchem er
unbeschreibliche Begebenheiten träumte, und woraus ihn eine andere
Erleuchtung weckte. Er fand sich auf einem weichen Rasen am Rande einer
Quelle, die in die Luft hinausquoll und sich darin zu verzehren schien.
Dunkelblaue Felsen mit bunten Adern erhoben sich in einiger Entfernung; das
Tageslicht [,] das ihn umgab, war heller und milder als das gewöhnliche, der
Himmel war schwarzblau und völlig rein. Was ihn aber mit voller Macht anzog,
war eine hohe lichtblaue Blume, die zunächst an der Quelle stand, und ihn mit
ihren breiten, glänzenden Blättern berührte. Rund um sie her standen unzählige
Blumen von allen Farben, und der köstlichste Geruch erfüllte die Luft. Er sah
nichts als die blaue Blume, und betrachtete sie lange mit unnennbarer
Zärtlichkeit. Endlich wollte er sich ihr nähern, als sie auf einmal sich zu bewegen
und zu verändern anfing; die Blätter wurden glänzender und schmiegten sich an
den wachsenden Stengel, die Blume neigte sich nach ihm zu, und die
Blüthenblätter zeigten einen blauen ausgebreiteten Kragen, in welchem ein zartes
Gesicht schwebte. Sein süßes Staunen wuchs mit der sonderbaren Verwandlung,
as ihn plötzlich die Stimme seiner Mutter weckte, und er sich in der elterlichen
Stube fand, die schon die Morgensonne vergoldete. Er war zu entzückt, um
unwillig über diese Störung zu seyn; vielmehr bot er seiner Mutter freundlich
guten Morgen und erwiederte ihre herzliche Umarmung. [N I: 241–42]

What does this dream accomplish? The dream actualizes some “blue flower” through acts
of perception and, consequently, situates the flower in a contiguous diegetic scene,
indeed in a cohesive world. It materializes the world to which the flower belongs as much
as it sensualizes the flower’s significance, and it does so by temporalizing, by
narrativizing the verbal image of a “blue flower.” From a readerly perspective, Heinrich’s
dream thus constitutes a scenography of perception. It is by way of the dream sequence,
then, that Heinrich’s “wondrous state” of mind, which the name “blue flower” can only intimate, is endowed with tangible sense, with looks, smells, sounds, touch, and many more bodily sensations—for the reader as much as for Heinrich himself.

These assertions require clarification. The primary reason of scenic cohesion is obvious enough: the dream leads towards the appearance of a “brilliant blue flower” as the enrapturing climax, thereby fulfilling Heinrich’s urge to behold the flower. Heinrich is utterly captivated by its irresistible appearance; once more he can neither think nor see anything but the flower: “Er sah nichts als die blaue Blume.” But this time he can presently perceive the flower’s double nature, since he sees its appearance and also recognizes in it a distinct meaning. The appearance of this flower induces sheer sensual delight—the state of being “tantalizingly well,” as Heinrich described it before, though this time Heinrich is able to connect this feeling to a present view of the flower. Its appearance thus manifests the visible sense, the token of such tantalizing pleasure. On the other hand, in displaying a “tender face” [zartes Gesicht], the flower impresses the image of a future desire on Heinrich’s soul. This impression discloses an erotic meaning, though Heinrich will fully comprehend this meaning only in retrospect, namely, as he comes to identify the face on the flower with Mathilde’s countenance.90 It is upon this climax, when the flower’s appearance presently converges with the revelation of a secret erotic meaning, that Heinrich, still “enraptured” [entzückt], is awakened by his mother, whose “affectionate embrace” [herzliche Umarmung] he then “reciprocates” [erwiederte] with conspicuous eagerness.91 As a result, the scene reverts to the parental living-room, where an “industrious” [emsig] father dismisses the dream of his son with a disenchanting “Träume sind Schäume” (N I: 243)—and this only moments before he narrates the
“strange,” and in certain regards remarkably similar, dream that he had as a young man (N I: 245–48).

In light of both Heinrich’s earlier soliloquy and the climactic convergence of the visible sense with a secret erotic meaning at the end, the dream appears to be plotted towards the appearance of the blue flower. But this double teleology is not the sole source of scenic cohesion. The dream scene coheres also through concatenated acts of perception—through aesthesiological series that point towards the blue flower, directly as well as indirectly. With regard to Heinrich’s experience, this means that his perceptions either resemble the flower’s “brilliant” or, literally, “light blue” [lichtblau] appearance, or else relate to the flower on the basis of a larger network of interconnected perceptions. For example, Heinrich enters into a tunnel wherein he perceives a “bright light” [ein helles Licht] and, shortly thereafter, a liquid that gives off “a dim bluish light” [ein mattes, bläuliches Licht] upon contact with the wall of the cave. At a later moment, shortly before he turns to the site of the flower, Heinrich notices “dark blue rocks” [dunkelblaue Felsen] and a “black-blue” [schwarzblau] sky, as well as a type of “daylight” [Tageslicht] that is “brighter and milder” than usually. These perceptions are immediately associated with the flower in that they resemble its most distinctive feature, its “brilliant blue” [lichtblau] radiance. These perceptions of blueness constitute the most conspicuous aesthesiological thread running through Heinrich’s dream, indeed through Heinrich von Ofterdingen as whole, as Novalis indicates in the “Berliner Papiere”:

“Farbencharacter. Alles blau in meinem Buche” (N I: 396). Other perceptions add detail to the flower’s sensory appearance: the “most exquisite smell” [der köstlichste Geruch] that surrounds its site, and the “broad blue collar” [blauen ausgebreiteten Kragen] that
Heinrich sees upon closer inspection. As properties, these perceptions are also immediately associated with the flower, namely, through direct causation.

But what about those other perceptions that neither resemble the flower’s “radiant blue” color nor issue directly from its appearance? Those perceptions also relate to the flower, but indirectly and mediately, which means, insofar as they are connected to the flower by way of perceptual contiguity—through an aesthesiological series or, using Novalis’s term, through a “catenation” of contiguous perceptions. The following example can illuminate the nature and the significance of these series. Bathing in the liquid that gives off “a dim bluish light” upon contact with the cave’s wall, Heinrich is imbued with Wollust. This Wollust eventually translates into very exciting erotic sensations. Heinrich senses the liquid on his skin as though he had been touched by “alluring girls”: “Die Flut schien eine Auflösung reizender Mädchen, die an dem Jünglinge sich augenblicklich verkörperten,” making him feel “berauscht von Entzücken.” These overtly sexual sensations thus relate to the flower by way of the following aesthesiological series or concatenation of perceptions:

- blueness of flower = blueness of liquid — contact with liquid on hand and lips — “irresistible desire” to bathe in the liquid, naked — Wollust — erotic sensations: liquid feels like “alluring girls” on the skin — utter rapture.

The liquid relates to the flower on the basis of an immediate sensory resemblance (symbolized above as “=”), namely, their blueness; Heinrich’s “irresistible desire” and Wollust and, by extension, his erotic ecstasy are contiguous with, indeed caused by, this liquid (symbolized as “—”); so that his erotic sensations could be said to convey a mediate sensory character of the flower, namely, feminine allure or, literally, a female touch. This anticipatory attribution of arousing feminine attributes to the flower, which
the aesthesiological series suggests by way of contiguity, is eventually confirmed and fulfilled as the flower exhibits a “tender face”—the countenance of Heinrich’s future love, Mathilde. The fact that both the naked bath and the later observation of the flower result in *Entzückung*—a climactic intensification of feeling that has clearly sexual overtones in Heinrich’s dream—additionally evidences the resemblance between the wondrous liquid and the flower. Further supporting their resemblance is the fact that this liquid stirs up “unzählbare Gedanken” and “neue, niegesehene Bilder” in Heinrich. Like the flower, which animates both Heinrich’s *Denken* and *Dichten*, this liquid excites both thinking and sensing, so that one might almost think of this liquid as the substance of which the flower is composed.

Further aesthesiological series are inscribed into the text—the scenography—of Heinrich’s dream. For example, the two distinct spaces or landscapes that evolve from Heinrich’s perceptual movements show astonishing similarities. In both cases, Heinrich remarks almost identical topographical features, so that the second landscape, wherein the flower is located, appears to be a variation of the first. The exact nature of this symmetry between the two landscapes can be described by means of the following series, which schematically renders the sequence of Heinrich’s perceptions (and, in the first case, his spatial movement as well):

... *kleine Wiese* — *Berghang* — *in den Felsen gehauener Gang* — *Springquell* of light, which feeds the colorful basin wherein Heinrich takes the exciting bath... = *weicher Rasen am Rande einer Quelle, die in die Luft hinausquoll* — *dunkelblaue Felsen mit bunten Adern* — *schwarzblauer Himmel* — *lichtblaue Blume*, surrounded by countless flowers of all colors...
The location where the first part of Heinrich’s dream breaks off, the basin close by a certain “fountain” [Springquell] of light, resembles the “fountain” [Quelle] where the second part picks up. It would almost seem as if Heinrich, swimming “dem leuchtenden Strome nach,” transitions directly into the second space—if this transition were not interrupted, oddly enough, by a dream within his dream. This strange occurrence is not only indicative of the many *mise en abyme* structures in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* but also stages a famously equivocal fragment by Novalis. Yet, regardless of the question of whether this transition is fully contiguous, there is, in any case, a visible—and, for the analyst, also legible—resemblance between the two landscapes. Their spatial setups resemble each other closely, while the sequence of their apprehension is almost identical. Heinrich remarks in each case a meadow (*Wiese, Rasen*), then rocks, a fountain, and finally the flower—which the first landscapes substitutes with the exciting liquid.

This aesthesiological series determines not only the course of Heinrich’s perceptions but also the reading experience of Novalis’s text. In that this series, like the others before, represents a network of sensory resemblances and perceptual contiguities, it regulates the course of the reader’s imaginary perceptions within the scene. The bath in the liquid, for example, also prepares the emergence of the flower in the reader’s eyes, but mediately, on the basis of perceptual contiguities, while the sense of this bath comes to completion by noticing, in retrospect, the corresponding effects of both flower and liquid. Similarly, the perceptual sequence by which the first landscape evolves anticipates the second landscape, wherein the flower finally manifests itself, while the noticing of their correspondence makes the reader realize that the latter landscape also belongs to the flower’s realm, but mediately. In phenomenological terms, one could say that, in pointing
to the flower as *telos*, the aforementioned aesthesiological concatenations instill and augment the protentional expectation of the flower’s enrapturing emergence. The appearance of the teleological referent then fulfills the retentional sense (*Sinn*) of the preceding perceptions, indeed the referential meaning of the series altogether. Regulating the retentions and protentions of the reader in such a way, the aesthesiological series endows the readerly experience with cohesion.\(^93\)

What, then, is the blue flower? It is without doubt a token of that “Märchenwelt” Heinrich was supposed to discover at the end of the novel by pursuing the flower’s visible and invisible traces. In these fantastical lands of pure poetry, it ought to be a self-evident truth that “poetry” [Poësie] is the “ultimate essence of all reality” [das ächt absolut Reelle] (N II: 420 #471). Here, “singing” and “kissing” will reveal true wisdom, Novalis promises, while “tales” [Mährchen] and “poems” will embody “the true history of the world” [die wahren Weltgeschichten], and here, where “the hourglass runs eternally” [Ewig läuft das Stundenglas], all hurting, all mourning, all sorrow will come to an end.\(^94\) But Heinrich does not reach those lands of eternal bliss and pure poetry; they never appear in the novel. And recalling the key doctrine of the “bounds of literary representation” [Grenze der Darstellbarkeit] that Klingsohr puts forth (N I: 333–34), those lands may not, and perhaps cannot, be shown. “Die Poësie,” to cite Novalis’s maxim once more, “muß nie der Hauptstoff, immer nur das Wunderbare sein” (N I: 389). The blue flower would thus herald a Märchenwelt that is fundamentally unrepresentable and, perhaps, not as desirable a refuge as it might seem at first glance, since it indicates, in truth, the land of death, as Novalis knows: “Selig sind allein die Todten” (N I: 399; my emphasis).
Thus the question remains: What is the blue flower, besides an unfulfilled and also unrepresentable promise of eternal bliss? The blue flower is something more fundamental and, perhaps, also more potent. It is, in the first place, a prompt to make active, indeed inverted usage of the senses. It is an abstract name—some “blue flower”—that solicits Heinrich to generate its concrete sense (Sinn) as well as its poetic meaning (Bedeutung) through perceptions. The name of the flower functions as an incantation that turns his senses—to recall an earlier formulation—into an instrument of speech (Sprachwerkzeug) so as to realize both its sense and its meaning. With his dream, Heinrich does just that: he makes sense of “the blue flower.” He translates an empty name, a senseless spell whose provenance we do not know, into a concatenated series of perceptions and so generates the scene wherein the flower can be both sensed and thought, wherein the poetry it transports can be beheld and understood. Thinking of “the blue flower” and its irresistible spell as he lies sleepless on his bed, Heinrich consequently generates a dream wherein, similar to the teacher in the Lehrlinge, “die Wahrnehmungen seiner Sinne [sich in große bunte Bilder drängten]: er hörte, sah, tastete und dachte zugleich” and wherein he finds “überall Bekanntes wieder, nur wunderlich gemischt, gepaart” (N I: 202). In generating such a vivid dream, however, Heinrich has taken the first step towards the real, the tangible goal of his Bildungsweg, for he started doing what the poets do: use “things and words like keys [wie Tasten]” (N II: 692 #935) so as to generate powerful “catenations” of sense and meaning—tangible scenes in short, wirkliche Szenen.

Consequently, the blue flower could be read as the foremost literary emblem of the Wechselbestimmung between perception and poetry. The opening passage of Heinrich
von Of terdingen, we have seen, stages their reciprocity. Heinrich’s soliloquy introduces the flower as an abstract name. With his dream he then realizes, indeed sensualizes this name, which is to say, he translates it into a perceptible scene. It is by means of this scene that the unrepresentable and hence abstract land of poetry that the flower betokens comes into appearance, though not in its ultimate, absolute reality—which is after all unrepresentable—but rather as a generation of Heinrich’s senses. But the flower figures in Heinrich’s dream not solely as concrete sense and appearance. It also functions as a source of cohesion in soliciting aesthesiological series. Yet, as such, these series remain invisible; they can only be understood and read, never sensed. Still, it is this abstract power to concatenate perceptions, the ability to solicit aesthesiological series, that one might consider the truly poetic potential of the flower. This has additional consequences with regard to the reader. Reading its name, the reader would be summoned, like Heinrich, to sensualize the flower’s name. Its powerful spell would urge him, too, to generate fresh conjunctions of thought, feeling, and desire—new scenes wherein the blue flower could be at home.
2 Looking with Rilke

Wird nicht der Fels ein eigenthümliches Du, eben wenn ich ihn anrede?
Und was bin ich anders, als der Strom, wenn ich wehmüthig in seine
Wellen hinabschaue, und die Gedanken in seinem Gleiten verliere?¹

The status of looking in Rilke’s middle period

In attempting to grasp what occurs in visual perception, Rilke persistently writes about
things. This remark contains in a nutshell the premise of my following readings. I
propose to connect the prominence of vision in Rilke’s writings, the many thematic
invocations of looking, gazing, and seeing, to the puzzling interest in things that many of
his works exhibit, Rilke’s sometimes perplexing Dingkult.² The process of looking—
Schauen or Anschauen—establishes this connection both in conceptual and in practical,
corporeal terms. It is the process of looking that generates the link between the seeing
subject and the seen objects, in Rilke’s works as much as in actual perception.

This chapter seeks to specify the modality and logic by which looking typically
appears in Rilke’s middle period—the aesthesiology of looking that seems to structure
certain scenes of the process of looking, or scenographies, of that period. The middle
period offers itself for consideration in this regard because vision and things converge
there in an extraordinarily exemplary way. Many texts of that period, I hope to
demonstrate, can be read as outlining striking scenes of looking that must be actualized
through acts of readerly aesthesis in turn. A key letter by Rilke, certain passages from Die
Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge, and the great poem Archaïscher Torso
Looking with Rilke

_Apollos_ will serve as the main examples in this attempt to analyze and actualize the visual force obtaining in Rilke’s middle period.

Considering the activity they demand on the part of their reader, it cannot suffice to investigate these texts solely in semantic or semiotic terms: as a set of fictional metaphors and immanent figures of speech that merely represent acts of looking in words. These scenographies present not only figures of speech; they _elicit_ at the same time acts of looking; they draw the reader into the spectatorial scenes which they represent. This chapter will have to combine, therefore, semiotic analyses of figurations of looking _in_ Rilke with an attempt to recast the sensuous dimension of the represented scenes—to look _with_ Rilke. The textual as well as the diegetic make-up of these scenes, their semiotic presentation and their phenomenal representation, will have to be examined together—and also weighed against each other whenever the semiotic code of the given scenography conflicts with the diegetic potential so indicated.

While the view that Rilke’s texts closely examine the process of looking enjoys no general consensus among Rilke scholars, it has become a noteworthy line of scholarship. In the comprehensive _Rilke-Handbuch_, Wolfgang G. Müller writes that the _Neue Gedichte_ in particular are nowadays considered as having recourse to a “secondary iconicity” [Ikonizität zweiter Ordnung]. By that Müller means that “Sprache im allgemeinen und Literatur im besonderen nicht nur durch Nachbildung von Elementen und Aspekten der Wirklichkeit ikonisch sein können, sondern auch durch die Abbildung von Wahrnehmungsvorgängen und Bewußtseinsprozessen.” Moreover, Müller adds, the representation of processes of perception in Rilke displays phenomenological qualities: “Das durch die Wahrnehmung konstituierte Objekt bei R[ilke] weist eine Verwandtschaft
mit Husserls phänomenologischer Dingkonstitution auf.” This is obviously a significant reorientation in comparison to the tendency, pervasive especially in older scholarship, to identify looking and seeing primarily as biographic topoi that reflect Rilke’s fascination with the visual arts, above all his close interest in Rodin’s sculptures and Cézanne’s paintings.

Yet it hardly surprises that Rilke’s writings should contain reflections on visual perception, since “looking” [schauen] is without doubt a “basic word” [Grundwort] that pervades the entirety of Rilke’s oeuvre, as Käte Hamburger pointed out five decades ago in her important essay, “Die phänomenologische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes.” Hamburger here demonstrates parallels between Rilke’s poetry and the key principles of Husserl’s phenomenological method, namely, intentionality, transcendental subjectivity, and phenomenological reduction. However, to point out further parallels between Rilke and Husserl is not my intention. More important in the context of the present chapter is Hamburger’s cautious reminder that Rilke writes “lyric poetry instead of an epistemology” [eine Lyrik statt einer Erkenntnistheorie], because this dictum indicates the critical limit for any aesthesiological reading. Even if Rilke explicitly thematizes issues of perception in some texts, they are always already much more than a pure logic or aesthesiology of looking, since these texts speak in a poetic rather than a philosophical voice. They offer scenographies of looking instead of a systematic theory of vision.

With this premise in mind, Rilke’s long-lasting poetic imperative to look and “to learn to see” [sehen lernen]—of which the various texts on Rodin, the letters on Cézanne, the Neue Gedichte, and the Aufzeichnungen are perhaps the foremost expressions—cannot be construed as a merely metaphoric phrase. Instead one had to say,
with Hamburger, that “der Begriff des Schauens [bei Rilke] niemals die Bedeutung der
‘inneren Schau’, der Intuition in einem mystischen Sinn hat, sondern immer das
Wahrnehmen der äußeren Welt meint.” This view, the validity of which Hamburger
demonstrates by means of close readings, also holds true from a historical perspective.
Far from being a mere metaphor, looking and learning to see belong to a historical nexus
that involves, above all, Enlightenment ideals in drawing instruction, the contemplative
gaze of 19th century aesthetics, psychophysical research with regard to the binocular
perception of space, and the Kunsterziehung movement of the early 20th century. Steffen
Arndal and Ralph Köhnen, among others, have recently situated works of Rilke’s middle
period in this nexus.

I mentioned above that an aesthesiological interpretation of Rilke’s middle period
needs to take into account both the semiotic code and the diegetic scene of the
scenographies under discussion. The semiotic analysis of figurations of looking in Rilke
needs to be complemented with the attempt to look with Rilke, which is to say, by
envisioning or, to put it more drastically, by inserting oneself into the represented scene,
by participating in that scene as an observer. Surely, the doubts as to the representational
capabilities of language that emerge in literary and critical discourses around 1900, the
so-called “language crisis,” would seem to warrant the divorce of a “pure” textual form
(signifiers) from the represented scene (signified). Yet in accepting their divorce—which,
for example, Hofmannsthal’s famous Lord Chandos Letter ostensibly advocates, yet by
means, paradoxically, of powerful images and vivid scenes—Rilke’s scenographies
would be deprived of their ability to describe the act of looking. These scenographies
would then comprise words merely to be “spelled out,” or analyzed as detached
signifiers, and little more—as Malte Laurids Brigge finds out during his visit to the Salpêtrière, when the true nature of avant turns out to be a-v-a-n-t rather than the meaning “before.” They would represent a certain kind of madness and non-sense, a Wahn-sinn that exists only on paper, as Kittler famously claimed, but never scenes to be recast through readerly aesthesis. On that standpoint, literal description and appearing scenes would belong to two utterly incommensurable media: here letters, and there sensuous experience.

To escape this aporia, the factual but blind primacy of letters must be bypassed, and the two media—letters and senses—linked by way of readerly aesthesis, that is, by envisioning Rilke’s scenographies of looking with the “inner sense” of imagination, thus transposing words into a perceptible scene and, hence, embodied sense. Without this essential transposition through readerly recasting, an aesthesiological reading of a Rilkean scenography of looking would be an absurdity indeed.

From this it follows, finally, that an aesthesiological reading of a Rilkean scenography of looking entails dramatically more than the “reconstruction” of the sequential “plotline” [Handlungsablauf]. What needs readerly actualization—or recasting—is the diegetic scene outlined by a given scenography—“diegetic” understood in both senses of the term “diegesis” put forward by the Introduction, namely, the diachronic act and discursive form by which a story is communicated (Plato’s definition of diēgēsis) as well as the phenomenal totality, the scene that this act of narration brings about (Genette’s definition of diégèse).
The reciprocal exchange of looks as basic aesthesiology

In the attempt to connect the thematic prominence of vision with Rilke’s ostensible Dingkult and, by extension, to apply Rilke’s poetic imperative “to learn to see” to those text from his middle period that often center on things being gazed at, one fundamental pattern of looking comes to the fore. This pattern, as the following sections will demonstrate, consists of two reciprocal but never strictly separable movements in looking that take place as a paradoxical exchange of looks. The first is marked by the inward impression or imprint (Eindruck) that external objects leave on the observer. Malte Laurids Brigge, the protagonist of the Aufzeichnungen, articulates this mechanism of being imprinted by the external world in the phrase: “Aber diesmal werde ich geschrieben werden. Ich bin der Eindruck, der sich verwandeln wird” (R VI: 756). This represents the first movement. Another version of the same mechanism by which things impress the observer with their imprint can be found in the following passage: “es geht alles tiefer in mich ein und bleibt nicht an der Stelle stehen, wo es sonst immer zu Ende war. Ich habe ein Inneres, von dem ich nicht wußte. Alles geht jetzt dorthin” (R VI: 710–11).13

The second, obverse movement of looking appears to be an imprint that the viewer impresses on things by the very act of looking at them. The imprint of the viewer establishes the things looked upon as stable objects, separate external entities available for personal possession. A rather extreme example of such a lasting imprint, which I will call cathexis,14 is that which Brigge’s grandfather, the Chamberlain Christoph Detlev Brigge, apparently left on the things of his household:

Ja, es war für diese geistesabwesenden, verschlafenen Dinge eine schreckliche Zeit. Es passierte, dass aus Büchern, die irgend eine hastige Hand ungeschickt
looking with rilke

geöffnet hatte, Rosenblätter heraustumelten, die zertreten wurden […] Und von Zeit zu Zeit fiel etwas, fiel unverhüllt auf Teppich, fiel hell auf das harte Parkett, aber es zerschlug da und dort, zersprang scharf oder brach fast lautlos auf, denn diese Dinge, verwöhnt wie sie waren, vertrugen keinerlei Fall. [/] Und wäre es jemandem eingefallen zu fragen, was die Ursache von alledem sei, was über dieses ängstlich gehütete Zimmer alles Untergangs Fülle herabgerufen habe, – so hätte es nur eine Antwort gegeben: der Tod. [/] Der Tod des Kammerherrn Christoph Detelv Brigge auf Ulsgaard. [R VI: 716–17]

The things in Brigge’s death room are disturbed in their peace, upset, and “the cause of all this” [die Ursache von alledem] is the imminent death of their sovereign master.15

Apparently, the cathetic imprint that Chamberlain Brigge has impressed on these things during the time of his death struggle is so powerful that, when he is about to pass away, his property is compelled to imitate his agony. But whereas Chamberlain Brigge had the cathetic powers to take things fully into possession, his grandson Malte Laurids Brigge feels haunted by things and their looks. Young Brigge is unable to control them, let alone take possession of them. The other examples to follow, from different works, will show a similar dilemma indeed, namely: that the appropriating imprint that the observer projects onto things is usually more precarious and less effective an endeavor than the inverse movement in looking, when things impress their imprint on the observer.

The import and necessity of cathexis in forming object relationships is no merely fictional topic for Rilke. His 1914 essay on “Dolls” [Puppen] (R VI: 1063–74) is probably the most explicit statement on the joys, but also sufferings, that such cathetic procedures imply. The doll here appears in two ways. On the one hand, the doll is a medium, indeed a “container” [Gefäß]16 that can potentially receive a child’s, and presumably also an adult’s, cathetic imprint, which is to say, mental and emotional investments such as “Überschwemmungen unserer Zärtlichkeit.” Thus the doll functions
in general as a container for selfhood, into which one “impresses” and, consequently, stores up one’s self: “wir konnten uns in sie hineindrücken und in ihr verlorengehen.” But there are also moments, Rilke writes in the same passage, when the doll resists the cathetic impression of the child. Then it appears “als der grausige Fremdkörper, an den wir unsere lauterste Wärme verschwendet haben” (R VI: 1067). These are the moments of suffering, when things seem to resist the appropriating imprint by the human who would possess them.

Rephrasing the twofold movement of looking that I have just introduced in abstracto, one might say, broadly speaking, that Rilke’s scenographies of looking concern the complex entanglement of perceiver and perceived that happens during the extended act of perceiving, the process of exchange. The “things” that these scenographies prompt us to envisage seem to belong to a moment before the positions of subject and object are established, in that these “things” are not represented as distinct external and coherent entities—as objects. As a result, the separation and the clear opposition between a seeing subject and a seen object is undermined.

This prompts a last terminological clarification before putting this hypothesis regarding the twofold movement of looking in Rilke into play. The word “object” is a compound combining the Latin terms ob and iacere. We can render this literally as that which is “thrown” or “stands against” the eye. The German word Gegen-stand, an attempted transliteration of the word, captures this spatial notion. The term object presupposes, consequently, a stable subject-position and so enacts an a priori separation between subject and object, as well as interiority and exteriority. This denotation of the term object as the external antithesis to subject makes it necessary to draw an analytic
distinction between three elements in perception. First of these is the actual material thing as such, and second, is the “thing” perceived, which may be referred to with the Greek term *aisthēton*, meaning “things perceived” or “percept,” the felt sensory content of perception. The *aisthēton* may contain diverse sensory aspects, many “things perceived” at the same time, including feelings and affections of the body.\(^\text{17}\) Strictly speaking, the *aisthēton* is always, even in the most basic scenarios, a complex mixture of sensory qualities, a somewhat indistinct stream of “things perceived,” in contrast to the influential eighteenth century idea that perception is based on readily available discrete impressions—an idea that modern perception theory has refuted in several ways.\(^\text{18}\) The third and final element is the discerned object that emerges a posteriori as the result of an apperception, that is, the apprehension of what the “things perceived” mean altogether, the realization of the objective meaning of these indistinct “things.”

The synthetic procedure that concatenates those three moments—thing, “things perceived,” object—could be described with a term by Paul Cézanne (whom Rilke admired as a champion of looking due to the tenacity of his gaze)\(^\text{19}\) as *réalisation*, which I take to mean the realization of the “things” seen, or the sensory presentation of the actual thing, in the form of one unified object. The term *réalisation* appears in various forms in Cézanne’s letters and conversations. For example, he is reported to have said on one occasion that “painting from nature is not copying the object, it is realizing sensations.”\(^\text{20}\) In the case of Cézanne, the object that ought to complete the procedure of *réalisation* is, naturally, a painting. Yet for Cézanne, the painter must never abandon the labor of looking, the acuity of the color sensation produced in his eye, but instead preserve the laborious process of looking by means of the painted image. This aesthetic
imperative is the reason that the *réalisation* of any given subject matter as a painting became virtually impossible for Cézanne. “The realization of my sensations,” he wrote in a letter to his son Paul six weeks before his death in 1906, “is always painful” because “I cannot attain the intensity that unfolds itself before my senses,” at least not by means of artificial colors.\(^{21}\) Rilke was well aware of the term *réalisation*, as a letter to his wife Clara Rilke Westhoff indicates, and some scholars indeed hold that Rilke uses his German translation of the term, *Dingwerdung*, as his own means of poetological reflection.\(^{22}\)

With the process of such *réalisation* in mind, we may investigate a first exemplary scenography of looking in Rilke, namely, a passage from a letter to Clara Rilke Westhoff of March 8, 1907. This passage articulates, or, perhaps better, calls into question, such a procedure of *réalisation* by investigating the relation between observer and *aisthēton* as it tends towards objectivity. According to Rilke’s account, however, looking at something and apprehending the corresponding object is just as wonderful as it is puzzling:

Das Anschauen ist eine so wunderbare Sache, von der wir noch so wenig wissen; wir sind mit ihm ganz nach außen gekehrt; aber gerade wenn wirs am meisten sind, scheinen in uns Dinge vor sich zu gehen, die auf das Unbeobachtetsein sehnsüchtig gewartet haben, und während sie sich, intakt und seltsam anonym, in uns vollziehen, ohne uns, – wächst in dem Gegenstand draußen ihre Bedeutung heran, ein überzeugender, starker, – ihr einzig möglicher Name, in dem wir das Geschehnis in unserem Innern selig und ehrerbietig erkennen, ohne selbst daran heranzureichen, es nur ganz leise, ganz von fern, unter dem Zeichen eines eben noch fremden und schon im nächsten Augenblick aufs neue entfremdeten Dinges begreifend –.\(^{23}\)
Arguably, this dense scenography bears traces of a rethinking of visual perception, if not a theory of looking in miniature, and, for that very reason, the difficulties that emerge in Rilke’s account bear close examination. As looking turns the observer’s attention fully to the outside, “things” seem to take place inside, but these “things” are perceived only by means of the “object outside” [Gegenstand draußen]. The “object outside” appears to be intertwined with an opaque inside—the impenetrable “Geschehnis in unserem Innern” that looking incited. Similarly, the “meaning” [Bedeutung] of the inside “things” is to be found—“grows up”—in the outside object, though this “meaning” cannot be fully grasped, or, as Rilke writes, “ohne selbst daran heranzureichen.” Looking, one might say, proceeds here by way of a confusing reversal without a clear resolution. This confusion or intertwining of inside and outside, the former being mapped onto the other, and vice versa, finds no resolution because a final realization of objective “meaning” does not take place. The “things” seen (the aisthēton) are never perceived as coinciding with one distinct external object. Consequently, there is no possible meaning or “name” (“ihr einzig möglicher Name”) for the anonymous “things” that looking shows; they cannot be grasped once and for all. Indeed, this name constantly escapes, despite the “convincing name” [überzeugender Name] that, for a short moment of blissful but faint recognition (“selig und ehrerbietig erkennen […] nur ganz leise, ganz von fern”), seems to capture the anonymous events inside. Lacking this one proper, permanent name, however, the relation that looking establishes between observer and aisthēton is continually estranged (entfremdet). As a result, the subject can neither distinguish himself, his looking, from and against the external object, nor reach the point of uniting both elements together under the sign of this “one proper name” [einzig möglicher Name]. Most remarkably, all
of this is said to happen “without us” [ohne uns]—without the perceiver’s conscious agency.24

But what makes the realization of “things” seen as distinct objects possible? How to sort out the confusing reversal that the process of looking perpetuates? How once more to separate inside and outside, looking subject and perceived object? In the 1907 lectures on sense perception known as Ding und Raum, given the same year of Rilke’s letter, Edmund Husserl grounds object perception in a chiefly egological model.25 For him, all object perception is based on the ability of our consciousness to intend sensations as a specific object. This means that the multifarious aisthēton becomes a clear and distinct object by means of the adequate fulfillment and, if necessary, adjustment of subjective expectations. The object of perception is “constituted” by active as well as passive acts of intention, in Husserl’s terms, which synthesize the manifold sensations.

Clearly, consciousness serves in Husserl’s egological model as determining origin and effective cause of perception. His model, much like Fichte’s, thus stipulates the author of looking in advance. In Rilke’s letter, however, both origin and cause are markedly different. Here, looking happens ultimately “without us.” The authorship of looking is not a priori certain because of the continued reversal of positions, their confusing displacement: the external thing appears to be always already inside, while this inside is always already projected towards the outside, so that both moments escape permanently. The separation of subject- and object-position and, by extension, the self-recognition of the author of looking are constantly undermined in this scene. Instead of apprehending the object of looking by its proper name, there are only “things” to see that pertain neither exclusively to the inside (subject) nor to some pure outside (object).
According to Rilke’s letter, then, looking both blurs the spatial difference and dynamizes the hierarchical relation between the involved protagonists, observer and thing.

 одну книгу (см., например, Rilke, 1928, S. 159). In order further to pursue these questions, it is helpful to consider a remark by philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels. Much like Rilke, Waldenfels contests notions of visual perception that ascribes the gaze a priori to a subject:

Wenn etwas naiv ist, so die voreilige Humanisierung und Personalisierung des Blicks, die diesen sogleich in einen Blickakt verwandelt und ihm sozusagen einem Blickautor zuschreibt. […] Doch ähnlich wie die fremde Stimme überrascht uns auch auch der fremde Blick; er tritt auf als Blickereignis, das zunächst anonym, namenlos daherkommt und nicht schon als jemandes Blick.

‘Es sieht’ sollte man sagen […] Ein Sehen, das sich nicht vorweg seiner selbst und seiner Gegenstände sicher ist, wird sich nicht scheuen, sich dem Blick der Dinge auszusetzen und Ernst zu machen mit dem Gefühl, daß die Dinge uns ansehen, sich in uns ansehen. […] Diese Blickverlagerung nach außen läßt sich nur dann als animistisches Relikt oder metaphorische Ausflucht abtun, wenn man von einem Sehsubjekt ausgeht, das seines Sehens Herr ist, dieses nach außen projiziert und den Dingen sozusagen Augen einpflanzt […] Doch der Gedanke, daß Dinge sich in uns sehen, gewinnt einen ganz anderen Sinn, wenn das Sehen selbst auf andere Weise verstanden wird, nämlich als ein Geschehen, das bis zu einem gewissen Grad anonym bleibt, das anderswo beginnt.26

The “event of looking” [Blickereignis], Waldenfels writes, cannot be said to belong immediately and unambiguously to the subject, but is rather “an occurrence […] that begins elsewhere” and “remains to a certain degree anonymous.” Clearly, this conclusion, which is partly indebted to Merleau-Ponty,27 renders explicit some of the “things” that the previous scenography of looking gives to see on my reading. Moreover,
Waldenfels’s phenomenological reflections can illuminate what has often been described as an “anthropomorphic” tendency in Rilke’s writings about things. Instead of performing “a hasty humanization and personalization of the gaze” to resolve the anonymity of looking, these writings could be said to hold fast to this anonymity. Rilke’s writings on things would become readable as scenographies of looking in which precisely the de-personalized interplay of glances and the anonymous exchange of imprints prevails. The so-called “anthropomorphic” tendency in Rilke could be explained in aesthesiological terms—instead of construing it as an ideologically blinded Dingkult concealing the capitalist alienation, as Adorno did, or as a “displacement of traumatic symptom from subjects to objects,” as psychologizing accounts often do.28

For reasons that pertain to the nature of looking itself, it may instead be the case that intensive observation causes certain things to suddenly turn against the observer, displaying an insistent look. This is the reversal of looking that so often transpires in Rilke’s scenographies of looking. To mention only one of the many examples of such reversals in the Aufzeichnungen, Brigge describes such insistent looks one lonesome evening in his Paris chamber, when he feels haunted by “a certain metal object,” presumably the “lid of a can” [Büchsendeckel]. He is horrified by the grimaces he sees in the look of things—the spiteful imprint that they impress on him. The things seem to exchange conspiring glances while resisting human dominion: “Da verbinden [die Dinge] sich, um ihn zu stören, zu schrecken, zu beirren, und wissen, daß sie es können. Da fangen sie, einander zuzwinkernd, die Verführung an, die dann ins Unermessene weiter wächst” (R VI: 878). Yet it is precisely by means of these spiteful winks that Brigge recognizes the truly objective—read: ob-jective—meaning of these things: they have
liberated themselves from human control to indulge in utter “debauchery”

[Ausschweifung].

Hier [i.e., when interacting with the lid] zeigt es sich so recht, wie verwirrend der Umgang mit den Menschen auf die Dinge gewirkt hat. […] Sie [things of daily use] ärgern sich, weil sie die Stärkeren sind, weil sie mehr Recht auf Abwechslung zu haben meinen, weil sie sich nachgeäfft fühlen; aber sie lassen die Sache gehen, wie sie sich selber gehen lassen. Wo aber einer ist, der sich zusammennimmt, ein Einsamer etwa, der so recht rund auf sich beruhen wollte Tag und Nacht, da fordert er geradezu den Widerspruch, den Hohn, den Haß der entarteten Geräte heraus, die, in ihrem argen Gewissen, nicht mehr vertragen können, daß etwas sich zusammenhält und nach seinem Sinne strebt. [R VI: 877–78]

For Brigge, the disconcerting lid of the can becomes representative of all the other things of daily use that “became confused” by the interaction with humans. Indeed, this lid betrays the true face of the object world: it is one among many “depraved devices” [entartete Geräte] seeking to assault the individual with “scorn” and “hatred.” In this scene, therefore, the structural logic underlying all those “things” seen is recognized and asserted, namely, the scorn and the hatred that the objects world casts on the observer.

For Brigge, then, the objects have become ecstatic, or literally in departure (ex-) from a simple, “static” standing: they now “stand out,” impressing their grimaces on the observer. The observer is forced to receive their scornful imprint, so that the precarious relation between observer and aisthēton is resolved and clear boundaries are restored. This comprehension of objective meaning, however, is not the mirror image of events taking place inside the observer, but rather the realization, indeed the demarcation of difference: subject versus object(s), or, “the solitary” [Einsamer] versus “depraved devices” [entartete Geräte].
This demarcation of subject and objects usually takes a rather unpleasant turn in Brigge’s \textit{Aufzeichnungen}, since the chief sensation that enables such demarcation is anxiety (\textit{Angst}), which frequently appears in the guise of horror, dread, fear, and the like. Brigge expresses feelings of anxiety in countless entries; it frequently happens to Brigge that “a bit of anxiety evolves inside me” [ein wenig Angst in mir anfing] (R VI: 769). The long paragraph that lists all the anxieties that were reawakened by the life in Paris makes Brigge’s \textit{Grundbefindlichkeit} abundantly clear:

\begin{quote}

Die Angst, daß ein kleiner Wollfaden, der aus dem Saum der Decke heraussteht, hart sei, hart und scharf wie eine stählerne Nadel; die Angst, daß dieser kleine Knopf meines Nachthemdes größer sei als mein Kopf, groß und schwer; die Angst, daß dieses Krümchen Brot, das jetzt von meinem Bette fällt, gläsern und zerschlagen unten ankommen würde, und die drückende Sorge, daß damit eigentlich alles zerbrochen sei, alles für immer; die Angst, daß der Streifen Rand eines aufgerissenen Briefes etwas Verbotenes sei, das niemand sehen dürfte, etwas unbeschreiblich Kostbares, für das keine Stelle in der Stube sicher genug sei; die Angst, daß ich, wenn ich einschließe, das Stück Kohle verschlucken würde, das vor dem Ofen liegt; die Angst, daß irgendeine Zahl in meinem Gehirn zu wachsen beginnt, bis sie nicht mehr Raum hat in mir; die Angst, daß das Granit sei, worauf ich liege, grauer Granit; die Angst, daß ich schreien könnte und daß man vor meiner Türe zusammenliefe und sie schließlich aufbräche, die Angst, daß ich mich verraten könnte und alles das sagen, wovor ich mich fürchte, und die Angst, daß ich nichts sagen könnte, weil alles unsagbar ist, – und die anderen Ängste . . . die Ängste. [R VI: 766–67]
\end{quote}
The affect of anxiety (*Angst*) represents the main force of objectification in the *Aufzeichnungen*. Though destabilizing with regard to his emotional well-being, Brigge’s anxiety at the same time stabilizes the object world in a very fundamental sense. For being afraid of something automatically introduces the mark of otherness—of objectivity. Anxiety, that is, implies the difference between “me” and that foreign “something” which makes itself felt as anxiety, fear, dread, horror. The imagery suggested by the etymology of *Angst* and anxiety, going back to Greek *agchein* (“to squeeze, to strangle, to throttle”) via Latin *angor* (the “choking,” and already “anxiety”), supports this phenomenological observation. Anxiety manifests itself in and through “my” body, yet it is at the same time a foreign feeling induced by outside “things” that seem to “tighten” the chest, “squeeze” the throat, etc. Being immersed in the experience of anxiety, the self stands always already in opposition to something that is “not-me,” namely, the feeling of anxiety—a feeling, however, that should not be confused with the exogenous cause inducing anxiety (darkness, for example, or corpses). Structurally, therefore, anxiety is both egocentric and intentional. It inevitably points back at a subject position “me,” the sentient medium of experience, as much as it directs the awareness of that subject towards something other, something objective, namely, that foreign feeling of anxiety that does not belong to “me,” that does not feel like “me.” In the case of specific fears and anxieties, wherein the exogenous cause is presently known (for example, a fear of darkness), their structural egocentricity and rudimentary intentionality is quite evident. But this structure also applies to unspecific fears and anxieties, whose causes are not readily known. Although unspecific anxiety is often expressed by the intransitive statement “I am afraid,” this statement nonetheless implies an objective counterpart, namely, a *feeling* of anxiety that
is alien to “me.” Whether it is provoked by a known cause or not, the experience of anxiety is, therefore, never purely intransitive but always points towards an objective counterpart.

One famous thinker of anxiety confirms the phenomenological observation that the experience of anxiety implies both egocentricity and rudimentary intentionality, thus combining a subject position at the center with the being-towards-something-else. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger writes:

Das Sichängsten erschließt ursprünglich und direkt die Welt als Welt. Nicht wird etwa zunächst durch Überlegung von inner-weltlich Seiendem abgesehen und nur noch die Welt gedacht, vor der dann die Angst entsteht, sondern die Angst erschließt als Modus der Befindlichkeit allererst die *Welt als Welt*. […] In der Angst versinkt das umweltlich Zuhandene, überhaupt das innerweltlich Seiende. Die „Welt“ vermag nichts mehr zu bieten, ebensowenig das Mitdasein Anderer. Die Angst benimmt so dem Dasein die Möglichkeit, verfallend sich aus der „Welt“ und der öffentlichen Ausgelegtheit zu verstehen. Sie wirft das Dasein auf das zurück, worum es sich ängstet, sein eigenliches In-der-Weltsein-können. […] Die Angst offenbart im Dasein das *Sein zum* eigensten Sein-können, das heißt das *Freisein für* die Freiheit des Sich-selbst-wählens und -ergreifens. Die Angst bringt das Dasein vor sein Freisein für... (propensio in...) die Eigentlichkeit seines Seins als Möglichkeit, die es immer schon ist. […] Das, *worum* die Angst sich ängstet, enthüllt sich als das, *wovor* sie sich ängstet: das In-der-Welt-sein. Die Selbigkeit des Wovor der Angst und ihres Worum erstreckt sich sogar auf das Sichängsten selbst. Denn dieses ist als Befindlichkeit eine Grundart des In-der-Welt-seins. […] Die Angst vereinzelt und erschließt so das Dasein als ‚solus ipse‘. Dieser existenziale »Solipsismus« versetzt aber so wenig ein isoliertes Subjekt ding in die harmlose Leere eines weltlosen Vorkommens, daß er das Dasein gerade in einem extremen Sinne vor seine Welt als Welt und damit es selbst vor sich selbst als In-der-Welt-sein bringt.29
Anxiety represents according to Heidegger the “Grundart” or, alternatively, “Grundbefindlichkeit” of being in the world. This means, on the one hand, that the experience of anxiety necessarily “individualizes” [vereinzelt] a subject; the subject is thrown back onto itself, which reveals in turn the very property and meaning, the Eigentlichkeit of individual “existence” [Dasein]. Being afraid, the subject thus focuses on itself; it is egocentric. At the same time, the experience of anxiety directs the attention to the outside world; it positions the subject “vis-à-vis” [vor] its world, because this world encompasses all the possible causes of anxiety—all the things “of which” [wovor] one can be afraid. Thus, being afraid also means to be turned towards the world as the horizon of all possible fears.

One incident in the Aufzeichnungen in particular supports these observations, while simultaneously making it plain that anxiety is Brigge’s chief function to objectify his perceptions, that is to say, to demarcate and comprehend the difference between himself and a world of often-frightening objects. This incident is Brigge’s encounter with “the wall” [die Mauer], which Heidegger quotes, clearly not by accident, in his 1927 lecture, Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie, to illustrate nothing other than the Grundbefindlichkeit of being in the world.30 Attending to “this” wall, the visible remains of one or multiple demolished buildings, Brigge makes mostly visual and olfactory perceptions. He notices a wide range of sensory properties, all of which he ascribes to “this” wall.

Ich weiß nicht, ob ich schon gesagt habe, daß ich diese Mauer meine. Aber es war sozusagen nicht die erste Mauer der vorhandenen Häuser (was man doch hätte annehmen müssen), sondern die letzte der früheren. Man sah in den verschiedenen Stockwerken Zimmerwände, an denen noch die Tapeten klebten, da und dort den Ansatz des Fußbodens oder der Decke. Neben den
This passage offers perhaps the most detailed scenography of perception in the *Aufzeichnungen*. The wall emerges for Brigge and, by extension, also for the reader with great and vivid detail because it is the object of Brigge’s ongoing perception. Rather than being set forth as a definite object, the wall presents itself as an evolving perceptual experience—as an *aisthēton* that appears by means of an ever-growing range of multifarious sensation: “es war noch vieles da, wovon man den Ursprung nicht wußte.” But the inexhaustible sensory detail of the wall is at the same time a problem. Brigge seems unable to integrate and consolidate the perceived manifold that the wall has impressed on him. The wall, it seems, remains in this scene a bundle of disconnected and incongruous “things,” and the objective meaning of the experience seems to escape constantly. In short, Brigge seems unable to translate the actuality of his experience—the wall as *aisthēton*—into a factual account—the wall as object.

This reading is further supported by two details in Brigge’s description. What the wall truly, objectively *is* cannot be expressed but only pointed out by means of deictic gestures. The wall remains a sheer “this” still at the end of his account: “von dieser Mauer spreche ich fortwährend.” The remarks prefacing the encounter with the wall similarly betray the difficulties of conveying the true nature of “this” wall, its objective shape and makeup—difficulties, indeed, that must be rather troubling for someone whose self-imposed mission it is to “learn to see” [sehen lernen]. Attempting to shut out in advance these doubts as to the objective reality and consistency of all the “things” he claims to have seen, smelled, and felt in the face of the wall, Brigge employs a somewhat
strained rhetoric: “Wird man es glauben, daß es solche Häuser giebt? Nein, man wird sagen, ich fälsche. Diesmal ist es Wahrheit, nichts weggelassen, natürlich auch nichts hinzugefügt. […] Aber, um genau zu sein, es waren Häuser, die nicht mehr da waren. Häuser, die man abgebrochen hatte von oben bis unten” (R VI: 749). It is, however, precisely the effortful nature of Brigge’s rhetoric that re-introduces the doubts that it meant to exclude, so that the reader might wonder whether “such” a wall can have objective existence indeed. It would appear, therefore, that Brigge is ultimately unable to properly objectify the aisthēton of his perceptual experience—all those “things” that on his account pertain to “this” wall, or to “such” houses “that were no longer there.”

This conclusion, however, is not entirely accurate, because at the very end of the scene, a retroactive act of objectification does occur. At last, Brigge “recognizes” or “comprehends” [erkennen] “all that,” all those “things” pertaining to the wall:

Man wird sagen, ich hätte lange davorgestanden; aber ich will einen Eid geben dafür, daß ich zu laufen begann, sobald ich die Mauer erkannt hatte. Denn das ist das Schreckliche, daß ich sie erkannt habe. Ich erkenne das alles hier, und darum geht es so ohne weiteres in mich ein: es ist zu Hause in mir. [R VI: 751]

“This” wall is “at home inside me,” reads Brigge’s conclusion; the comprehension of “all that” which pertains to the wall refers back to himself. But in what sense? What is it, exactly, that is entirely “at home inside me”? Brigge’s all-consuming anxiety, one might answer. Consequently, the possibility of apprehending the aisthēton of his perceptual experience, the manifestation of the wall, as a distinct object, as “this” wall over “there,” would seem to depend on his Grundbefindlichkeit. The wall’s objectivity—its factual existence or, rather, the sheer force of its oppositional “thisness”—would result from his anxiety, in that his anxiety demarcates the boundaries of his ego just as much as it
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stabilizes the wall as a distinct objective counterpart. The “things” he wanted to ascribe exclusively to the wall would bear on their flipside the stamp of Brigge’s anxiety—*his* cathectic imprint, for which they can enter so easily: “darum geht es so ohne weiteres in mich ein.” The “horrible thing” [das Schreckliche] for Brigge to realize would be, therefore, that the flight from the wall is in fact in vain, since, like anxiety itself, the objectivity of “this” wall is “at home inside me.”

The Nachträglichkeit of looking in *Archaïscher Torso Apollos*

Certain thing-poems from the *Neue Gedichte* represent scenes of looking in which the reciprocal exchange of looks (or of visual imprints) results in a distinct reversal and, subsequently, in the realization or apperception of objective meaning. The outstanding example for such a reversal of looking, which, with a phenomenological term, could be described as “noematic” in kind, is the sonnet *Archaïscher Torso Apollos*. In examining the problematics of reversal, the following interpretation intersects with Paul de Man’s reading of Rilke’s poetry. De Man has drawn attention to the chiastic structure of his thing-poems, which means, on his account, that these poems often invert the properties of the represented thing by presenting, for example, the inside as the outside, but only to make these seeming oppositions collapse at the end by means of “totalization.” In the case of *Archaïscher Torso*, de Man detects one simple ocular reversal aiming at totalization, namely, the transformation of “the eyeless sculpture [in]to an Argus eye capable of engendering, by itself, all the dimensions of space.” My interpretation, however, will consider in detail the procedure as well as the temporality by which the reversal of looking is effected. For a closer look at *Archaïscher Torso* gives its reader
reason to consider the inherent tension of any scenography of perception as such: the
tension between the phenomenal, diegetic scene and the textual form of its representation.
Indeed, this poem is one of the most extreme examples from the *Neue Gedichte* of textual
form dislocating representational scene. Instead of coinciding, the sonnet form
(metrically dictated line breaks, stanza scheme, rhyme, etc.) here subverts the internal and
external cohesion of the sentences, which describe the phenomenal scene to be envisioned. The resistance of the sonnet form to the poem’s semantic cohesion causes its
diegetic scene to undergo abrupt breaks and confusing collisions between separate
sentences within the same line. My reading will show, however, that this apparent tension
between phenomenal scene and textual arrangement also reflects the paradoxical
temporality of looking in *Archaïscher Torso*, its *Nachträglichkeit*.

*Archaïscher Torso Apollos*

Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,
sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.

Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;

und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern

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The comprehension of the poem’s objective or, with Husserl, “noematic” meaning appears represented in its famous last line, the exhortation: “Du mußt dein Leben ändern.” Before this comprehension takes place, however, the awareness of an alien looking [sein Schauen] grows in the observer(s) of the torso, which the poem implies if apprehended as a scenography of looking. In fact, this looking seems present right from the beginning—despite the absence of the sculpture’s head form the scene and the lacking knowledge thereof: “Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt, / darin die Augenäpfel reiften.” The looking of the head, it would appear, has already sunk into the torso: “in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt, / sich hält und glänzt.” For that reason, the text suggests, the stony torso is still glowing—present tense in the German indicating the actual situation—from the inside like a “candelabrum”: “Aber / sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber.” And this must be so, the two following subjunctive clauses hypothesize, because “otherwise” [sonst] the various parts of the torso could not blind the observing eye, and glimmer and burst out like a shining star: “Sonst könnte nicht der Bug / der Brust dich blenden […] Sonst stünde dieser Stein enstellt […] und flimmerte nicht […] und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern / aus wie ein Stern.”

In a final turn, the penultimate line identifies, again in present tense, that which structured the entire scene of looking from the beginning: “denn da ist keine Stelle, / die dich nicht sieht.” There is no place on the torso that does not see “you,” the observer; to speak with a similar line form the Rodin monograph: “und es gab Stellen ohne Ende und keine, auf der nicht etwas geschah. Es gab keine Leere […] Es gab nur unzählbar viele
lebendige Flächen.” Now the presence of an objective looking, intuited at first as a glowing and glinting, is confirmed with conclusive certainty and experienced in actuality (present tense): all this glowing and glinting happens “because” [denn] every place of the torso returns your looking. Moreover, the accusative pronoun “you” [dich] indicates a shift in direction. Whereas it is in the beginning apparently an observer who looks at the stone and sees the torso glowing like a candelabrum, the torso now returns the gaze, for “you” have become the direct object of all its looking places. The observer has finally realized that his gaze is reflected, indeed thrown back by the torso—objectified in the literal sense. As the objectivity of all the “things” seen is thus apprehended, the thing looked at, the stony torso finally discloses its truly objective meaning: “Du mußt dein Leben ändern,” which in turn confirms the observer’s subject position vis-à-vis the torso, his being a “you.” Additionally, this articulation seems to encapsulate the ethical imperative that the observation of the torso reveals the moment it emerges as a coherent aesthetic object—as a work of art—rather than a series of impressions and “places” [Stellen].

If the reciprocal recognition of subject and object exhausted the meaning of this scene of looking, then the analysis would be complete. In that case we might simply regard Archaïscher Torso as a neat illustration of the emergence of self-consciousness in the sense of Hegel, who describes this emergence in the Phenomenology precisely as a “movement” of reciprocal “recognition” or “affirmation” [Bewegung des Anerkennens]. But this strange first sentence—which announces as much to a lack of knowledge as it points out a vacant place, while in the past tense—complicates a dialectical explanation of the final reversal, perhaps subverts it altogether, since the
element mediating between subject and object, the “unprecedented head” [unerhörtes Haupt], is, precisely, missing. The precondition and epistemic center of this scene was “unheard of” [unerhört], and the eyeballs ripening therein were not known to us, at no point in time. This head is not, and so cannot be recognized and affirmed. It is only by dint of grammatical inference that the reader (not the observer) can connect sein Schauen to the head and its eyes. But then, where does—observing from within the scene—the looking come from? What phenomenon invested the stone with a power of looking that the observer recognizes as his objective opposite?

Once more we are compelled to examine the very first sentence, the ostensible “origin” of this scene of looking, at least according to the text: “Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt, / darin die Augenäpfel reiften.” Especially the first word, “we,” seems curious. Who is “we” in a scene of perception? Recalling Rilke’s letter of May 1907, wherein looking is rendered as an interaction between two elements, the anonymous “things” inside and the unreachable thing outside, together with Waldenfels’s critique of egological models of vision, one might have an answer: “We” means all agents involved in this scene—observer (potentially: observers) and torso. “We” all, the observer(s) of the past, present, and the future as well as the torso, do not know the head from which, ostensibly, looking has issued; nor can this original head be presently perceived. This head was never seen and heard of, as far as is known; it can only be posited as an hypothesis. In hypothesizing, however, that the head’s looking has infiltrated the torso and hence brought about all the looking “places” [Stellen] on the torso’s surface, the text re-stores an origin of looking with words, though not within the scene. Indeed, this head is never diegetically shown but only announced—yet as a lack, as a thing yet unseen and
unheard of, as a vacancy. The poem’s first phrase thus announces a paradox: it speaks of an origin of whose existence it does not—did never—know; it asserts an origin whose originality remains purely hypothetical, indeed unheard-of. The figure of an *unerhörtes Haupt* repeats this paradox in a nutshell, in that it names an origin of looking—“head”—that is actually “unheard-of” and also “bizarre” or “unprecedented,” thus sabotaging the very credibility of that name. In short, such a “head” may be announced; but it cannot be seen within the scene, nor can it be heard.

In light of this, the hypothetical reconnection of the authorless gaze (*Schauen*) with an unseen head and unknown eyeballs appears to be the result of what happened *between* the observer and the impenetrable surface of the torso during the scene, rather than representing the origin or determining cause of looking itself. For, seen from within the present diegetic scene—which is delineated in the indicative mood—looking has no true origin, at least none that “we” observers could see and know of—only a retrospective “origin” to be asserted with words alone. Phenomenologically speaking, the “origin” of looking emerges after the procedure of looking has taken its course; it comes into being by way of *Nachträglichkeit*.41

Jean Laplanche describes the vexed temporality pertaining to *Nachträglichkeit* as follows:

In the first place, *[nachträglich]* has the simple meaning of ‘additional’ or ‘secondary’; and hence, in a temporal sense, of ‘later.’ A second use implies movement from past time in the direction of the future, while a third implies the opposite, a movement from the future towards the past.42

Now, how does this temporality play out in the sonnet as a whole? Complying with the convention of reading from top to bottom, and in accordance with the sequence of
diegetic occurrences, *nachträglich*, in the sense of additional and secondary, is the closing exhortation: “You must change your life.” The phrase appears to be the result of the scene of looking, in that the continued observation finally reveals the torso’s meaning as an aesthetic object, as a work of art.

The poem in its entirety hinges on a twofold temporal movement in opposing directions, moving both forward and backward in time. This movement represents the two remaining types of *Nachträglichkeit* mentioned by Laplanche. Taken together, this movement results in a vicious temporal loop, as it either departs from or returns to the imaginary but in a way unimaginable—the “bizarre” [unerhört]—head. This loop makes it impossible to decide whether the departure from or the return to the head assumes chronological primacy. While the phenomenality of the scene and the textual sequence indeed intersect in that the head assumes in both cases a pivotal role, they bifurcate precisely with regard to the temporal direction of the deferral. On the one hand, the textual sequence presents looking as moving forward, from the past to the future, specifically, as having been submitted by the head to be eventually noticed and acknowledged by the observer. In this view, the looking departs from the head, or serves as a trace to this head. On the other hand, the diegetic scene features an anonymous, indeed a headless looking on the torso that moves backward in time, in that this headless looking is retroactively transferred onto the head—as the result of the scene of looking. In this view, the looking returns to the head, or it revives this head as its hypothetical cause. Accordingly, the “origin” of looking in *Archaïscher Torso* is *nachträglich* both in the second and the third sense of Laplanche’s definition. It is due to this twofold, reciprocal *Nachträglichkeit* that we can read it forward just as well as backward, for
which reason the poem as a whole might appear like a sculpture, as Norbert Fuerst observed. Whether you start with the first line (the void, the head that is not there), the middle part (the torso), or the final line (an inscription on the pedestal, if you will), the sculpture would look the same.

Finally, the two-sided temporality enacted by the sonnet resembles the two-way logic of imprinting, the blueprint for scenes of looking in Rilke’s middle period suggested above. Phenomenally, the current observer transmits the looking backward, thus imprinting an imaginary head of the past with a looking that belongs to none of the participants present in the scene. The textual arrangement, on the other hand, indicates, in reverse, that the head has transmitted its looking forward to the future, thus impregnating first the torso with its looking and then, mediately, through countless looking places, the observer, too: “denn da ist keine Stelle, die dich nicht sieht.” Hence, the poem performs the paradoxical chronology that the exchange of “imprints” demands: circular Nachträglichkeit. Once this reciprocal exchange has taken place, the last, nondescriptive line, which the poem has been enacting all along, can be stated, thus expressing the “additional” [nachträglich] outcome of the encounter between observer and torso.

The anonymity and inexhaustibility of looking

Perhaps, the preceding observations can be summed up by saying that in a typical Rilkean scenography of looking, the anonymous interplay of looks, with all its reversals and retrospective repositionings, remains the spatially opaque and temporally paradoxical but nonetheless necessary procedure for an object to take shape. This generalization can be supported with more examples. Brigge’s experience of the wall bears further witness
to the anonymity of looking—up to the point that Brigge comprehends its objective meaning. Yet before this final comprehension occurs, Brigge notices “something” that apparently occupies the wall from the inside. At first he wants to call it “das zähe Leben dieser Zimmer”—rooms, however, which do no longer exist. But as he traces the various manifestations of this “stubborn life” in the wall, which seems to pervade its colors, textures, and its pungent smell, he starts referring to what he detected plainly, and more adequately, as “it” [es]:

Es war noch da, es hielt sich an den Nägeln, die geblieben waren, es stand auf dem handbreiten Rest der Fußböden, es war unter den Ansätzen der Ecken, wo es noch ein klein wenig Innenraum gab, zusammengekrochen. Man konnte sehen, daß es in der Farbe war, die es langsam, Jahr um Jahr, verwandelt hatte […] es […] es […] etc. [R VI: 750; my emphasis]

Indeed, it would appear that the cumulative employment of the pronoun “it” expresses once again the nameless anonymity that belongs to the actuality of looking: it gives many “things” to see, while their objective meaning, their “proper name” continually escapes. This elusiveness resonates with the 1905 *Vortrag über Rodin*, which draws our attention precisely to the difficulty of identifying, naming the “things” that we see as we look.


My final examples illustrating the basic aesthesiology of Rilke’s scenographies of looking are the poems *Die Fensterrose* and *Schwarze Katze*. Together with *Archaïscher Torso*, they represent the most obvious scenes of exchanged glances in *Neue Gedichte*. In
both poems looking loses its fixed “origin” the moment it starts to see, and so discovers its essential anonymity—that it looks, not “me” (which is why these poems are particularly relevant illustrations).

_Die Fensterrose_

Da drin: das träge Treten ihrer Tatzen
macht eine Stille, die dich fast verwirrt;
und wie dann plötzlich eine von den Katzen
den Blick an ihr, der hin und wieder irrt,
gewaltsam in ihr großes Auge nimmt, —
den Blick, der, wie von eines Wirbels Kreis
ergriffen, eine kleine Weile schwimmt
und dann versinkt und nichts mehr von sich weiß

wenn dieses Auge, welches scheinbar ruht,
sich auftut und zusammenschlägt mit Tosen
und ihn hineinreißt bis ins rote Blut —:

So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein
der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen
ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein.

_Schwarze Katze_

Ein Gespenst ist noch wie eine Stelle,
dran dein Blick mit einem Klange stößt;
aber da, an diesem schwarzen Felle
wird dein stärkstes Schauen aufgelöst:

wie ein Tobender, wenn er in vollster
Raserei ins Schwarze stampft,
jählings am benehmenden Gepolster
einer Zelle aufhört und verdampft.

Alle Blicke, die sie jemals trafen,
scheint sie also an sich zu verhehlen,
um darüber drohend und verdrossen
zuzuschauern und damit zu schlafen.
Doch auf einmal kehrt sie, wie geweckt,
 ihr Gesicht und mitten in das deine:
und da trifft du deinen Blick im geelen
Amber ihrer runden Augensteine
unerwartet wieder: eingeschlossen
wie ein ausgestorbenes Insektd.

In *Die Fensterrose*, die anonymity of the “origin” of looking is already emphasized by the uncertain setup of the scene: Who is looking at whom, and who is seeing what? Is it the cat who looks at the rose window? or the rose window at the cat? And what is the role of the observer in all this, who looks at the cats “in there” [da drin]? The identity of their grammatical gender (*die Fensterrose, die Katze*) makes it in fact hard to determine whose gaze and eye it is that the pronouns refer to, particularly in the first and the second stanza. But regardless of this uncertainty, the poem makes explicit what happens as soon as looking has begun: forgetting.

den Blick, der, wie von eines Wirbels Kreis
ergriffen eine kleine Weile schwimmt
und dann versinkt und nichts mehr von sich weiß,

wenn dieses Auge, welches scheinbar ruht,
sich auftut und zusammenschlägt mit Tosen
und ihn [the gaze] hineinreißt bis ins rote Blut —:
Once the cat has cast her gaze onto the rose window (or the other way round), “her” gaze is forcefully displaced by that mighty blinking eye of the rose window. The initial gaze is compelled to forget itself the moment it receives a glance—in fact a commanding imprint—in return, which forces this gaze to turn back inside, dissolving in the “red blood.” Consequently, the cat is deprived of her ostensible possession, “her” gaze, through a reversal.

A similar displacement occurs in *Schwarze Katze* (and this not only because the poem concerns a cat, too). At first, “your”—the observer’s—looking is absorbed, indeed “dissolved” by the cat’s black fur: “aber da, an diesem schwarzen Felle / wird dein stärkstes Schauen aufgelöst.” Recalling all the seeing, yet also blinding, “places” [Stellen] on the torso’s stony surface in *Archaïscher Torso*, it is certainly more than a euphonic coincidence that the third line, “an diesem schwarzen Felle,” rhymes with the first line, “eine Stelle.” For in *Schwarze Katze*, again, an omnipresent surface refracts the observer’s gaze, so that there remains no “place” [Stelle] on the cat’s black fur where “your” looking could rest: “Alle Blicke, die sie jemals trafen, / scheint sie also an sich zu verhehlen.” Much like the stone in *Archaïscher Torso*, the materiality of this fur is so blinding, so refracting, that it does not allow its observer to focus on one single place. This surface too is all-consuming and unseeable—and, paradoxically, still less seeable than a “specter” [Gespenst], which in the first and the second line of the poem is described as having at least “eine Stelle / daran dein Blick mit einem Klange stößt.” The third stanza brings the decomposition—and dispossession—of “your strongest looking” [dein stärkstes Schauen] to a total completion. But paradoxically, the gradual
dispossession of looking eventually enables the observer to regain his vision, in that he recognizes “his” possession (“deinen Blick”) in and through the face of a reciprocal gaze:

Doch auf einmal kehrt sie, wie geweckt,
 ihr Gesicht und mitten in das deine:
und da trifft du deinen Blick im geelen
Amber ihrer runden Augensteine
unerwartet wieder: eingeschlossen
wie ein ausgestorbenes Insek.

The moment the observer regains “his” gaze and starts to see the object, the cat, he must realize that, “unexpectedly” [unerwartet], the cat has already retracted “his” looking, displacing—or relocating—that which formerly seemed his possession. Whenever it was that the cat seized his gaze—perhaps before she turned up her face, so that in fact her impenetrable fur, all its Stellen, decomposed the observer’s “strongest looking”?—it is now “enclosed” [eingeschlossen] inside her eyes; not just reflected on her eyes. Now “your” looking, formerly strong and alive, is put to rest in her eye stones, like a dead insect. “You” disappeared in there; “you” was buried in there.45

Thus, much like the examples discussed in the preceding sections, these scenographies of looking make manifest a singularly unsettling experience: the effective disappearance of the subject as it faces the “things” of looking. They indicate that the conventional egocentrism of the gaze, that is, the attitude that ascribes looking to a subject, is nothing but an interpretation, a fictum after the fact. Looking pertains to a pre-personal order in Rilke’s scenographies; there are only “things to see and nobody who sees,” as Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the topology of vision.46 But, at the same time, the “things” to be seen seem to slip away at the same pace as they gain in sensuous detail. For it is precisely not the closer look, the accumulation of more impressions that
can consolidate the *aisthēton* into an object. Brigge, who aspires to “learn to see,” expresses this paradox when he concludes:

> Es ist alles aus so viel einzigen Einzelheiten zusammengesetzt, die sich nicht absehen lassen. Im Einbilden geht man über sie weg und merkt nicht, dass sie fehlen, schnell wie man ist. Die Wirklichkeiten aber sind langsam und unbeschreiblich ausführlich. [R VI: 854]

The effective reality—the *Wirklichkeiten*—of perceiving, consisting of “so many discrete details” [so viel einzigen Einzelheiten], are inexhaustible, so that it becomes impossible to apprehend the real in a purely empirical way—by “absorbing” [absehen] all details through the eye. At the same time, no act of imagination can integrate and identically represent such inexhaustible, “indescribably detailed” [unbeschreiblich ausführlich] complexity, nor can writerly description. Rilke elaborates on this predicament in a famous letter on Cézanne:


No act of recollection can repeat “the great cohesion of colors” [der große Farbenzusammenhang] in Cézanne, their belonging together as one whole *object*, in spite of “relentless” [unnachgiebig] attempts to absorb every single shade of color, every “cipher” of the painting with the eye. And no act of saying (or writing) can access the
corporeal actuality of perceiving, the many individual traces the procedure of looking has left in blood and feeling. In short, if learning to see means practically—to paraphrase a famously immodest passage from the *Aufzeichnungen*—to totally apprehend “the real” [das Wirkliche] and then, once it is apprehended, write down what has been “overlooked for millennia,” one would and could never achieve, in the sense of bringing to completion, such learning.\textsuperscript{48}

The impossibility of both exhaustive empirical perception and identical representation of the real did not only occur to Malte Laurids Brigge, of course. Most notably, this was a fundamental premise of the oppositely tending development of psychophysics, based upon which dissection and quantification would replace older holistic models of apprehension and description.\textsuperscript{49} But even Husserl, who always repudiated psychophysic positivism, maintains the inexhaustibility of empirical perception—an argument that supports in turn the validity of the phenomenological reduction, that is, the turning away from the empirical existence of an object in favor of its intentional correlative. In *Ding und Raum*, Husserl points out that, unless perceptual experience—manifold reality of the *aisthēton*—is apprehended under the concept of objecthood, perceiving may continue in principle indefinitely:

Ist eine Erscheinung [i.e., the thing as it just appears] vorausgesetzt, so sind damit unendlich viele Möglichkeiten für Erscheinungsreihen offen, die Erscheinungsreihen eines und desselben Dinges wären. […] Immer ist die Möglichkeit offen, daß es, dasselbe Ding, neue Bestimmtheiten habe, die in den jetzt erscheinenden nicht dargestellt [sind].\textsuperscript{50}

Despite the increasing detail closer looking yields, there will always be aspects that cannot be simultaneously perceived. Sensory perception is unable to exhaust its object
and apprehend it in full, although the intuitive “pretension” of sensory perception is precisely that it could do so, as Husserl remarks elsewhere:

Die äußere Wahrnehmung ist eine beständige Prätention, etwas zu leisten, was sie ihrem eigenen Wesen nach zu leisten außerstande ist. […] Was damit gemeint ist, wird Ihnen alsbald klarwerden, wenn Sie schauend zusehen, wie sich der objektive Sinn als Einheit [in] den unendlichen Mannigfaltigkeiten möglicher Erscheinungen darstellt […] und wie gegenüber den faktischen, begrenzten Erscheinungsabläufen doch beständig ein Bewußtsein von darüber hinausreichenden, von immer neuen Erscheinungsmöglichkeiten besteht. […] Eine äußere Wahrnehmung ist undenkbar, die ihr Wahrgenommenes in ihrem sinndinglichen Gehalt erschöpfte, ein Wahrnehmungsgegenstand ist undenkbar, der in einer abgeschlossenen Wahrnehmung im strengsten Sinn allseitig, nach der Allheit seiner sinnlich anschaulichen Merkmale gegeben sein könnte. 51

Certain facets cannot be seen and remain to us, as it were, “in the shadow” [abgeschattet], the back side of a house apprehended from the front side, for example. We can never see the entire object at once, presently perceive all its attributes, so in turn we come to know that there is always more to see—a surplus that presents itself only in the form of aspects, parts, pieces. Cézanne’s work, for Rilke the epitome of tenacious and “dogged” observation, speaks, for him, exactly to the great difficulties of exhausting and then integrating the heterogeneity of a visual field.

Nonetheless, without applying an integrative rule to the manifold—an objective meaning that is found to correspond to the aisthēton but without ever identically representing it—the apperception of an object could not take its course. Instead, there would be only disconnected series of sensations, “so many discrete details” that could never be exhausted. But this integrative rule (objective meaning)—to which Rilke’s 1907 letter seems to refer with the phrase “convincing name,” while Husserl calls it in his
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Ideen the “noema”\textsuperscript{53} of perception—is ultimately not to be found within actual perception. Mere receptivity supplies neither the name nor the meaning of the object. The “convincing name” escapes as soon as it comes into sight, while the noema is, according to Husserl himself, nothing but an “unreal” and transcendent, yet somehow operative relationality. In a manner of speaking, the rule unifying the aisthēton is in both cases an absent head, too—or, literally, an unseen “Mitte, die die Zeugung trug”: an “unreal” center that somehow creates (zeugen) perceptual synthesis. Given that perception can neither exhaust nor define its object solely through sensory intake, a conceptual abstraction from the manifold of sense impressions becomes an essential operation in realizing the object.\textsuperscript{54}

Scenographies instead of terminologies of looking

The preceding analyses have been offered as a part of a larger reassessment of the manner in which scenes of looking figure in Rilke. Bearing in mind the necessity of an integrative rule in object perception—the need for active form-giving—a narrative and, as it were, “metaphoric” dimension comes into play as well. In contrast to standard definitions of metaphor as a figurative usage of words that could be rephrased in non-figurative terms, a “metaphoric” narration designates here precisely a scene—the diegetic world it brings forth—as much as a diegetic procedure that seeks to render that which is in the first instance nameless, anonymous, and placeless. Not only language, and specifically metaphor, however, can provide the only means to objectify the elusive “things” of looking. Painting and sculpture are probably the self-evident, perhaps even the privileged media for objectifying “things” seen—an apparent advantage that might
explain why Rilke, who wanted to learn to see *in order to* learn to realize “things” in the form of literary objects, would immerse himself in precisely these artistic forms. Still, it was this “metaphoric” or figural dimension of looking in Rilke’s middle period that was charted in all of the preceding examples so as to unravel its aesthesiology—but as pertaining to a scenography rather than a merely textual or intertextual complex. As these scenes enact an integrative figural, “metaphoric” logic, they provide a fundamental means—an aesthesiology—to realize and retain objective meaning against the paradoxical while necessary con-fusion occurring during the non-objectifying actuality perception. Without summoning an ostensible origin by the figure of an (absent and unknown) head, for instance, the looking in *Archaischer Torso* would truly come from nowhere, be directed at nothing by no one at all.

Seen in that light, it is not as symptoms of an over-indulged and disturbed psyche that there are so many anthropomorphisms in Rilke: telling looks of “knowing things” [mitwissende Dinge], undead walls that appear soulful, revolting objects acting against the observer, and so forth. These could be seen, rather, as “absolute metaphors,” to use Hans Blumenberg’s term, metaphors that emerge in situations where the mere gaze cannot exhaust or conclude the matter. At the same time, Rilke’s scenographies retain a memory of the “blind spot” that the conventional egological gaze simply overlooks: that the actuality of perception marks, to use another phrase by Blumenberg, “a vacancy of terminology that can only be filled through imagination” and therefore expressed only with “metaphors”—if the actuality of perception can be rendered at all in its “many discrete details,” as Brigge gave to think in the *Aufzeichnungen*. Nonetheless, Brigge still
tries to write all those indescribable details down; he has to: “ja er wird schreiben müssen, das wird das Ende sein” (R VI: 728).

One might say, therefore, that the “metaphoric” figurality of Rilke’s scenographies of looking, especially their predominant involvement with prosopopeia, is also a response to the very vacancy of terminology that the act of looking unearths, perhaps even a consequential one. For it forces the viewer to face the blind spot of vision itself: that the perceived result does not emanate merely from sense data. It is this potential, it seems to me, that constitutes the aesthetic, sensuous force of Rilke’s scenographies of looking. And perhaps, precisely in refusing all such vacuity of terminology to apprehend and classify this blind spot, what Rilke’s scenographies can show comes indeed closer to the “things” we are looking at—before the still object comes into sight.
3 Listening to Proust’s Recherche

Critics have unanimously concluded that music is indispensable to the development of “Marcel,” the narrator of Proust’s Á la recherche du temps perdu. But in what sense is music indispensable for Marcel’s development? Which kind of “profundity,” as Marcel calls it at a certain moment, might be grasped “with a Vinteuil”? How does Marcel reckon with the supposed dependence on music? Does his literary composition implement musical structures?

The concern of this chapter is thus to explain not only how the diegetic development of Marcel’s experience and understanding but also how the discursive, the textual construction of the extensive Recherche, Marcel’s book, rely on music. I first analyze—or, rather, listen to—some of the scenographies in which musicality makes itself heard as a driving force of the Recherche’s textual architecture. In the second section, I explore the thematic impact of music on the storyline (histoire) of Marcel’s development; this concerns primarily the import of Vinteuil’s music. According to my analyses, a leitmotif technique is the logic that structures both the textual architecture of the Recherche and the storyline of Marcel’s development.4

Speaking of a leitmotif technique calls to mind Richard Wagner, who employed this technique in his music dramas and subsequently defended this practice in his theoretical writings. A canonical passage from Wagner’s late essay “Über die
Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama” (1879) can provide a preliminary definition of what the term “leitmotif technique” denotes in the context of his music dramas:

Dennoch muß die neue Form der dramatischen Musik, um wiederum als Musik ein Kunstwerk zu bilden, die Einheit des Symphoniesatzes aufweisen, und dies erreicht sie, wenn sie, im innigsten Zusammenhange mit demselben, über das ganze Drama sich erstreckt, nicht nur über einzelne kleinere, willkürlich herausgehobene Teile desselben. Diese Einheit gibt sich dann in einem das ganze Kunstwerk durchziehenden Gewebe von Grundthemen, welche sich, ähnlich wie im Symphoniesätze, gegenüberstehen, ergänzen, neu gestalten, trennen und verbinden: nur daß hier die ausgeführte und aufgeführte dramatische Handlung die Gesetze der Scheidungen und Verbindungen gibt.5

Wagner here writes about a “network of basic motifs” or leitmotifs6 [Gewebe von Grundthemen] that unifies the “new form of dramatic music”—the music of his operas. In contrast to a merely acoustic work such as a symphony, however, the interaction of these leitmotifs is governed not only by musical conventions but even more by the “dramatic action” on the stage.

Clearly, Wagner’s definition cannot be directly transferred onto a verbal composition, a work of literature. Though grounded in a rudimentary familiarity with some of Richard Wagner’s operas, terms such as “leitmotif,” “leitmotif technique,” and also “musicality” must, therefore, achieve a meaning that is intrinsic to Proust’s Recherche; they must be shown to designate literary techniques. This can be achieved by tracing the leitmotific recurrences of the opening sound of the Recherche—the obstinately mysterious “longtemps.” As of yet, this particular line of inquiry has not been systematically explored in Proust scholarship, although Edmund Wilson alluded to such a line of inquiry as early as 1927:
Proust's novel is [...] a symphonic structure rather than, in the ordinary sense, a narrative. [...] Like many of his generation, he was probably as deeply influenced by Wagner as by any writer of books, and it is characteristic of his conception of his art that he was in the habit of speaking of the “themes” of “A La Recherche du Temps Perdu.” The book begins with what is really an overture, of which it is important [...] to note the first chord: “Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure,” followed by a second sentence in which the word “temps” twice recurs.7

To show that the leitmotific recurrence of longtemps structures the composition of the Recherche one must start on textual grounds. Yet the first section will also demonstrate that this system of recurrences provides only the sonorous potential out of which the leitmotif emerges. For it is the reader who realizes the leitmotif and brings it into bodily effect by associating a recurrent verbal motif—which, strictly speaking, is audible only to him—with a variable diegetic scene. Understood in that way, a literary leitmotif would describe an aesthesiology that correlates sound and scene, or music and drama—much as Wagner, in the preceding citation, directly links the “network” of acoustic “motifs” to the “dramatic action” on the stage.

“Longtemps”

“Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure” (Swann 3; I: 1).8 This placid opening phrase will turn out, upon further reading and reflection, to set the stage for Marcel’s long research of “lost time,” initiated as he hovers between memories of the past and the present situation, as between sleep and waking, in the novel’s first chapter “Combray.” Although it is known that Proust considered “musical moments” as a model for literary writing and was deeply concerned with the sound material of his prose,9 the appreciation
of the rhythmic and melodic euphony of this most celebrated of modernist first sentences remains subject to the ear of its reader.

What does the phrase specifically introduce? A recurring sound and the nucleus of a diegetic theme. It exposes the recurring sound longtemps, which is privileged in a remarkable way: as the very first resonance of the chapter “Combray,” indeed as the opening note of the entire Recherche. Accordingly, longtemps rings out as a distinct acoustic motif. This acoustic motif, however, is immediately complemented and enriched with scenic context or a diegetic theme, that is to say, with perceptions and occurrences happening within the diegetic scene as the motif rings out. Lying on his bed, not quite awake or asleep, Marcel finds himself in an intermediate state of self-awareness, in a transitory sphere between no and full consciousness of the temporal and spatial situation. Immersed in this state outside linear time and manifest space, Marcel is in a position to “apply himself” to events, places, stories that, while palpably present to his mind, lack spatiotemporal reality in themselves:

I had gone on thinking, while I was asleep, about what I had just been reading, but these thoughts had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I awoke; it did not offend my reason, but lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as the thoughts of a
previous existence must be after reincarnation; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to apply myself to it or not [...]. [I: 1]

With this scenic specification of the motif *longtemps* (a sound that I would hear as one of these mild rings vibrating through the air of Combray if it were not a word), the exposition of the leitmotif is complete. Situated in a physically and temporally indistinct in-between, *longtemps* now embodies a paradoxical state of being in which the usual experience of temporality, as a steady procession of moments following each other into the future, is suspended for a short while. Associated immediately with the diegetic theme of this hovering, in-between state, the motif or acoustic image (to use Saussure’s term for the sensory component of the sign) *longtemps* can henceforth recall and so render present precisely this peculiar diegetic state, activating the memory of how it feels. Thus the two sides of this particular leitmotif—acoustic image and scenic context, sensed sound and felt recollection—form an evocative sonorous unity whose expressive force, heard and felt repeatedly, can never fully be delimited or contained by words.

Such experiences on the part of the reader respond in part to Marcel’s explicitly stated aesthetic problem: the central question of how to preserve “the miracle of an analogy” (*Retrouvé* 178; VI, 223) induced by involuntary memory in writing, of how to translate into and preserve in a literary discourse this meaningful correlation between momentary sensation and recollection. The “miracle of an analogy,” to be clear, occurs, for example, during the famous flashback moments evoked by the taste of the madeleine or the feel of the uneven paving-stones in the courtyard of the Guermantes’ palace. In these moments, sensuous experience—a certain taste or touch—brings back a remembrance of things past. Involuntarily, the essence of past experience, which as a singular occurrence would appear to be lost forever, is revived by means of the senses.
Such otherwise fleeting memories thus reveal a hitherto unknown correlation or “analogy” between the past and the present and so transcends the evanescence of the particular occurrence, as well as its merely linear, sequential temporality. Fusing acute present perceptions with latent meaning, they turn present acts and sensory experiences into past acts and remembered sensations, and vice versa.12

The narrative discourse of “Combray” thus anticipates Marcel’s final comprehension of the “miracle of an analogy” and associated experience of “extra-temporal joy” (Retrouvé 178; VI: 231) by imitating the very structure and effect of that experience with music-dramatic means—with a leitmotif technique. In other words (and chronologically more accurate since Marcel writes his book after he has deciphered the extra-temporal “miracle of an analogy” that involuntary memory induces), the leitmotific musicality of Marcel’s book utilizes the evocative powers of involuntary memory long before the reader is explicitly made aware of these. Marcel himself suggests this parallel between the workings of involuntary memory and the evocative powers of leitmotific music, in writing: “Thus nothing resembled more closely than a beautiful phrase of Vinteuil [qu’une belle phrase de Vinteuil] the peculiar pleasure which I had felt at certain moments in my life, when gazing, for instance, at the steeples of Martinville […] or, more simply, at the beginning of this book [ouvrage], when I tasted a certain cup of tea” (Prisonnière, 360–361; V: 428).13 In light of this, the struggle for the “pure and disembodied [désincarné]” perception of “an undifferentiated memory” [une mémoire uniforme] “freed from what is necessarily imperfect in external perception” (Retrouvé 175–176; VI: 220) that marks the end of his story and the birth of his book, finds its technical solution in the leitmotific composition of his book. The elusive sphere of
disembodied, simultaneous perception summoned by longtemps resounds throughout the Recherche—a long time before it is expressly explained and theorized in the final volume.14

But how so? By dint of its sheer acoustic materiality, its functioning as a sensible trace, a leitmotif reminds the reader of a diegetic theme, like the feeling of the “timeless” drift that Marcel experiences on his bed, that requires no explanation of its meaning. It can recall, indeed summon such a feeling and simultaneously preserve its unfathomable individuality because the acoustic token and the recollection of this feeling corporeally coincide: the leitmotif longtemps now combines a distinct sound with an associated theme or scenic context. One can perceive, “see,” the diegetic theme and, at the same time, listen to the sound of a leitmotif, thus embodying them both; acoustic sense and dramatic sense converge. A leitmotif can thus express a complex meaning—the feeling of a timeless drift—without abstracting from the actual materiality of its expression, as in the case of proper linguistic acts of signification through conventional, arbitrary signs. Based on corporeal acuity and embodied memory rather than linguistic conventionality, the leitmotif skirts the divide between material signifier and abstract signified, but does so at the cost of definite meaning: the semantic complex invoked by a leitmotif remains ultimately indeterminate and opaque in its meaning.

For, the meaning of the word, the sign “longtemps” in Marcel’s first sentence remains unclear, as does its immediate reference. Semantically, this first word represents nothing but an indeterminate, even obfuscating deictic marker that barely carries any significance aside from that of a habitual action. Taken as a merely indexical sign (rather than a motif), longtemps contributes to the chronic indeterminacy pervading “Combray,”
specifically to the seeming timelessness generated by “pseudo-iteratives,” as Genette called such formulations. Yet, precisely because it is such an empty deictic marker indicating some unspecific moment before and outside the novel’s diegetic world, *longtemps* also refers—as an *abstract* sign—to that indistinct and “timeless” place that Marcel will indeed search for a very long time.

A leitmotif is recurrent by definition, and Marcel’s leitmotif *longtemps*—the *petite phrase* that opens the *Recherche* and announces his narratorial place and presence—returns on several significant occasions. The following five examples can demonstrate the systematicity of its recurrences.

(1) Marcel’s leitmotif rings out after the opening episode, known as “Awakenings” [Reveils], has come to a close, as he starts to remember the pain caused by Swann’s visits to his home during bedtime. *Longtemps* rings out at that moment in connection with its initial scenic context, the bedroom, thus triggering once more the timeless and strangely displaced feeling of in-betweenness:

À Combray, tous les jours dès la fin de l’après-midi, *longtemps* avant le moment où il faudrait me mettre au lit et rester, sans dormir, loin de ma mère et de ma grand’mère, ma chambre à coucher redevenait le point fixe et douloureux de mes préoccupations. [Swann 9; my emphasis]

At Combray, as every afternoon ended, long before the time when I should have to go to bed and lie there, unsleeping, far from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred. [I: 8]

(2) The leitmotif is repeated at the beginning of the brief interlude that connects the first part, concerning Marcel’s deprivation of his mother’s good-night kiss, with the second part of “Combray,” introducing further local personalities and affairs.
C’est ainsi que, pendant longtemps, quand, réveillé la nuit, je me ressouvenais de Combray, je n’en revis jamais que cette sorte de pan lumineux […]. [Swann 43; my emphasis]

And so it was that, for a long time afterwards, when I lay awake at night and revived old memories of Combray, I saw no more of it than this sort of luminous panel […]. [I: 49]

This recurrence musically introduces the first experience of involuntary memory, the madeleine episode, which is described shortly thereafter and causes a vivid resurrection of Combray. Similar to the structural workings of a leitmotif—namely, the evocation of memory by means of a sensory cue—the madeleine’s taste physically reminds Marcel of his childhood experience in Combray, the feelings and memories that belong to it. His leitmotif longtemps prepares this drifting back in time by eliciting that feeling of a timeless in-between which by now is enduringly associated with its sound. This drift ultimately culminates in a full resurrection of Combray.

(3) The leitmotif returns during the coda of the “Combray” chapter, where it opens the final cadence and last paragraph: “Certes quand approchait le matin, il y avait bien longtemps qu’était dissipée la brève incertitude de mon rêve” (Swann 184; my emphasis). “It is true that, when morning drew near, I would long have settled the brief uncertainty of my waking dream” (I: 223). This recurrence is consistent with the musical convention that, after a period of development, the leading motifs recur towards the end of a piece, especially in the case of a Wagnerian music drama. Their recapitulation affirms their ability to endure across the unspecified musical developments and departures dividing them from their introduction in time. Well acquainted with musical works and traditions, as countless passages of the Recherche demonstrate, the narrator seems aware of this convention. Additionally, this recurrence makes sense because of the scenic context. Once again longtemps resounds during a scene of awakening. But this
time, the scenic situation is subtly altered, so that the leitmotif shimmers in fresh and as yet unknown thematic hues. The “state of darkness” [obscurité] (Swann 3; I, 1) of Marcel’s waking dream on the first page of “Combray” is now brightened by feeble traces of daylight, by a “first white, correcting ray” coming through “the darkness” [obscurité] like an “uplifted forefinger of dawn” [le doigt levé du jour] (Swann 184; I, 224).

(4) My penultimate example is a perplexing wink at the end of the second chapter, “Un amour de Swann.” Here, Marcel’s leitmotif is associated, indeed conflated with seemingly unrelated motifs and diegetic themes, thus generating a new motific-thematic complex. Wagner makes frequent use of this music-dramatic technique in his operas to draw secret connections and allude to concealed intentions and desires. Additionally, this technique realizes Wagner’s idea of “endless melody”—a seamless stream of music that eschews noticeable breaks. There are many instances in Wagner’s music dramas when motific conflations are employed to great effect. For example, the sound of the so-called “motif of suffering” [Leidensmotiv], which expresses the sufferings inflicted upon both Tristan and Isolde by their fatal passion, is nothing else than the inversion of the so-called “motif of yearning” [Sehnsuchtsmotiv], the signature of their love. The Sehnsuchtsmotiv, to be clear, is the pressing, irresistible chromatic ascension that comes out of the celebrated Tristan-chord in the second bar of the Prelude to Tristan und Isolde, while the Leidensmotiv is the underlying descending movement in the lower register. Consequently, these two motifs not only stand in derivative relation to one another but are in fact conflated together from the very outset, and the dramatic scenes that follow evidence the necessity of their conflation.16 Many other examples of such evocative derivations and
conflations can be found in Wagner’s tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The *Ring* is famous for its rich network of interdependent leitmotifs, which thus comment and, to a certain extent, explain the psychological undercurrents of the stage action. It was precisely for the prominence of such leitmotivic comments in his operas that Nietzsche charged Wagner with having reduced music to a “theatrical rhetoric.”

It cannot be clear, nor need it be, to what exact extent Proust intentionally follows Wagner’s subtle “art of transition” [Kunst des Übergangs], as Wagner called it in the case of *Tristan*. Nonetheless, we can recognize a derivative of Marcel’s leitmotif *longtemps* in the following passage from “Swann In Love.” This passage describes Swann’s awakening from a dream that had developed a series of strained reflections about his unhappy love for Odette de Crecy. *Longtemps* rings out here seemingly unmotivated and without great significance, almost as if it were redundant. If we hear it as a recurrence of the leitmotif, however, the passage discloses a more sophisticated meaning:

> il n’était pas loin de voir quelque chose de providentiel dans ce fait qu’il se fût décidé à aller à la soirée de Mme de Saint-Euverte, parce que son esprit désireux d’admirer la richesse d’invention de la vie et incapable de se poser longtemps une question difficile [...] considérait dans les souffrances qu’il avait éprouvées ce soir-là et les plaisirs encore insoupçonnés [...] une sorte d’enchaînement nécessaire. Mais tandis que, une heure après son réveil, il donnait des indications au coiffeur [...]. [Swann 375; my emphasis]

he was not far short of seeing something providential in the fact that he had at last decided to go to Mme. de Saint-Euverte’s that evening, because his mind, anxious to admire the richness of invention that life shews, and incapable of facing a difficult problem for a long time [...] came to the conclusion that the sufferings through which he had passed that evening, and the pleasures, at that time unsuspected [...] were linked by a sort of concatenation of necessity.

But while, an hour after his awakening, he was giving instructions to the barber [...] [I: 459]
The employment of *longtemps* not only prepares Swann’s awakening, his drift into linear time consciousness, thereby utilizing the established thematic connotation of *longtemps* as a signal for a transitional drift. The passage also inserts a strange sound—one associated with Marcel—into the misty, absent-minded aftermath of the dream of another, Swann. This recurrence of *longtemps* at the end of Swann’s dream intimates, on the one hand, the subcutaneous connection between him and Marcel, one Marcel will later acknowledge in stating that, ultimately, it was Swann who provided him with the “raw material” of his life, he notices in retrospect (*Retrouvé* 221; VI: 278). Without Swann, Marcel’s leitmotif could have never emerged.

On the other hand, the recurrence of *longtemps*—a motif summoning the presence of Marcel—within the context of Swann’s dream, which revives his *amour fou* for Odette de Crecy, signals a sharp dissonance: this sound does not belong to Swann. It rings out as a foreign particle, because, unlike the narrator, Marcel, and his musical reader, Swann is indeed “incapable” of hearing the evocative echo of *longtemps*. By contrast, the leitmotif that clearly belongs to Swann is *la petite phrase*, in the double sense of the term as combing both an acoustic motif—the sound of these words—with a recollection of a scenic context—the passion that the little phrase from Vinteuil’s *sonate en fa dièse* instills in Swann. In addition to its primary diegetic theme, the Vinteuil sonata, *la petite phrase* is subsequently associated with a secondary diegetic theme: Swann’s passion for Odette. This passion, however, is enkindled by the irresistible sound of this little phrase itself rather than the allure of her appearance and personality. For that reason, the sound of the word “Odette” does not function as an independent leitmotif in “Un amour de Swann”; in the words of the narrator: “Odette had been merely by his [Swann’s] side [à
côté de lui], not (as the phrase had been) within him [non en lui comme le motif de Vinteuil]” (*Filles* 104; II: 123).

The phrase of the Vinteuil sonata will be investigated more closely in the following section. Returning first to the quoted passage we notice, in addition to the acoustic dissonance, a stark thematic contrast. The hovering between waking and dreaming signaled by *longtemps* at the opening of and throughout “Combray” contrasts sharply with Swann’s dream, in which the fatality of his love once more becomes apparent. This thematic contrast brings to mind the fundamental difference of character between the two. The feeble echo of Swann’s dream only suggests fatalism to him: that things proceeded according to “a sort of concatenation of necessity.” “Incapable of facing a difficult problem for a long time [*longtemps*],” Swann thus responds with fatalistic resignation. The fact that Marcel’s distinct leitmotif *longtemps* could be easily omitted from this phrase without significantly changing its meaning—“incapable of facing a difficult problem” would mean virtually the same—emphasizes all the more its function as a musical cue: a semantically “superfluous” word, *longtemps*, rings out here as dissonance. For, in contrast to Swann’s resignation, Marcel will eventually respond to *his* difficult problem, the need to transform and preserve his life experiences, with a relentless effort to transcend the bonds of temporal experience through a literary work.

(5) The final example bears witness to the earlier claim that the musicality of the *Recherche*, its leitmotif technique, appears to be the artistic fulfillment of what his quest (or *recherche*) was all about: the overcoming of the evanescence of momentary impressions that belong to discrete moments in time through the preservation of their shared, correlated essence—termed “Time” [Temps] by the narrator—in a literary oeuvre.
This final transfiguration of Marcel’s leitmotif (which had to remain inaudible until the first Pléiade edition of 1954 inserted a *longtemps* into the close of the work) occurs in the very last phrase of *Le Temps retrouvé*:

Aussi, si elle [la force de maintenir longtemps attaché à moi] m’était laissée assez longtemps pour accomplir mon œuvre, ne manquerais-je pas d’abord d’y décrire les hommes, cela dût-il les faire ressembler à des êtres monstrueux, comme occupant une place si considérable, à côté de celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l’espace, une place au contraire prolongée sans mesure puisqu’ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années à des époques, vécues par eux si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer – dans le Temps. [Retrouvé 353; my emphasis]18

So, if I were given long enough to accomplish my work, I should not fail, even if the effect were to make them resemble monsters, to describe men as occupying so considerable a place, compared with the restricted place which is reserved for them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure, for simultaneously, like giants plunged into the years, they touch the distant epochs which they have lived, between which so many days have come to range themselves—in Time. [VI: 451]

In aligning *longtemps* and *Temps*, this phrase makes it finally audible that the sound of Marcel’s leitmotif both contains and announces, from its first measure, the entirety of Marcel’s longtime quest for Time, his effort to wrest the “timeless” essence from past and present experience. Moreover, this final alignment of *longtemps* and *Temps* can be understood to resolve a certain tension between the acoustic properties of Marcel’s leitmotif and its verbal meaning—the key structural tension between the short-lived sound of the word and its exactly opposite meaning, “long time.” For precisely this duration—the long time it took Marcel to understand the goal of his quest and the aesthetic task it prescribes—is at last sublated by the insight that Time always already permeates Marcel’s experiences, memories, and impressions of the past and the present, even those of a future to come. Essential Time has in fact resonated from within the
leitmotif from its first appearance, as its last recurrence gives finally to hear: “longtemps […] simultanément […] le Temps.” At the foundation of the theme—its sound, and verbal meaning—sits Time itself. The indeterminate, meaningless sound opening the *Recherche* is thus completed by the articulation of its teleological referent, Time. This referent, however, remains elusive throughout—a “pure and disembodied,” “undifferentiated memory” (*Retrouvé* 175–176; VI: 220) that Marcel can describe only as that which it is not, namely, such mundane things as external perception and ordinary temporal experience. In that the innermost meaning of the leitmotif, its referent “Time,” cannot be adequately verbalized, it continues to defy linguistic, literary objectification.

A few conclusions may be drawn from observing this first leitmotif in the *Recherche*. Marcel’s leitmotif does not proceed according to a logic of identity; it does not repeat an unchangeable motific-thematic complex that one could pin down with a name or a concept, as some nineteenth-century Wagnerians assumed in the wake of Hans von Wolzogen various “guides” [Leitfäden] to Wagner’s operas. The brief contrasting of Swann’s essential leitmotif, *la petite phrase*, with the name “Odette” (a major theme but not a leitmotif in itself) illustrated the discrepancy between a leitmotif’s sound and its growing thematic context. In contrast to Swann’s confusion, the sound of the leitmotif may absorb multiple dramatic themes. It can be enriched with fresh and unknown hues, and modified up to the point that a new motific-thematic ensemble emerges out of the “sonorous nebula.” Thus, both the dramatic meaning and the musical function of a leitmotif are context-sensitive; they depend on their concrete integration in an acoustic phrase and a diegetic scene. The expressive meaning of a leitmotif cannot be determined once and for all, perhaps not even in the individual instance, so that the changing acoustic
and scenic contexts during which the motif rings out become its essential flipside, for Wagner as well as for Proust.

Indeed, it is this indeterminacy that lends a leitmotif its force. It gains traction precisely in being a proliferating motific-thematic complex—a dramatic ensemble that fuses in a fundamentally obscure yet pregnant way sense and “sense,” audible motif and scenic meaning. The technical implication of this finding with regard to literature would be that a word like longtemps or a short phrase such as la petite phrase can only function as leitmotifs if they allow for a certain semantic flexibility. In other words, the chosen verbal motif must have a metamorphic potential. It is this metamorphic potential of the leitmotif that fuels the musical consistency, the “endless melody” of a literary text.19

Thus, the musicality of the Recherche reaches well beyond momentary euphony—the beautiful ring of this or that sentence. Indeed, these two categories should be kept apart, rather than treated interchangeably, as they too often are. The euphony of a linguistic phrase depends on its prosody and is subject to certain conventions of what sounds “pleasing” to the ear: alliterations and rhymes, the accumulation of open vowels, metered language, etc. The musicality of a text, by contrast, would operate on a larger, architectonic level and involve the enactment of macroscopic musical schemata—a leitmotif technique being one such schema. This musical architecture may go unheard at first; perhaps it is never recognized without textual analysis, without being “read.”20 But whether identified or not, this musicality nonetheless exerts its sensuous force upon the listening reader. It is precisely this architectonic type of musicality, I believe, that Proust recognized in Flaubert, who “treated [the change of tempo] in terms of music,”21 Proust remarked, and then appropriated for his own composition. In any case, the composition of
an “œuvre cathédrale,” as Proust characterized his work, requires an acoustic architecture as well.  

The metamorphic potential inhering in an unshaped leitmotif, its self-referential sound, can be a pleasurable affair, at least for some listeners. Marcel, for one, admits to “the joy that my mind derived [...] from this task of modelling a still shapeless nebula [modelage d’une nébuleuse encore informe]” (Prisonnière 358; V: 425). This is an indulgence he evidently shares with Richard Wagner, who carves no less than 136 bars out of the acoustic nebula of just one and the same E flat major chord—the Prelude to Das Rheingold.

Wagner marks perhaps the logical coda of this first section, and also a suitable transition to all those matters connected to the Vinteuil sonata. At a certain moment in La Prisonnière (149; V: 173), when Marcel can “detach” his thoughts “for a moment from Albertine” because she is physically absent, he describes the ceaseless texture of Wagner’s music in a beguiling phrase:

Je me rendais compte de tout ce qu’a de réel l’œuvre de Wagner, en revoyant ces thèmes insistant et fugaces qui visitent un acte, ne s’éloignent que pour revenir, et, parfois lointains, assouplis, presque détachés, sont à d’autres moments, tout en restant vagues, si pressants et si proches, si internes, si organiques, si viscéraux qu’on dirait la reprise moins d’un motif que d’une névralgie. [Prisonnière 149]

I was struck by how much reality there is in the work as I contemplated once more those insistent, fleeting themes which visit an act, recede only to return again and again, and, sometimes distant, dormant, almost detached, are at other moments, while remaining vague, so pressing and so close, so internal, so organic, so visceral, that they seem like the reprise not so much of a musical motif as of an attack of neuralgia. [V: 174–75]

Perhaps we may take these words emphasizing the metamorphic vagueness and the lack of definitive meaning of acoustic “themes” (or Grundthemen, as Wagner calls them in

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“Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama”) also as a concise rendition of the irresistible sensuality, the musicality of his own narration: so pressing, so visceral—“la reprise moins d’un motif que d’une névralgie.”

The music of Vinteuil

The principle of the leitmotif connects the narrative discourse of the *Recherche* with its diegetic world. The previous section was chiefly concerned with the discursive functioning of the leitmotif *longtemps* and its sensuous effects on the reader. The story told throughout the *Recherche*—the life of Marcel up to the realization of his literary “vocation”—involves a leitmotif technique, too, namely, a recurring and proliferating thematic nucleus—the Vinteuil sonata—that drives the series of events forward. Indeed, this section will demonstrate how the interventions of the sonata unfold or explicate the story, implicitly as well as explicitly, and thus lead to Marcel’s comprehension of his “vocation” and “redemption” of lived experience through art: the writing of his book. Consequently, the leitmotif technique would operate in the *Recherche* not only on a semiotic, discursive level but also within its diegetic world, where the story takes places.

The same point could be expressed with just a single word and semantic complex taken from the *Recherche*’s diegetic world itself: *Wagner*, the most influential proponent of the leitmotif technique and one of the most frequently mentioned artists in the *Recherche*, serves within the work to tie its discourse and story together. To recognize Wagner as an important hinge between discourse and story of the *Recherche* does not mean, however, to view his operas as blueprints for Proust’s novel, as certain critics have
done, even if certain parallels between Wagner’s operas and the *Recherche* are striking.\textsuperscript{24}

It is the effect rather than stories of Wagner’s compositions that intervene in both the content and method of the *Recherche*.

The consanguinity between Vinteuil and Wagner is explicitly stated in the same passage in which Marcel describes Wagner’s (and, by extension, his own) style of narrating. Wagner is identified here as Vinteuil’s “grandfather”:

\[\text{[U]ne mesure de la sonate [de Vinteuil] me frappa, mesure que je connaissais bien pourtant, mais parfois l’attention éclaire différemment des choses connues pourtant depuis longtemps et où nous remarquons ce que nous n’y avions jamais vu. En jouant cette mesure, et bien que Vinteuil fût là en train d’exprimer un rêve qui fût resté tout à fait étranger à Wagner, je ne pus m’empêcher de murmurer : « Tristan ! », avec le sourire qu’a l’ami d’une famille retrouvant quelque chose de l’aïeul dans une intonation, un geste du petit-fils qui ne l’a pas connu. [Prisonnière 148]}\]

I was struck by a passage in the [Vinteuil] sonata. It was a passage with which I was quite familiar, but sometimes our attention throws a different light upon things which we have long known, and we remark in them what we have never seen before. As I played the passage, and although Vinteuil had been trying to express in it a fancy which would have been wholly foreign to Wagner, I could not help murmuring ‘Tristan,’ with the smile of an old family friend discovering a trace of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who has never set eyes on him. [V: 174]

This kinship is already noticeable when Vinteuil’s music resounds for the first time, during the soirée at the Verdurins’. On that occasion, the sound of Vinteuil’s sonata in F sharp—and, in particular, the endearing “little phrase” in the first, andante movement that will serve as Swann’s leitmotif—is described in a Wagnerian parlance.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, it becomes clear that Vinteuil’s music employs leitmotifs. The narrator of “Swann in Love” then describes the sonata’s “motifs which from time to time [par instants] emerge, barely discernible, to plunge again and disappear” (*Swann* 206; I: 251) in a wording similar to Marcel’s understanding of Wagner’s “insistent, fleeting themes which visit an act, recede
only to return again and again [ne s’éloignent que pour revenir]” (*Prisonnière* 149; V: 174). In both cases the stream of music is structured by an erratic coming and going of “fugitive phrases” and “vague” motifs, while the recurrences of the “perfumed” phrase emerge from a “long-drawn sonority, stretched like a curtain of sound [rideau sonore],” from a seamless Waganerian texture that veils “the mystery of [the phrase’s] incubation” (*Swann* 208; I: 254).

One may even go so far as to suggest that it is, fundamentally, music that initiates and compels Marcel’s quest. Vinteuil’s music, specifically the “little phrase” of the sonata further investigated here, is the syntagmatic force that forms the genesis and connects pivotal episodes of the story, as these have been critically discerned. That connection, however, is not an autonomous feature of the text—a definitive plot that exists prior to reading—but is instead perceived by the reader, much as the pivotal events of musical compositions are experienced and remembered—and hence united—by their listener. To put it more directly: The emergence of music as the thematic nucleus and syntagmatic force of the *Recherche*’s story is the product of my reading, my interpretative recasting of that text.

“Tinged already with disenchantment” [déjà un peu désabusé] (*Swann* 193; I: 235), Swann encounters the “little phrase,” which arouses a “passionate longing” [il souhaita passionnément] inside him (*Swann* 207; I: 251). This longing is initially attached to the music itself; it is a “passion [amour] for a phrase of music” (*Swann* 207; I: 252).

On the occasion of the Verdurin Soirée, Swann rediscovers Vinteuil’s sonata, performed in a piano reduction; he then remembers that he had heard the sonata once before, though with the ignorant attitude of a consumer. This second, now passionate encounter with
the sonata causes for a short time “a sort of rejuvenation” (Swann 207; I: 252), replacing
the “rather ephemeral satisfactions” in which Swann had been inclined to indulge with
the “exquisite and inexpressible pleasure” [le plaisir spécial et intraduisible] offered by
the “little phrase” (Swann 208; I: 253). Consequently, Swann “had been filled [éprouvé]
with love for the ‘little phrase,’” as with a new and strange desire [comme un amour
inconnu]” (Swann 206; I: 251). Vinteuil’s music has imbued Swann with a pure form of
passionate desire, yet without providing a permanent, substantial object to which he can
attach his newfound passion. The ensuing attachment to Odette fills this vacancy.

“L’amour est ici une résultante,” as Ortega y Gasset put it.30

Swann attaches this passion—already invested with strong erotic connotations in
its abstract musical form (the feminine gender of whose verbal designations, la musique,
and la petite phrase, also connote as much)—to a woman whose “type” of beauty had
initially left him “indifferent” (Swann 193; I: 234). Marcel discloses this transference
later on in the book, when concluding, retrospectively, that Swann “mistakenly
assimilated [that happiness which the little phrase of the sonata promised] to the
pleasures of love” [ce bonheur proposé par la petite phrase de la sonate à Swann qui
s’était trompé en l’assimilant au plaisir de l’amour] (Retrouvé 184; VI: 231). Vinteuil’s
petite phrase thus eroticizes a scenario that previously existed for Swann merely as an
entirely abstract idea, namely, that of amorous possession “without any foundation [base]
in desire” (Swann 193; I, 235). Once the musically induced passion and the pleasing
notion of possession are conflated, the “little phrase” becomes “the national anthem”
[l’air national] of the love between Swann and Odette (Swann 215; I: 262). By means of
supplementary aesthetic media, foremost among these Botticelli’s Zipporah, Swann seeks
to augment and sustain his passion for Odette. Swann thus turns the liaison with Odette into that self-referential obsession which may be termed, following Niklas Luhmann, a “romantic love” indeed, since his love is based on “a peculiar combination of circular closure and openness for anything that can enrich this love.”

Thus, it is his precisely his “romantic love” that compels Swann to silence Odette upon their first and highly comical act of intimacy in a carriage. For unlike the aesthetic enrichments Swann has attached to her effigy, Odette’s actual character and utterances do not augment his passionate love, his fatal obsession. Odette, the person, cannot substantially increase the thematic core of Swann’s musical leitmotif, the self-reinforcing passion that Vinteuil’s “little phrase” ignites in Swann. When Swann repeatedly exclaims in the carriage: “Whatever you do, don’t utter a word, just make a sign” [Surtout, ne me parlez pas, ne me répondez que par signes] (Swann 229; I: 279), it is because he could not otherwise preserve the more beautiful things and experiences he associates with his leitmotif.

As a result of this musically induced romance, which is followed by the agonies of jealousy and, finally, indifference, Swann fathers a child with Odette, marries her, and settles down with his family in Combray. Here, Swann finds himself in a position to exert a formative influence on Marcel. He becomes the “unwitting author” [l’auteur inconscient] of Marcel’s sufferings in depriving him of the maternal kiss (Swann 43; I: 50), but also the “author” of his early encounters with the world of art. Swann shows Marcel photographs of paintings and encourages his passion for Bergotte, the writer. Moreover, the offspring of Swann’s musical passion, his daughter Gilberte, prescribes the typology of Marcel’s future sexual desires, after her commanding visage was
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inextinguishably imprinted on his mind one sunny day (*Swann* 139–40; I: 168–70). It is also Gilberte who brings “the famous ‘Albertine’” to Marcel’s attention, the future object of his own obsessive love, whom Swann praises in the same context as “charming, pretty, intelligent […] even quite witty [spirituelle]” (*Filles* 83, II, 98). Due to his reception of Vinteuil’s “little phrase,” and all that issues from it, Swann thus provides Marcel, as the latter sums up in *Le Temps retrouvé*, with no less than

la matière de mon expérience, laquelle serait la matière de mon livre […] non pas seulement par tout ce qui le concernait lui-même et Gilberte. Mais c’était lui qui m’avait dès Combray donné le désir d’aller à Balbec, où sans cela mes parents n’eussent jamais eu l’idée de m’envoyer, et sans quoi je n’aurais pas connu Albertine, mais même les Guermantes […] ma présence même en ce moment chez le prince de Guermantes, où venait de me venir brusquement l’idée de mon œuvre (ce qui faisait que je devais à Swann non seulement la matière mais la décision), me venait aussi de Swann. [*Retrouvé* 221–22]

the raw material of my experience, which would also be the raw material of my book […] not merely because so much of it concerned Swann himself and Gilberte, but because it was Swann who from the days of Combray had inspired in me the wish to go to Balbec, where otherwise my parents would never have had the time of sending me, and but for this I should never have known Albertine. […] had I not gone to Balbec I should have never known the Guermantes either […] so that even my presence at this very moment in the house of the Princess de Guermantes, where out of the blue the idea for my work had just come to me (and this meant that I owed to Swann not only the material but also the decision), came to me from Swann. [*VI: 278–79*]33

After the death of Swann, the “begetter” [auteur] (*Retrouvé* 222; VI: 279) of his life, Marcel’s development becomes increasingly complex and cannot be traced in detail here. However, reviewing the trajectory of Marcel’s aesthetic *curriculum vitae*, it would seem fair to regard music as a—and perhaps the—foremost artistic medium within it. The early exposure to the eminently sensuous world of Combray, an environment drenched with bodily sensation, and the later encounter with the “metaphoric” intricacies of Elstir’s paintings at Balbec are crowned, and in a way completed, by Vinteuil’s music.34 This can
be inferred from two prominent passages. As Marcel, in *La Prisonnière*, plays the Vinteuil sonata for himself, the music reanimates his forgotten aesthetic ambitions and at the same time indicates a place where the shortcomings of “everyday existence”—the maddening strain of jealousy, for example—are overcome:

> Approaching the sonata from another point of view, regarding it in itself as the work of a great artist, I was carried back upon the tide of sound to the days at Combray—I do not mean Montjouvain and the Méséglise way, but to my walks along the Guermantes way—when I myself had longed to become an artist. In abandoning that ambition *de facto*, had I forfeited something real? Could life console me for the loss of art? Was there in art a more profound reality, in which our true personality finds an expression that is not afforded it by the activities of life? For every great artist seems so different from all the rest, and gives us so strongly that sensation of individuality for which we seek in vain in our everyday existence! [V: 173–74]

A related passage in *Le Temps retrouvé* is even more assertive as concerns the role of music in Marcel’s aesthetic becoming:

> And thinking again of the extra-temporal joy which I had been made to feel by the sound of the spoon or the taste of the madeleine, I said to myself: “Was this perhaps the happiness
that the little phrase of the sonata promised to Swann [...] was this the happiness of which long ago I was given a presentiment—as something more supraterrestrial even than the mood evoked by the little phrase of the sonata—by the call, the mysterious, rubescent call of that septet which Swann was never privileged to hear, having died like so many others before the truth that was made for him had been revealed?” [VI: 231]

The supraterrestrial “call” [appel] that resounds in Vinteuil’s music, especially in the septet, prefigures the triumphant, blissful, and also pregnant instant in the courtyard of the Guermantes’ palace when Marcel finally understands the “miracle of an analogy,” involuntary memory, that enables him to “escape from the present” [échapper au présent] (Retrouvé 178; VI: 223). No wonder, then, that “the last works of Vinteuil had seemed […] to combine [avaient paru synthétiser] the quintessential character” and concentrate “the same happiness” [la même félicité] of all his previous involuntary memories (Retrouvé 173; VI: 216–17). Accordingly, it was the septet, Marcel discovers in retrospect, that made him realize for the first time that only works of art can “give permanence” [fixer] to those two-sided miracles that involuntary memories manifest for just a moment; “the septet had seemed to point to the […] conclusion” [la pièce pour concert de Vinteuil eût semblé me dire] that this connection between immediate sensations and memories could be preserved (Retrouvé 183–84; VI: 230). Vinteuil’s music indicates the way to “link for ever” [enchaîner à jamais] those “two sets of phenomena [les deux termes différentes] which reality joins together” in a “phrase,” whether a musical or literary one (Retrouvé 196; VI: 246). It is this link, precisely, that a leitmotif establishes: the connection between a “material pattern” [figure matérielle]—an acoustic figure—and “the outline [trace] of the impression that it made upon us”—the recollection of a correlated theme, such as the feeling of a timeless drift on the threshold between waking and dreaming (Temps, 186; VI: 234).
On the basis of the preceding recasting of the Recherche’s story, its actualization through selection and interpretation, one might conclude that Vinteuil’s music is the seed “sine materia” of Proust’s composition. Polymorphously shimmering through the discursive texture, this theme secures the cohesion of the storyline—most notably as a “little phrase” which would “from time to time emerge, barely discernible, to plunge again and disappear […], recognized [connus] only by the particular kind of pleasure” it gives (Swann 206; I: 251). The art of Vinteuil, in all its guises, in all the “iridescent” metamorphoses it performs, provides Proust’s fiction with thematic consistency. His “little phrase” is the indispensible fiction inside the fiction, whose “expressive value” would thus embody for the reader what it comes to embody for Swann: “no longer pure music, but rather design, architecture, thought” (Swann 206; I: 251).

However, Vinteuil’s music has a leitmotific function not only with regard to Swann’s and, therefore, Marcel’s development; it also occupies a seminal role within the aesthetic cosmos of the Recherche. Vinteuil’s music is discussed as an exemplary aesthetic medium and source of inspiration. What, then, is the aesthetic lesson Marcel derives from Vinteuil’s music? And what is the message that Marcel hears in the septet’s “mysterious, rubescent call” [l’appel rouge et mystérieux] (Retrouvé 184; VI: 231)?

Whereas Vinteuil’s “little phrase” inflames a hitherto unknown passion in Swann and, by extension, the fatal desire for a woman endowed “with a kind of beauty which left him indifferent, which aroused in him no desire [ne lui inspirait aucun désir], which gave him, indeed, a sort of physical repulsion” (Swann 193; I, 234), the phrase reminds Marcel in a free moment—in the absence of his fatal object of desire, Albertine—of the time before his entire life was dominated by the “spasmodic disease” of jealousy, which
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he obviously shares with Swann. More importantly, playing and listening to Vinteuil’s
sonata unveils that the “sensation of individuality for which we seek in vain in our
everyday existence” (*Prisonnière* 148; V: 174) is to be found in art alone—never in the
love for another person:

Comme le spectre extérieurise pour nous la composition de la lumière, l’harmonie d’un
Wagner, la couleur d’un Elstir nous permettent de connaître cette essence qualitative des
sensations d’un autre où l’amour pour un autre être ne nous fait pas pénétrer. […] Même ce
qui est le plus indépendant du sentiment qu’elle nous fait éprouver garde sa réalité
extérieure et entièrement définie, le chant d’un oiseau, la sonnerie de cor d’un chasseur […]
découpent à l’horizon leur silhouette sonore. [*Prisonnière* 149]

As the spectrum makes visible to us the composition of light, so the harmony of a Wagner,
the colour of an Elstir, enable us to know that essential quality of another person’s
sensations into which love for another person does not allow us to penetrate. […] Even that
which, in this music, is most independent of the emotion that it arouses in us preserves its
outward and absolutely precise reality; the song of a bird, the call of a hunter’s horn […]
each carves its silhouette of sound against the horizon. [V: 175]

Swann perceives Vinteuil’s music essentially as a *Gemütherregungskunst*,37 as a
“technique to agitate the soul,” that stands in the service of his *amour fou*, thus failing to
hear the musical utterances in their own right. In contrast to Swann’s instrumental grasp
of music, Marcel achieves in this scene an immanent, aesthetic understanding of the
“mysterious call” of Vinteuil’s music: “Was there in art a more profound reality, in which
our true personality finds an expression that is not afforded it by the activities of life [une
expression que ne lui donnent pas les action de la vie]?” (*Prisonnière* 148; V: 174). For
Marcel, this “profound reality” exists only in art; it has no adequate referent outside its
own aesthetic realm, no representation in “everyday existence.” Though it is created and
received under ordinary, empirical circumstances, the work of art situates its true origin,
cause, and meaning—its reality—nowhere else than within itself; which means in turn,
however, that this “reality” belongs to a “fatherland” [cette patrie perdue] that is always already “lost” and “unknown” [inconnue]—also to its creator, the artist (Prisonnière 245; V: 290). Marcel eventually claims such radical autonomy and indeterminacy for his own work, his book to come:

En réalité, chaque lecteur est quand il lit le propre lecteur de soi-même. L’ouvrage de l’écrivain n’est qu’une espèce d’instrument optique qu’il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n’eût peut-être pas vu en soi-même. La reconnaissance en soi-même, par le lecteur, de ce que dit le livre est la preuve de la vérité de celui-ci […]. [Retrouvé 217–18]

In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer’s work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this book, he would perhaps never have experienced in himself. And the recognition by the reader in his own self of what the book says is the proof of its veracity […]. [VI: 273]

In contrast to Marcel, Swann never recognizes the radical autonomy and indeterminacy of art, thus failing to detach his aesthetic experience from both personal feelings and authorial intentions.38 This conclusion applies even to the Saint-Euverte concert, during which Swann tries hard to detach the meaning of the “little phrase” from its material referent, Odette. This scene seems to attribute a degree of aesthetic comprehension to Swann comparable to that of Marcel, for example, when music is perceived as “an immeasurable keyboard [clavier incommensurable] […] showing us what richness, what variety lies hidden, unknown to us, in that vast, unfathomed and forbidding night of our soul which we take to be an impenetrable void [cette grande nuit impénétrée et décourageante de notre âme que nous prenons pour du vide et pour du néant]” (Swann 344; I: 420–21). Swann is also said to note “the audacity of a Vinteuil experimenting, discovering the secret laws that govern an unknown force” (Swann 345; I:
423). But even though these formulations are reminiscent of the key metaphor that Marcel will later use to describe the task of the artist—namely, the deciphering of the “inner book of unknown symbols [signes inconnus]” so as to reveal an inherent “law” of concatenation, its “necessary” syntax (Retrouvé 186–88; VI: 233–36)—it seems unlikely that Swann was able to attend to the self-contained tale of Vinteuil’s music, for two reasons. On the one hand, Swann seems incapable of detaching the music from Odette, the reified meaning of the “little phrase.” As soon as the musicians start to play, Odette, “who was entirely absent” until then, is summoned “as though she had entered, and this apparition was so agonizingly painful [une si déchirante souffrance] that his hand clutched at his heart” because of “the forgotten strains of happiness” [les refrains oubliés du bonheur], and also the sufferings, that her apparition recalled (Swann 339; I: 415). In this scene, then, Swann again reduces a musical utterance to a conventional act of signification, so that the semantic indeterminacy of music is obliterated. To Swann, the “dilettante of intangible sensations” [sensations immatérielles] (Swann 263; I: 321), music does not speak about itself; it merely signifies a passion, whose bitter-sweet happiness, Swann now realizes, is lost forever.39 On the other hand, one must bear in mind the narratorial situation of the chapter “Swann in Love.” The chapter is not told in Swann’s voice, and so there are reasonable grounds to wonder whether the narrator’s descriptions convey Swann’s inner experience or the narrator’s speculative narration thereof.

Marcel realizes the necessity for an immanent mode of aesthetic apprehension. Listening in that attitude, music speaks indeed—in its sheer immediacy. As the first andante movement of the septet, “to which [Marcel] had entirely surrendered”
(Prisonnière 246; V: 291), comes to an end and refreshments are handed around, Marcel laments the loss of the enrapturing immediacy he had just experienced:

While he was listening, Marcel heard a resonance of those riches that lie “hidden, unknown to us, in that vast, unfathomed and forbidding night of our soul” (Swann 344; I: 421), to quote again the narrator’s anticipatory phrase from “Swann in Love.” These riches cannot be transmitted with words; their genuine medium is music, says Marcel.

However, the bewildering turn that Marcel’s reflection takes should not go unheard: “It is like a possibility that has come to nothing.” Not even composers remember the musical paradise of angelic communication, “this lost fatherland” [cette patrie perdue], although each of them “remains all his life unconsciously attuned to it” [accordé en un certain unisson avec elle] (Prisonnière 245; V, 290). Having drowned in the blissful waves of resonance, Marcel, now a reasoning earthling again, is unsettled by
the conclusion that music is after all an impossible way of communicating. For “communing” in private with a “heavenly phrase of music” as a means of gaining access to one’s “angelic” self, is still something other than the sharing of experience with others through expression. To grasp this difference, the contrast between the possibilities of aesthetic reception and aesthetic expression or communication, would be one of the critical teachings of the septet.

The other lesson is perhaps even more important for Marcel’s artistic development, at least in practical terms. Some time after the performance, he discovers that the septet was not conceived in heaven, as it were. It was Mlle Vinteuil’s girlfriend who “deciphered” the dead master’s “indecipherable scribblings,” assembling them “by dint of patience, intelligence and respect” (Prisonnière 249; V: 295) so as to bring forth Vinteuil’s unfinished masterwork. The divine septet, which sounded already during the performance at the Princess Guermantes’ at moments “laboriously earthbound” [traînait si péniblement à terre] (Prisonnière 239; V: 283), is nothing but a result of profane labor; it is, in truth, a second-hand pastiche rather than a so-called “original.” This revelation, moreover, represents the late denouement of the (in)famous scene of “sadism,” as Marcel terms it, at Montjouvain, Vinteuil’s house, which was told many hundred pages earlier (Swann 157–61 I: 190–96). Learning that Mlle Vinteuil’s girlfriend compiled, nay created, the septet, one must concede that it was not only “ritual profanations” that old Vinteuil received in return for sacrificing his life to his daughter, as it initially appeared. Rather, the completion of the septet is the “form” in which both the naughty daughter and her girlfriend honor Vinteuil’s memory, the “reward” [salaire] to make up for his self-
sacrificing devotion. And so it was indeed the “profound union between genius” and “the sheath of vices” that brought about a masterwork (Prisonnière 252; V: 298).

The laborious and prosaic fabrication of the septet epitomizes the arduous task that Marcel himself takes up in the end, namely, the literary deciphering and assemblage of hitherto indecipherable scribblings, of those “unknown symbols” that his manifold life experience had inscribed into his mind, his “inner book” (Retrouvé 186–88; VI: 233–36). Marcel’s reflections on the septet therefore pertain to the core of the Recherche’s aesthetics, as Malcolm Bowie has pointed out:

These pages are a gloriously impure, lumber-filled rhapsody. In them Proust’s art reveals art, lays bare its inner workings, comes clean about its insecurities and low motives, and pins snapshots of the production-process on to the finished product. This combined description and reinvention has unparalleled summative force: it is an allegorical representation both of what the narrator’s book will eventually be like and of what Proust’s book has already been like from its first page.41

Marcel’s final commitment to aesthetic labor, which Vinteuil’s septet inspired, represents a very bourgeois turn indeed, whereby, perhaps not entirely by surprise, Vinteuil’s “grandfather” Richard Wagner is summoned one last time. For Wagner is the perfect exemplification of a relentless bourgeois work ethic—the horrible duty to always fulfill the daily quota. In a letter from 1854, Wagner reportedly writes to Julie Ritter, his benefactress: “a morning without work is a day in hell” [und ein Vormittag ohne Arbeit ist ein Tag in der Hölle].42 Baudelaire expresses the sentiment in more sober words: “Inspiration is definitely the sister of daily labor” [L’inspiration est décidément la soeur du travail journalier].43 Not bouts of genius but diligence and persistent labor are the basis of a work of art with which “we do really fly from star to star,” just as “we can do with an Elstir, with a Vinteuil” (Prisonniere 246; V: 291). This the “laboriously
“earthbound” septet makes abundantly clear, too. Twinges of insufficiency and underachievement, along with the haunting sorrow to run out of time—mortal time (the kind written in lowercase)—before the artistic (hand)work is completed, are the mundane conditions of the work ethic of both Vinteuil and his author. Nonetheless, the musicality of Proust’s book lives on, carving “its silhouette of sound against the horizon”—as long as it has a reader.
Notes
Abbreviations, quotations, translations


I sometimes provide translations to better integrate the German phrase into the English syntax; all these translations are my own. In those cases, “the original phrase” [die ursprüngliche Wendung] either follows in square parentheses or is provided in a separate note.

The “emphasis of words” [Hervorhebung von Worten] within quotation marks and/or square parentheses reproduces the original unless noted otherwise.

Individual German words that are not meant as direct citations—Aufhebung, for example, or Darstellung—are set in italics.

* This edition of the Phenomenology is quoted not only for reasons of convenience, as it is widely available, but more importantly because it eliminates many confusing orthographic inconsistencies of the first print. Indeed, it was Hegel himself who remarked the need for corrections. Immediately displeased with the defective first print of the Phenomenology and also convinced, as he wrote in a letter in 1829, that a “revision [Umarbeitung] of the work” (Gesammelte Werke, 9: 476) was necessary, he undertook to correct and revise the book at the end of his life. Ultimately, he was unable to revise beyond the Preface due to his death in 1832. Accordingly, the majority of the orthographic emendations in the “Theorie-Werksgabe” are not sanctioned by Hegel. This occasionally raises philological concerns. The main concern would be that the editors of the “Theorie-Werksgabe” have taken some liberty in contracting and nominalizing certain formulations vis-à-vis the first edition; compare, for instance, “Sichaufsichbeziehen” (PdG 95) against the locution in the original print, “sich auf sich beziehen” (Gesammelte Werke, 9: 72). I believe that such nominalizations give more metaphysical weight to certain Hegelian formulations than necessary. I have, therefore, always cross-checked the “Theorie-Werksgabe” edition of the Phenomenology against the historical-critical edition (vol. 9 of Gesammelte Werke) and tacitly applied necessary corrections.
Swann, Filles, Prisonnière, Retrouvé each refer to the respective volume of the “folio classique” paperback edition of the Recherche:


English quotations of the Recherche always refer to the corresponding volume and page numbers of the revised Moncrieff translation:


In no instance have I modified Moncrieff’s translation. Instead, I provide “the French original” [la phrase originale] either when alternative translations seem possible or to highlight critical terms in the original.

The emphasis of words within quotation marks and/or square parentheses reproduces the original unless noted otherwise, as in the case of “Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure” (Swann 3; my emphasis).

Individual French words that are not meant as direct citations, such as Vinteuil’s sonate en fa dièse, are set in italics.
Notes to the Introduction

1 N II: 434.


3 Since the common Eurasian buzzard (Buteo buteo) is not endemic to North America, a brief reminder might be in order. The common Eurasian buzzard is no vulture but a large hawklike bird of prey with broad wings and a rounded tail, typically seen soaring in wide circles; it does not normally form flocks.

4 The term “isotopy,” introduced by A.J. Greimas (Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983], esp. Chapter 6), designates a basic meaning trait that implicitly unifies a given set of lexemes as they share one or multiple semantic properties.

5 Such accessibility is disdained only by those readers who, harboring crypto-theological fantasies of Poesy, aim instead to discover the “unnamable secret” and “impenetrable riddle” in a poem, sheltering at its core “einen fast sakralen Innenraum, ein Unberührbares, Unauflösliches,” as see Fritz J. Raddatz’s Warnruf, “Durs Grünbein – die dichtende Luftnummer,” Die Welt, August 21, 2012, sec. Kultur, http://www.welt.de/kultur/literarischewelt/article108711083/Durs-Gruenbein-die-dichtende-Luftnummer.html. Cf. William Empson’s observation that “critics have been perhaps too willing to insist that the operation of poetry is something magical, to which only their own method of incantation can be applied” (Seven Types of Ambiguity [New York: New Directions, 1966], 9).


8 Nobel laureate Herbert Simon, for example, defends this position in his essay “Literary Criticism: A Cognitive Approach,” Stanford Humanities Review 4, no. 1 (1994), http://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/4-1/text/toc.html. Promising and indeed delivering an “unabashed missionary for contemporary cognitive science” (1), this piece caused great controversy. With the aid of Lessing and Kant, Claudia Brodsky (“‘Is That Helen?’ Contemporary Pictorialism, Lessing, and Kant,” Comparative Literature 45, no. 3 (1993): 230–57) has levelled a powerful critique against flourishing pictorialisms in contemporary criticism and theory, as they blindly confuse, Brodsky contends, “the visual with the verbal” (241). Additionally, it should be pointed out that, in contrast to its pictorialist appropriation, the catchphrase ut picture poesis figures in its source, the Ars Poetica by Horace, as an extended analogy, but nowhere does Horace recommend to “paint pictures” with words.

10 This is of course not to say that the lines “Müde in einer U-Bahn […] / Schaukelnd zwischen Erinnerungsschlieren: / Ein deutscher Wachtraum“ (l. 8–13) or the poem as a whole are bereft of historical reference, to the contrary. The inception of these lines is clearly influenced by the historical situation. Considering the poem’s date of publication, 1991, shortly after the German reunification, whence the GDR ceased to exist as a separate national state, these lines seem to allude to the process of memory formation and reconfiguration involved in the emergence of this “new” historical epoch. The “traces of past remembrances” [Erinnerungsschlieren]—the history and culture of the GDR—insert themselves into the present “reverie” [Wachtraum], which is now taking place in a reunited Germany and produces, by way of a Traumarbeit of sorts, new idiosyncrasies of national identity. Neither do the preceding assertions want to deny the import of poetic figurality, nor dismiss the validity of arguments concerning the historical and technical specificity of literary texts. They simply question their absolute priority with regard to readerly experience.


14 Friedrich Nietzsche, NF-1885, 38[10] in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 11: 608. This conclusion already looms in the famous idea of the Apollonian, being the form-giving power of the artist by means of which a fundamentally chaotic, Dionysian world gains shape and meaning (however illusory it might be); for only in perceiving like an artist, Nietzsche maintains in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, hence in conferring a fictional or invented form onto the world, can a subject see clear images and representations, so that the world is finally recognized—and justified—as an “aesthetic phenomenon” (Kritische Studienausgabe, 1: 47–48). The essay *Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge*, composed in 1873, only a year after *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, makes similar claims about the necessity of form-giving in perception, though from a
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different angle: The metaphoric lies and fictitious illusions on which the intellect has to rely as it confronts the disconnected series of “nervous stimuli” that the sensory world consists of are not in the first place free subjective inventions but subject above all to the “precepts of language” [Gesetzgebung der Sprache] as well as its “conventions” (Kritische Studienausgabe, 1: 877).


15 See, for example, Nietzsche’s critical remarks about Hegel in Ueber die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten (Kritische Studienausgabe, 1: 707–8), and his later charge that Hegel’s philosophy promotes “Staats-Anbetung” (Kritische Studienausgabe, 11: 45; NF-1884, 25[121]).

16 PdG 90.

17 The terms “aesthesis” and “diegesis” call for a definition. By “aesthesis” I mean the activity of perceiving by the senses, including the more or less distinct feelings and affections of the body (pain, excitement, feebleness, etc.). For a classic definition of aisthēsis, the original Greek word for the act of perception, see Plato’s Theaitētos, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 156b–c. Daniel Heller-Roazen, The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 22–24 summarizes Aristotle’s rather complex understanding of aisthēsis as set froth in De anima, while F.-P. Burckard’s entry on “aesthesis” in the Metzler Philosophie Lexikon (ed. Peter Prechtl and Franz-Peter Burkard, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1999]) provides an informative juxtaposition of Plato and Aristotle. Thomas Schirren, Aisthesis Vor Platon: Eine semantisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Problem Der Wahrnehmung (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998) reconstructs the changeable history of the term aisthēsis before its meaning was consolidated by Plato, for whom aisthēsis, in contrast to pre-Socratic philosophers, affected exclusively the human sensorium and no longer entailed mental operations such as “Achtsamkeit […] als Erkenntnishaltung gegenüber den Dingen” (261–62).

“Diegesis” I use here and in the following in the twofold meaning it has acquired in narratology. On the one hand, it denotes the narrative act and discursive form by which a narrative is told. This is Plato’s classic definition of diēgēsis, found in the Politeia (The Republic, trans. Paul Shorey [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930]), Book III, 392e–394c. Unlike Aristotle, whose critical term to describe both the pursuit and nature of poetry is mimēsis, Plato here analyses precisely the narrative act and discursive form of poetic works. He distinguishes three manners of poetic speech or “dictions” (lexeōs). The distinctions he draws concern the status of the narrating voice. Either “the poet [or the narrator, we might want to say today; CJ] himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but
himself is speaking” (393a); or the narration (diēgēsis) “is effected through imitation” (392b) of other voices that are not identical with the “poet” or narrator. Plato considers the dithyramb an example of the former, “simple” type of narration (haplē diēgēsei), while a tragedy counts as a narration effected solely by the poet’s imitation of other voices. A mixture of these two pure types is the third possibility that Plato considers. An epos such as the Iliad represents the prime example of this mixed type of narration. Although different with regard to their “diction,” these three types are altogether forms of diēgēsis according to Plato—poetic narrations. On the other hand, diegesis came to mean in narratology the totality signified by the narrative discourse, the “world” evoked by a narration. Drawing on Anne and Etienne Souriau’s earlier work on film in the 1950s, Gerard Genette defined “diegesis” (diégèse in French) precisely as “l’univers spatio-temporel désigné par le récit” (Figures III [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972], 280). Genette derives form this basic definition a number of critical narratological terms, for example, the oppositions extra-/intradiegetic and hetero-/homodiegetic. For a more detailed definition, consult the lemma “diegesis” in the Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft, ed. Harald Fricke et al., 3rd ed. (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1997) as well as the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London; New York: Routledge, 2008).

It should be noted all the same that the involvement of narrative processes in sense perception and cognition in general has also been expounded in recent years by psychologists and cognitive scientists. The cognitive scientist Robert C. Schank and psychologist Robert P. Abelson also hold, in “Knowledge and Memory: The Real Story,” in Knowledge and Memory: The Real Story, ed. Robert S. Wyer (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1995), 1–85, that “stories about one’s experiences, and the experiences of others, are the fundamental constituents of human memory, knowledge, and social communication” (1). In a similar vein, cognitive scientist Mark Turner argues, in The Literary Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), that “narrative imagining—story—is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend on it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicating, of planning, and of explaining” (4–5). This goes so far that, on Turner’s account, even basic object perception entails narrative procedures: “Story depends on constructing something rather than nothing. A reportable story is distinguished from its assumed and unreportable background. It is impossible for us to look at the world [viz. its objects] and not to see reportable stories distinguished from background” (145). The view that objects are, as it were, surrounded by reportable stories derives from James J. Gibson’s “theory of affordances,” which Gibson develops in The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979). Gibson’s theory basically says that we have meaningful object perception only by imagining what the object enables or “affords” us to do. Knowing an object within this theoretical framework means to imagine a story of how to use it, thus embedding the object in an imaginary narrative sequence. The visual perception of a cup would mean to imagine, for example, that, in seizing its handle with my right forefinger and thumb, I could first fill this thing with milk and then drink from it. This conception of object perception as involving the imagination of possible interactions with the object is still very influential. Take, among others,
the “enactive approach” recently proposed by Alva Noë, which, although saturated with current neuroscientific research, leans on Gibson’s theory of affordances; cf. *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 17.

The insight, however, that perception and cognition (*Erkenntnis*) in general assume narrative form is already looming in Kant. Claudia Claudia Brodsky, *The Imposition of Form: Studies in Narrative Representation and Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) has cogently demonstrated this. Since “narrative [defined as the means by which a story is told] is the literary form most generally understood to foster its own logical understanding,” thus enabling a “coherent presentation of experience” (3), it plays a crucial epistemological function. If this general understanding of narrative holds true, then Kant’s critical theory might be seen as in essence expounding a narratology of knowledge. In Brodsky’s words: “Kant’s critical limitation of knowledge to a formal knowledge of representation seems to describe a general theory of representational narration” (3, fn.1). The subsequent chapter on Kant (21–87) demonstrates this thesis.

19 This notion of mimesis has its roots in Books Three and Ten of Plato’s *Politeia* but may have meant, prior to Plato, quite simply the imitation and re-enactment of divine love-making. In the first volume of *Musik und Mathematik* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2006–2009), an enthusiastic testimony to Aphrodite, Friedrich Kittler declares that “Götter machen Liebe vor, wir Sterblichen sie nach. Und das heißt Mimesis, nichts sonst” (1.1: 127). Specifically, Kittler maintains that mimesis originally meant nude “Tanz als Nachvollzug der Götter” (ibid., 128). Two slaves, for example, would impersonate Aridane and Dionysos on the stage, a performance, Kittler envisages, that in turn animates the married viewers to mimetically repeat the divine dance at home and make children, or else motivates the unmarried viewers to get married. It may very well be that this Ancient notion of mimesis still echoes in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where we find the telling line: “die Liebe ist eine endlose Wiederholung” (N I: 338). This no doubt provided Kittler with good reason to include Friedrich von Hardenberg in his “Chronology” of world-historical events pertaining to music and mathematics in *Musik und Mathematik*, wherein Novalis is mentioned five times—more often than any other German Romantic (*Musik und Mathematik*, 1.2: 359, 361, 362).


21 Goethe to Schiller on November 19, 1796; see ibid., 651.

22 N II: 282 #125.

24 Novalis (N II: 241 #32) addresses the readers of the first Athenäum volume with the words: “Wir sind auf einer Mission: zur Bildung der Erde sind wir berufen” (N II: 241 #32).


27 N II: 398–99 #398. This fragment also names some of the operations which the reader freely executes: “Gedankenstriche – großgedruckte Worte – herausgehobne Stellen – alles dies gehört in das Gebiet des Lesers.”

28 N: II 356 #205. Without reference to Novalis, Roland Barthes reminds, in The Pleasure of the Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), esp. 10–23, the literary critic once again of this radical freedom of reading, describing it as the moment when the reader pursues the instincts and inclinations, the “ideas” of her body rather than the precepts of the intellect, so that reading becomes a sensuous and corporeal pleasure. Needless to point out that Novalis’s basic idea of reading as a partly free, partly determined process of concretization anticipates the model of reading that Roman Ingarden first envisioned in Das literarische Kunstwerk and Wolfgang Iser fully developed in Der Akt Des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung, 2nd ed. (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1984).

29 See the Lyceum fragment #112: “Der synthetische Schriftsteller konstruiert und schafft sich einen Leser, wie er sein soll; er denkt sich denselben nicht ruhend und tot, sondern lebendig und entgegenwirkend. Er läßt das, was er erfunden hat, vor seinen Augen stufenweise werden, oder er lockt ihn es selbst zu erfinden. Er will keine bestimmte Wirkung auf ihn machen, sondern er tritt
mit ihm in das heilige Verhältnis der innigsten Symphilosophie oder Symposie” (Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe [München: F. Schöningh, 1958–], 2: 161). Schlegel juxtaposes in the same fragment this “synthetic” (or Romantic) idea of co-authorship with the “analytic writer”—a notion that sums up Paul de Man’s understanding of literary language as an acutely self-aware and possibly deceptive machine quite well: “Der analytische Schriftsteller beobachtet den Leser, wie er ist; danach macht er seinen Kalkül, legt seine Maschinen an, um den gehörigen Effekt auf ihn zu machen” (ibid.).

30 Retrouvé 221, 217–18; VI: 278, 273. In light of this quote, it is easy to understand why a book recollecting “lost time” would privilege the act of reading, and also why Proust’s novel practically originated from “a meditation on criticism,” as Georges Poulet (La conscience critique [Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1971], 49–50) puts it, from being “a reader,” the traces of which we find in the critical essays posthumously published as Contre Sainte-Beuve. For the key operation of the literary critic—the identification of similarities through rereading and comparison—resembles the discursive route by which the Recherche unfolds the significance of the protagonist’s memories, suggests Poulet (52–55).

31 This paragraph paraphrases mainly §§ 27–28 of Husserl’s Ideen (Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950], 3.1: 56–60). Consult moreover the Cartesianische Meditationen (Husserliana, 1: 94–99), where Husserl states that the “reality” [Wirklichkeit] and “evidence” [Evidenz] of a given world become actual only through the conscious experience of its (material and/or ideational) contents. For a first introduction to this Husserlian key term, also its genesis, see the lemma “Welt” in Hans-Helmuth Gander, ed., Husserl-Lexikon (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010). 308–311.

32 In contrast to Ingarden’s Das literarische Kunstwerk, Heidegger’s Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes (in Holzwege, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, vol. 5 of Gesamtausgabe [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977], 5: 1–74) is concerned with the worldliness of works of art in general, whether visual or literary in kind, supposedly even the “musical work” [Musikwerk]. This worldliness—meaning the world opened up and made seen by the work of art, this Lichtung—reveals and in a way even produces (herstellen) the concrete materiality of the work, its being a thing made of “earth” (physis)—an “earth,” however, that, for Heidegger, is rooted in a particular culture (Volk) and history (Geschichte). At the same time, the worldliness of the work stands on Heidegger’s account in a conflict (Streit) with its thingified physis, because as a thing of the “earth”—as a material and historical being—the work fundamentally resists the disclosure (Entbergung) and opening (Lichtung) which its world is said to bring about.

In fact, however, Heidegger’s account of an artwork’s worldliness excludes all musical art. Heidegger’s “attention to music is, we know, nearly nil,” Lacoue-Labarthe accurately observes in Musica Ficta: Figures of Wagner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), and “allusions and references to music are extremely rare, and mostly conventional” (91). The recently published Schwarze Hefte—which attest, in the most revolting way, to Heidegger’s private Nazism and anti-Semitism, including the plainspoken conviction that the German Volk


34 Ingarden, Das literarische Kunstdwerk, 230. The worldliness of literature is also a critical aspect of Wolfgang Iser’s conception of reading. Iser, Der Akt des Lesens, 177–94 discusses this experience as “der wandernde Blickpunkt” of the reader, which on his account—and in line with Ingarden’s observation—actualizes and concretizes the diegetic world. Primarily on the basis of Luhmann’s conception of differentiation and distinction generated through “observation,” Remigius Bunia has proposed a complex theory of fictional worlds as Faltung that radically differs from the referenced phenomenological conceptions of literary worlds, which I utilize and appropriate throughout. Bunia attacks the quasi-phenomenal character that most phenomenological conceptions ascribe to literary worlds, hence the idea that they appear in the form of perceptible scenes (Faltungen, 123–31). Instead, he pursues the rather abstract idea that fictional world-making means, fundamentally, the instigation of a distinction (“In-die-Welt-Setzen einer Unterscheidung”), namely the fundamental distinction between fact and fiction, from which the textual Darstellung, being the “description of experience” [Beschreiben von Erleben], then derives further distinctions for narrative unfolding (cf. ibid., 98–116).


38 To William Blackwood in October 1821: “P.S. I wish I could find a more familiar word than aesthetic for works of taste and criticism. [...] As our language [...] contains no other useable adjective, to express that coincidence of form, feeling, and intellect, that something, which, confirming the inner and the outward senses, becomes a new sense in itself, to be tried by laws of its own, and acknowledging the laws of the understanding so far only as not to contradict them; that faculty which, when possessed in a high degree, the Greeks termed philokalia, but when spoken of generally, or in kind only, to aisthētikon; and for which even our substantive, Taste, is a—not inappropriate—but very inadequate metaphor; there is reason to hope, that the term aesthetic, will be brought into common use as soon as distinct thoughts and definite expressions shall once more become the requisite accomplishment of a gentleman” (Coleridge, *Biographia Epistolariis: Being the Biographical Supplement of Coleridge’s Biographia Literaria*, ed. Arthur Turnbull [London, G. Bell and Sons, 1911], 2: 236–37).

39 Stanley Fish, “Why No One’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,” *Diacritics* 11, no. 1 (1981): 2–13 harshly attacks Iser’s model of reading as imitating sense perception and specifically the idea of immediate observation (cf. 8–11). In an equally trenchant response, Iser, “Talk like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish,” *Diacritics* 11, no. 3 (October 1, 1981): 82–87 rebuffs every single point Fish makes. Likewise, de Man argues in “Reading and History,” first published as the introductory essay to Jauß’s *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, that Jauß models readerly reception on the basis of sense perception: “if literary understanding involves a horizon of expectation, it resembles a sense perception, and it will be correct to the precise extent that it imitates such a perception” (*The Resistance to Theory* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986], 67). Indeed, that literary understanding should also involve the senses, let alone be modelled on perception, has been a red flag for de Man ever since he came forth as a literary critic; cf. *Blindness and Insight*, 33–35, 107. Jauß, “Response to Paul de Man,” in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 202–8 vehemently negates the analogy drawn by de Man—although the term aisthēsis plays a major role in his theory of aesthetic experience; cf. Jauß, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 71–90, 125–65. Here, Jauß conceives of aesthetic experience as constituted by the functions of poesis (the generation of
fictional worlds), aisthesis (the “receptive” apprehension of these worlds), and catharsis (the identification with and the stance taken towards these worlds).


41 Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, 214: “Verstricktsein ist der Modus, durch den wir in der Gegenwart des Textes sind, und durch den der Text für uns zur Gegenwart geworden ist.”


43 Cf. Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, 1984, esp. IV–VIII. Iser variously attacks an older hermeneutic approach that scans for a higher or more fundamental meaning (Bedeutung) in literary texts, as it often happens in allegorical and biographical exegeses (Auslegungen), though due to his debt to Gadamer, his own conception of Sinnbildung is not entirely devoid of hermeneutic traces. In any case, Sinnbildung concerns, on Iser’s account, primarily an immanent meaning that emerges on the basis of semantics and logical consistency (cf. III–VII, 87, 138, 175, 183, and esp. 257–355, where Iser unfolds his thoroughly semantic concept of the Leerstelle). Iser’s semantic conception of meaning is clearly opposed to the more immediately aesthetic understanding of “sense” that I have proposed, since it emphasizes sensuous, corporeal acuity over logical consistency.


46 It may sound strange to call, for example, a tea-soaked madeline a “medium.” In that, however, this object contains information that is accessed and interpreted by means of perception, by tasting it, for example, it can be called a medium. This is exactly the function of the madeline in Proust’s *Recherche*: it serves as a medium or storage of childhood memories, yet these memories need to be accessed through the sense of taste to be received and interpreted as such.

Derrida’s suggestion that sense perception involves linguistic interpretation and articulation can be supported with positions held in psychology and neuroscience. Not unlike Nietzsche’s attack on the ideology of purportedly straightforward and unambiguous sensory impressions, John Dewey dismantles the notion that sensory stimuli and perceptual response are merely mechanically connected. In the 1896 article “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” (in *Psychological Review* 3, no. 4 [July 1896]: 357–70), one of his most influential writings, Dewey criticizes exactly the then-dominant understanding of perception as “reflex arc,” as an automated “sensori-motor circuit” (357). This notion, Dewey explains, unjustly disjoins the holistic nature of perception as a “teleological process” (365) by chopping it up into a discrete “sensation-followed-by-idea-followed-by-movement” sequence (358). Against this mechanistic view, Dewey holds that stimulus and response are “coordinated” by an “act” of perception. The bodily response that a child feels when reaching into a burning flame, for example, its “heat-pain quale,” is not a “totally new experience,” as the reflex arc view would hold, but is in fact anticipated by the act of “seeing-of-a-light-that-means-pain-when-contact-occurs” (359–60). One might say that this kind of seeing involves a quasi-linguistic procedure of interpretation and articulation, in that visual stimulus and possible response to the flame—the burn upon contact—are coordinated by a story about the object of perception, which the hyphenated expression encapsulates and which contemporary psychologists of perception would probably call, with James J. Gibson’s term, an “affordance” of the candlelight. For a gloss on Gibson’s “theory of affordances,” see my earlier n. 18; for a detailed recapitulation, see Anthony Chemero, “An Outline of a Theory of Affordances,” *Ecological Psychology* 15, no. 2 (2003): 181–95.

Contemporary neuroscientists have drawn similar conclusions. Wolf Singer, a leading figure in the field and an influential popularizer of neuroscientific research in Germany, rejects the view that nervous stimuli mechanically translate into conscious perceptions, the neuronal equivalent of which one could in turn localize in this or that cerebral area and then quantify so as to determine the nature of the perceptual experience. Rather, perceptions are generated by spontaneous acts of coordination and interpretation that cannot be dissolved into discrete local events, explains Singer: “Das Gehirn interpretiert. Es wäre sicher falsch, Wahrnehmung als einen passiven Abbildungsprozess zu verstehen. Wir wissen, dass der Wahrnehmungsvorgang ein aktiver Prozess ist […] Die Art, wie wir Welt sehen, ist determiniert durch die Struktur unserer Gehirne, die vermutlich auch anders hätte ausfallen können. […] Erkennen beruht immer darauf, dass man Bezüge zwischen Phänomenen erzeugt, die zunächst isoliert und ungeordnet sind. […] Aber es können auch andere Ordnungsprinzipien existieren, die wir bislang noch nicht erfasst haben” (Singer, *Ein neues Menschenbild? Gespräche über Hirnforschung* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003], 72). Consequently, Singer maintains that perception must be thought as involving a creative acts of form-giving: “Wahrnehmen ist, so könnte man sagen, das Verifizieren von vorausgeträumten Hypothesen. Die Sinnessysteme sind nur ganz lose in die verarbeitenden Strukturen eingekoppelt, bedingen dort Symmetriebrechungen und modulieren Aktivitätszustände, aber das System [the brain] ist von sich aus ständig aktiv und auf der Suche nach Kohärenz. […] Insofern ist jeder, der wahrnimmt, in einem gewissen Sinne ein Künstler, weil er Modelle von der Welt erzeugt, interpretiert und selber seine Stimmigkeitskriterien

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generiert” (*Ein neues Menschenbild*, 83, 85). If, however, these “criteria of consistency” [Stimmigkeitskriterien] are indeed creative achievements of cognitive action, rather than immediate results of sensory stimuli, these criteria would be also bound up with the leading medium of cognition, language.

49 Husserl introduces in his lectures and manuscripts concerning the *Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins* (vol. 10 of *Husserliana*) the interplay of retention and protention as the foundation of inner time consciousness, indeed of conscious experience altogether. Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens*, 181–83, 240–46 imports this Husserlian conception, using the interplay between retention and protention as the basis for his model of semantic reading (*Sinnbildung*). Although one might want to object to certain “logocentric” presuppositions of Husserl’s phenomenology and its alleged adherence to a “metaphysics of presence,” the retentional and protentional structure of experiential time has been acknowledged even by Derrida: “One then sees quickly that the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only inasmuch as it is continuously compounded with a nonpresence and nonperception, with primary memory and expectation (retention and protention). These nonperceptions are neither added to, nor do they occasionally accompany, the actually perceived now; they are essentially and indispensably involved in its possibility” (*Speech and Phenomena*, 64). For further clarification, see the lemmata “Retention” and “Protention” in both the *Wörterbuch der phänomenologischen Begriffe*, ed. Helmuth Vetter (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004) and the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter et al. (Basel: Schwabe, 1971–2007). For a more detailed introduction to Husserl’s conception of inner time consciousness, see Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005), 49–73 and Dieter Lohmar and Ichirō Yamaguchi, eds., *On Time: New Contributions to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010).


51 There is a certain overlap between retention/protention and recollection/expectation, which is why Husserl tries to separate these two pairs analytically. On his account, the former pair generally pertains to the “passive” continuity of mental acts and so remains on the threshold of perceptibility, whereas the latter “actively” disrupts the temporal continuity of the act-structure in bringing consciously to mind either a moment of the past or the future. However, the difference between a more or less “passive” retention and an “active” recollection is clearly a gradual one; they easily translate into one another. This is even more true with regard to the thin line between “passive” protention and “active” expectation. Husserl grapples in many contexts with the terminological tension between “passive” or “receptive” and “active” or “spontaneous” acts. *Husserliana*, 11: 357–61 may be a good place to start, since this “Beilage” discusses their gradual difference as well as their transition into one another. Husserl’s choice of terms—receptivity and spontaneity—also signals the specifically Kantian descent of this active/passive crux.
Opting for an anthropological extension of Husserlian phenomenology, Hans Blumenberg (Zu den Sachen und zurück [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002], 201–23) points out and criticizes the problematic active/passive division in Husserl. A further crux Blumenberg observes is closely related to this point. It concerns the fact that all phenomenological description essentially depends on “recollection” [Erinnerung]: “Daß da der ‘Haken’ der Phänomenologie liegt, ergibt sich aus ihrer Angewiesenheit auf eine Form der Erinnerung, die am unverdächtigsten erscheint: Deskription” (35). For “Restitution von Anschauung,” that is, the ultimate goal of phenomenology, is based precisely on a retrospective description—which is to say, on recollection: “Der Haken ist, daß auch die Beschreibung nicht ‘die Sache selbst’ ist, nur das Rezept für diese – eine Eselsbrücke der Erinnerung zur Restitution von Anschauung” (35). Nonetheless, the problems to distinguish retention/protention from recollection/expectation indicates at the same time a productive mutability, as indicated above: Precisely because retention easily turns into active recollection and protention quickly congeals into definitive expectation, the passivity and uniformity of the act-structure can be broken, so that the experience spontaneously takes a different direction.


53 The term “aesthesiology” was first expounded by the German philosopher Helmuth Plessner, one of the founding fathers of philosophical anthropology. He did so in his book Die Einheit der Sinne: Grundlinien einer Ästhesiologie des Geistes (in Gesammelte Schriften [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003], 3: 7–315). Plessner investigates here both the modalities of sensuous apperception—viz., the modes of understanding that enable us to grasp corporeal sense as meaning or sense (Sinn)—and the corporeal gestures by means of which the understood sense can be expressed and can become sensible again. Therefore, the philosophical problem from which Plessner departs is the problem of sensuous objectivity (sinnliche Gegenständlichkeit), the key questions being: How is it that sensuousness provides us by its own devices—without recourse to the traditional categories of the understanding—with comprehensible, intelligible objects? Why is it, for example, that listening to a piece of music or looking at a drawing immediately fills us with a pregnant, self-sufficient meaning (Sinn)? Why and how do such sensory experiences become immediately meaningful? Plessner’s investigation relies primarily on a Kantian method—even though some of his main points are at odds with Kant. At the same time, positions pertaining to phenomenology, philosophy of culture, and hermeneutics play an important role. Plessner’s final answer to the problem of sensuous objectivity consists, first and foremost, in three different types of categorical correspondences between the forms in which we see, hear, and feel and the forms in which we understand (apperceive) these sensations. These correspondences between perceived sense and understood meaning he calls “concordances.” Additionally, he discovers the principle of “accordance,” which denotes for him a genuine identity between the hyletic qualities of a sensation and its cognitive form of comprehension. There are two instances of “accordance” for Plessner: music and geometry, and it is this “accordance” that explains on his account the immediate comprehensibility of music and geometry. But Plessner’s phenomenology of sense
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perception does not end in the realm of consciousness. Eventually, his theory reveals a third, anthropological category—corporeal expression—through which merely intellectual comprehension is finally acted out and thus brought to a sensible completion. Consequently, the “aesthesiology of the mind” entails for Plessner two dimension: the possible ways of understanding the senses (*Vergeistigung des Sinnlichen*) as well as their corporeal, sensible expression (*Versinnlichung des Gei stigen*). Traces of Plessner’s conception of aesthesiology can be found in the distinct model and terms specified above.

54 Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 2. In the *Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Marie-Laure Ryan reviews “previous definitions of narrative” (23) by Genette, Prince, etc. and reaches the same conclusion. John Pier, “Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology,” *Style* 31, no. 3 (1997): 555–60 adds more complex detail, yet here too the successive cause-and-effect structure remains the basic denominator of the common understanding of narrative: “Accentuating chronology of events, on the one hand, and causal links between those events, on the other, it [viz. E. M. Forster’s definition of narrative] gives a favored place to the ‘who-did-what-and-why’ of narrative and, in effect, reflects the widely held and pervasive position that narrative is defined essentially in terms of a content composed of ordered events coupled with actantial roles which is then communicated by linguistic or other means to the addressee” (555). To be sure, Fludernik’s own narratology disputes the causal-successive understanding of a narrative and develops instead a concept of storytelling as “representation of experientiality”; cf. Fludernik, *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 20–52.

55 Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Three Parts,” *The Sewanee Review* 53, no. 2–4 (1945): 221–40, 433–56, 643–53; see 234–35 and 225 for the quotations. Considering the county fair scene in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Frank defines the “spatial” or “simultaneous perception” (229) of literary texts more closely: “For the duration of the scene, at least, the time-flow of the narrative is halted: attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the limited time-area. These relationships are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative; and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning” (231). In that it gathers, juxtaposes, and reflects the individual moments simultaneously, next to each other, this mode of reading is for Frank better suited to the “perceptual form” (233) that modern literature implies. However, Frank at no point considers the necessary interrelation between these two aspects, narrative sequence and signified relationality. Instead, he conceives of the “spatial apprehension” of a given scene as happening at once, “in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence” (225). Moreover, Frank does not reflect upon the role of the reader. Finally, I am not convinced by Frank’s historicist claim, derived from Worringer, that the rise of “spatial form in modern literature” would be caused by a certain “spiritual and emotional climate” at the turn of the century that sought to “overcome, so far as possible, the time-elements,” the *Zeitlichkeitswert* of aesthetic forms (650–51).
56 Cf. Kritik der reinen Vernunft, B 176–187 / A 137–147, in Kant, Werke, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, 12 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977); henceforth abbreviated as KrV. In this dense passage, Kant defines a “schema” as the mediating link between concept and intuition, as a “vermitteln de Vorstellung […] einerseits intellektuell, andererseits sinnlich” (KrV B 177 / A 138). The schema can assume such a mediating function because it consists above all in “a priori determinations of time” [Zeitbestimmungen a priori], which is to say, a conceptual “rule” [Regel] that connects “die Zeitreihe, den Zeitinhalt, die Zeitordnung, endlich den Zeitinbegriff in Ansehung aller möglichen Gegenstände” (KrV B 185–86 / A 145). The four dimensions of time that the quote enumerates can be paraphrased as the temporal succession, the material, sensible content of time, the relationality of events, and finally the temporal mode of existence (e.g. sometimes, now, always). According to Kant, these four temporal dimensions exactly match up with the four categories of quantity, quality, relation, and modality. In combining the by definition merely intelligible categories with merely sensible dimensions of time, the transcendental schemata not only override the Kantian dichotomy between sensibility and intelligibility but also describe the phenomenal manifestation of the categories. Thomas Khurana, “Kant, Heidegger und das Verhältnis von Repräsentation und Abstraktion,” Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft 58, no. 2 (2013): 203–24 provides a lucid summary of the “Schematismus” chapter (cf. 203–11). Khurana here also indicates the paradox that emerges if one understands the schema as a merely conceptual rule of application without sensible, temporal component. In that case, a schema would describe a regressive circle: a rule of application for another rule of application, namely, a concept.

57 See Scott G. Burnham, Beethoven: Hero (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 146–68, esp. 162–68. In contrast to his preceding argument that the music of Beethoven’s middle period would by itself “project[] the voice and authority of a narrator but also the compelling sweep of an enacted narrative” (146), Burnham here concedes that it is the listener, really, who carries all this out (164). Indeed, for Brunham it is our perceptual involvement in, and corporeal identification with, the motion of Beethoven’s music that realizes its narrative sweep, which often takes place, Burnham continues, on the local, momentary level. Thus the “heroic” force of Beethoven’s music is experienced and becomes present through the intermediary of a self-conscious body—through the musical presence enacted by the listener: “It should go without saying that such presence depends on our presence, and is not the same for everyone: it is profoundly individual yet not hermetically so, otherwise we would not be able to communicate with one another about it. Its integrity as an experience that appears to stay nearly the same, time after time, is due to the integrity of our own selves. And its communicability is contingent upon the fact that as citizens of the same era and tradition, we are not so different from one another as we might imagine” (165).

58 In his dissertation “Embodying Meaning and Imagining Sound in Nineteenth-Century Piano Music” (Ph.D., Princeton University, 2015), Robb proposes several different “modes of embodiment” that we—as performers, listeners, or analyzers—inhabit when listening especially
to nineteenth-century piano music. Each mode is grounded in a metaphor of bodily movement or state, and is determined by our bodily engagements with different compositional features and performance inflections. Importantly, the level, role and nature of imagined sound, which these modes involve, vary considerably from mode to mode.

59 The beginning of Beethoven’s Waldstein Sonata, which sets out with a stubbornly repeated C major cord without apparent motivation, might serve as a concrete example. Following the erratic harmonic route taken by the music constantly alters our musical narration and, by consequence, the apprehension of the repeated chords. The “story” of this sonata and its exposition in particular may very well be that of negativity, the “negation of negation,” as Adorno heard it; cf. Beethoven: Philosophie der Musik: Fragmente und Texte, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 90–91 no.131. As the musical phrase continues to cancel out each preceding cadence, Adorno’s argument runs, tonality as such is recreated precisely through a process of negation—through a “negative dialectic,” if you will.

60 KrV B 156: “[…] daß wir die Zeit, die doch gar kein Gegenstand äußerer Anschauung ist, uns nicht anders vorstellig machen können, als unter dem Bilde einer Linie, sofern wir sie ziehen.”

61 It would be possible to reverse the order of observation, which was fashioned in the given example as a bottom-up process. Construing the example as a top-down process, the observer would first read the title that announces the narrative subject matter. In a second step, she turns to the painting and then maps the at first utterly abstract schema onto the optical manifold, thus temporalizing and differentiating its contents so as to determine the exact scene that Ingres chose to depict.

Merlin Donald, “Art and Cognitive Evolution,” in The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity, ed. Mark Turner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3–20 similarly describes the “act of looking at a painting” as a temporal procedure of segmentation and re-integration, though his terminology is that of cognitive science, not the blend of phenomenology and narratology that I have chosen: “The act of looking at a painting, for example, might be deconstructed into a series of very brief components, each of which produces a ‘glimpse’ of the object. These components include such things as moving the eyes, fixating and focusing them, processing the fixated image, storing that image in some form of temporary, or buffer, memory, and synthesizing the whole series of remembered images into a unified perception of the painting. This percept might then be subjected to further scrutiny in working memory. The sequence might be repeated and reflected upon many times before the viewer acquires any ‘expertise’ or familiarity with the painting” (10).

62 Corngold’s Complex Pleasure (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998 eloquently advocates this wondrous quality both writers and readers have found, and hopefully still find, in literature. The complex forms of feeling which arise through the tension between reason and imagination, Corngold claims, “disclose” at the same time new forms of perception and experience in “a state of bodily possession” (xiv). Similarly, Hans Robert Jauß champions in his
magisterial Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik aesthetic pleasure (Genuß), because this pleasure “läßt ‘neu sehen’ und bereitet mit dieser entdeckenden Funktion den Genuß erfüllter Gegenwart; sie führt in andere Welten der Phantasie und hebt damit den Zwang der Zeit in der Zeit auf” (39–40). Drawing on Rousseau, Baudelaire, and especially Proust, Jaüß later on characterizes the insight gained through aesthetic experience with the neat French expression voir plus de choses qu’on n’en sait (125–65). Indeed, the view that art can make us “see more and with different eyes” is a conviction that modern aestheticians—Adorno, Merleau-Ponty, Gernot Böhme, and Bernhard Waldenfels, among many others—share.


64 Clearly, this kind of secondary, imaginary Anschauung gained through readerly recasting cannot be identified with an actual Anschauung, the perception of a chandelier tipping over, for instance. These are two entirely different forms of sensuousness, also for Schiller, who stresses precisely the inevitable abstractness of literary representations of sensuous observations. Literary language is not and never a mere vehicle, the immediate expression of sense experience, as Theodor A. Meyer (Das Stilgesetz der Poesie [Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1901], 8) points out: “es könnte sich bei genauere Betrachten ergeben, […] daß die Sprache allem, was durch sie hindurchgeht, auch dem Sinnlichen ihren eigenen Stempel aufdrückt; daß sie uns also das Leben, das uns der Dichter zu genießendem Nacherleben darbieten möchte, in psychischen Gebilden vorführt, die verschieden von den Erscheinungen der sinnlichen Wirklichkeit nur unserer Vorstellung eigen sind. […] Man mißverstehe und nicht! Es kann niemand und am wenigst uns einfallen, der Dichtung die Anschauung abzusprechen, sofern man dies Wort in einem geläufigen übertragen Sinn nimmt, sofern man sagen will, daß uns in der Poesie ein fremdes Objekt in ähnlicher Weise gegenwärtig gegenübertritt, wie bei der sinnlichen Anschauung.” Adorno recalls this passage in his essay on Eichendorff; see Noten zur Literatur, ed. Tiedemann Rolf (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 82–83.


66 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, What Is Philosophy? (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 167. Literary scholar Pierre Ouellet has critically taken up this cue in his work; he summarizes his approach in the following terms: “Literature cannot be reduced to brute sensation, whether the latter be its verbal material or graphic substance, but at the same time, literature seeks to emancipate the percept from the material conditions of its formal appearance. […] Neither pure art nor mere knowledge, literature is ideas crossbred with affects, knowledge mixed with sensations; in short, it is epistémé married to esthèsis [viz. aisthèsis], without any possible divorce between concept and percept, united for better or for worse in what we could call, following the lead of the cognitive psychologists, a mental image—a kind of percept elevated to the rank of the
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collection, or better yet, a concept anchored into the ground of the percept.” Consequently, “literature gives us a medial perceptual experience,” since literary images would constitute “the very conditions of possibility of our own perceptual experience.” Cf. Ouellet, “The I’s Eye: Perception and Mental Imagery in Literature,” *SubStance* 22, no. 2/3 (1993): 64–73, esp. 65–66.

This fourth point in response specifically to the attribution of an “iconic character” [Bildcharakter] to poetic works by Iser (*Der Akt des Lesens*, 219–26), as discussed earlier, and Ralf Simon, as discussed below.

Cf. Peter Brooks, “Fictions of the Wolfman: Freud and Narrative Understanding,” *Diacritics* 9, no. 1 (1979): 72–81, here 77–80. This is not the only cue that I derived from Peter Brooks. In *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 3–36, Brooks defines “plot” as the generative, dynamic activity that narrative texts elicit, as the “structuring operation” and “dynamic logic […] which makes sense of succession and time, and which insists that mediation of the problem posed at the outset takes time” (10). “Plot […] is the active interpretive work of discourse on story” (27), an interpretative work, however, that actually “belong[s] to the reader’s literary competence, his training as a reader of narrative” (19). Following these definitions, a “plot” thus describes a dynamic structure that unites the discursive form (*discours*) of a story with its overall content (*histoire*) and that becomes actual through the reader’s interpretative activity. I am indebted to his generative and synthetic understanding of plot, since this understanding encouraged me to propose a similarly synthetic notion of narration or diegesis as combining a discursive process (Plato) with a narrated totality (Genette) through readerly activity.

70 Corngold, *Complex Pleasure*, 15.


72 Gumbrecht, *Stimmungen lesen*, 101–9 (on Thomas Mann) and 67–70 (on Shakespeare). Gumbrecht’s tireless attempts to defend and promote the categorical value of presence have finally found their echo in Departments of Philosophy. Known for his work on perception theory, Alva Noë recently published an enthusiastic praise of *Varieties of Presence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), in which the danger of banality looms large as well. The “Appendix” to Noë’s book (157–60), a list of self-expressions documenting the performative attempt to “show oneself, to make oneself present, on the stage” (xii), perfectly illustrates this predicament. On this list, we find wisdom such as “Love will keep us together. […] Music is mysterious. […] You need light to see.” Hegel’s characterization for such effusive meditations was *Seichtigkeit* and *Brei des Herzens*.


77 Simon, *Der poetische Text als Bildkritik*, 256–57; Simon derives the term “scenography” from Umberto Eco’s *Lector in fabula*.

78 However, Simon tries hard to expunge both the pictorial associations and the sense of visibility that are evoked by attributing an “iconic character” to a literary text. In bracketing these attributes, Simon gains a more abstract concept of an image, defining an image ultimately as the immaterial gift (*Gabe*) of an iconic medium or source, which conscious attention then apprehends as an image. According to Simon, this holds true regardless of the source whence the iconic gift is derived, be it an optical, an imaginary, or a linguistic medium—a painting, a remembrance, or a text. Cf. *Der poetische Text als Bildkritik*, 19–107 for a full account of Simon’s theory of iconicity. At the same time, Simon acknowledges that a poetic text is in principle more resistant to releasing its inherent image than visual or imaginary media. This has to do with the intrinsic attributes of texts—the fact that they consist of letters, words, sentences. Simon’s term for the
internal opposition of a text to the poetic image that it conveys is Bildkritik. Since the dualism between Bildkritik and Bildaffirmation pertains, for Simon, to the ontology of the textual medium itself, every poetic text must simultaneously perform a subversion of its poetic image in order to display it. Individual words and the text as a whole (viz. the totality of diegetic actions, its story) represent for Simon the most resistant linguistic entities, while individual sentences and longer textual sequences are less resistant to an iconic translation. Der poetische Text als Bildkritik, 261–300 details the iconic resistance of poetic texts, their performative Bildkritik; Simon, “Was ist: ‘Bildkritische Literaturwissenschaft?’,” 53–57 exemplifies these considerations by demonstrating the dualism between Bildkritik and Bildaffirmation that is operative in Rilke’s Der Panther.

79 Simon, Der poetische Text als Bildkritik, 96: “Wenn man das ganze Kraftfeld, welches die Szene des Blickenden und das Angeblickten umfasst, Bild nennt, so kann ein Bild überhaupt nur aus dem Überkreuz der Blicke gedacht werden”; and 91–92: “Bild ist der Inbegriff jenes Kraftfeldes, das sich bildet, wenn eine figurale Konstellation eine solche Kraft und Energie in sich versammelt hat, dass ihr Angeblickt-wollen den Blick auf sich zieht […] Ein Bild ist also dasjenige, was den Blick steuert und was sich aus diesem Bezirk seiner Machtausübung als Ganzes ergibt […] Bild ist die Summe dieser Blicke.”

80 Cf. Simon, Die Bildlichkeit des lyrischen Textes, 10–14 and Der poetische Text als Bildkritik, 119–121; ibid., 241–274 attempts to resolve the paradox to conceive of an image as at once invisible and not immanent to consciousness.


84 Peter Utz, Das Auge und das Ohr im Text: Literarische Sinneswahrnehmung in der Goethezeit (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1990), 139 et seq.

85 Utz, Das Auge und das Ohr im Text, 17.
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2 See Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968–), 1: 381–98. All subsequent quotations from *Bericht einer Alpenwanderung*, which is an editorial title, refer to this edition; page numbers will be given in parentheses in the main text. The original manuscript has disappeared, but its content, the editors argue, was reliably preserved through Rosenkranz’s *G.W.F. Hegel’s Leben* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1844), wherein the *Bericht* appeared for the first time. I thank Emanuel Tandler for bringing this small gem to my attention.

3 Christoph Meiners, *Briefe über die Schweiz. Zweiter Theil* (Berlin: Spener, 1785), 1 et seq.

4 Particularly “ludicrous” [abgeschmackt], Hegel writes, are the myths surrounding the Gotthard passage, especially the so-called Teufelsbrücke—which is actually not that narrow and dangerous, he scoffingly adds, in contrast to contemporary depictions in literature and on copperplates. With regard to these myths, Hegel concludes, “hat die christliche Einbildungskraft nichts als eine abgeschmackte Legende hervorgebracht.” Though, the urge for mythic explanations is readily understood considering the “Kindersinn dieser Hirtenvölker” (*Bericht einer Alpenwanderung*, 396).

5 Hegel’s characterization of the painting may derive from Lessing’s *Laokoon*. Lessing maintains here that a painting, showing “never more than one single instant” [nie mehr als einen einzigen Augenblick] and only one perspective of its subject matter, constrains the “free play” of the beholder’s “imagination” [Einbildungskraft] unless chosen wisely. Cf. Lessing, *Werke 1766–1769: Laokoon, Briefe antiquarischen Inhalts*, ed. Wilfried Barner, vol. 5.2 of *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), esp. 32.

6 See Hegel’s so-called *Privatgutachten* to Niethammer in October 1812 (*Gesammelte Werke*, 10.2: 823–32, here 827), which concerns “den Vortrag der philosophischen Vorbereitungswissenschaften auf Gymnasien.” The optical experiments with Goethe during his time at Jena may have contributed to Hegel’s developing interest in nature. At a later point in his career, during the years at Berlin, Hegel unabashedly promoted Goethe’s theory of colors, thus assisting Goethe in securing a “triumph even in that domain”: “Von Professor Hegel, der, meiner Farbenlehre günstig, mir darüber geistreiche Worte meldet, habe soeben einen Schüler, Dr. Henning, gesprochen, welcher, gleichfalls für diese Lehre entzündet, manches Gute wirken wird; es wäre wunderlich genug, wenn ich auch noch in dieser Provinz triumphierte” (Goethe to Zelter on October 17, 1821; cit. Günther Nicolin, ed., *Hegel in Berichten seiner Zeitgenossen* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1970), 229 no. 354).
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8 Hegel, Bericht einer Alpenwanderung, 392.


10 Cf. Enzyklopädie of 1830, §§ 420–21, which I always quote after the “Theorie-Werkausgabe”: “Die nähere Stufe des Bewußtseins, auf welcher die Kantische Philosophie den Geist auffaßt, ist das Wahrnehmen, welches überhaupt der Standpunkt unseres gewöhnlichen Bewußtseins und mehr oder weniger der Wissenschaften ist. Es wird von sinnlichen Gewißheiten einzelner Apperzeptionen oder Beobachtungen ausgegangen, die dadurch zur Wahrheit erhoben werden sollen, daß sie in ihrer Beziehung betrachtet, über sie reflektiert [wird], überhaupt daß sie nach bestimmten Kategorien zugleich zu etwas Notwendigem und Allgemeinem, zu Erfahrungen werden. […] Diese Verknüpfung des Einzelnen und Allgemeinen ist Vermischung, weil das Einzelne […] fest gegen das Allgemeine bleibt, auf welches es zugleich bezogen ist. Sie ist daher der vielseitige Widerspruch, – überhaupt der einzelnen Dinge der sinnlichen Apperzeption, die den Grund der allgemeinen Erfahrung ausmachen sollen, und der Allgemeinheit, die vielmehr das Wesen und der Grund sein soll, – der Einzelheit, welche die Selbständigkeit in ihrem konkreten Inhalte genommen ausmacht, und der mannigfaltigen Eigenschaften, die vielmehr frei von diesem negativen Bande und voneinander, selbständige allgemeine Materien sind […].” The contradiction between the particularity of the object and the universality of its attributes that Hegel indicates here is also treated in the Phenomenology. Therein, it figures as the vexed dialectic of the thing of perception that can be apprehended either as a “One” [Eins] or an “Also” [Auch].


12 Hegel, Gesammelte Werke, 25.1: 108. This text reproduces Hotho’s Mitschrift, but similar statements can be adduced from later lecture records, too; see Griesheim’s record of the 1825 lecture (Gesammelte Werke, 25.1: 417–25). Moreover, note § 413 in the 1830 Enzyklopädie, where consciousness is defined from the outset as self-reflexive, viz., “die unendliche Beziehung des Geistes auf sich, aber als subjektive.”

13 Hegel, Werke, 6: 254–57. Hegel’s debt to Kant is enormous. Robert Pippin, Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) shows in great detail that Hegel took Kant’s principle of the “transcendental unity of apperception” (cf. KrV B 132–47) as one of the most important cues in developing his own philosopher’s system. This principle, Pippin argues in his book, Hegel systematically develops throughout his oeuvre. Consequently, Pippin interprets Hegel’s speculative idealism as a radical
completion of Kant’s transcendental philosophy. But considering consciousness as a product of reflection, as Hegel does, with the assertion that “all consciousness is already self-consciousness,” has its own aporia. Dieter Henrich, “Selbstbewusstsein. Kritische Einleitung in eine Theorie,” in Hermeneutik und Dialektik, ed. Rüdiger Bubner, Konrad Cramer, and Reiner Wiehl (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1970), 257–84 has objected to an a priori reflexive model of consciousness—as you have it in Hegel, but also in Kant (again, KrV B 132–47)—because it leads, on his account, either to logical inconsistencies or to a *petitio principii*, a logical circle. Henrich summarizes the aporia as follows: “Sie [the reflexive theory of consciousness] enthält zunächst eine Zweideutigkeit hinsichtlich des Ich, das zu sich selber in Beziehung tritt: es war nicht klar, ob dieses Ich schon Kenntnis von sich haben soll oder nicht. Diese Unklarheit ist unentbehrlich, solange die Theorie Überzeugungskraft haben soll. Wird sie nämlich durch eine eindeutige Entscheidung für oder gegen die Bewußttheit des Ichsubjektes behoben, so zeigt sie sich sogleich in ihrer ganzen Schwäche. Denn entweder ist das Ich, das sich als Subjekt zu sich verhält, bereits seiner selber bewußt. Dann ist die Theorie als Erklärung des Bewußtseins zirkelhaft, da sie Bewußtsein, sogar Selbstbewußtsein bereits voraussetzt. Oder das Ichsubjekt ist seiner nicht bewußt und hat keinerlei Vertrautheit mit sich. Dann läßt sich mit Mitteln der Reflectionstheorie niemals verstehen, wie es je in die Lage kommen soll, irgendeinen Sachverhalt sich selber zuzusprechen oder auch nur unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Frage anzusehen, ob er ihm selbst zugehört oder nicht” (268). Recalling what he takes to be Fichte’s “original insight,” Henrich pleads instead for a theory of consciousness in which the difference between subject and object is considered the product of an anonymous and pre-reflexive act of opposition that occurs prior to the empirical perception of that difference. This act of opposition replaces, on his account, the reflexive operations of relating and differentiating as the foundation of both object and self-consciousness.

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14 Hegel, *Werke*, 2: 55; Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 69 regards this quote as one of the earliest summaries of Hegel’s overall philosophic enterprise. As to the implosion—or, with Hegel’s term, “sublation” [Aufhebung]—of the concept/intuition dualism, see *Hegel’s Idealism*, 26–31, 85–88, 106–8, 125–27.

15 KrV A 141 / B 180.


18 Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 121, 126.

19 The convoluted complexity of the first two chapters, indeed the *Phenomenology* as a whole, is not solely due to the inability of the dialectician to talk plainly as he is constantly carried away by his—sometimes tedious—inclination to demonstrate that any supposedly immediate evidence is always already afflicted with its antithetical opposite. Neither does it spring from a generally poor style of writing on Hegel’s part, some of whose later prefaces and private letters are composed with quite a bit of elegance and grace. Besides the intricacies that spring from the subject matter
Notes to Part One – Hegel

itself, the obscurity of the arguments of the *Phenomenology* also have a structural basis. As the proper introduction to that system, speculative philosophy, which the *Wissenschaft der Logik* subsequently expounds as both the core of all ontology and as *prima philosophia*, the *Phenomenology* has to constantly mediate between subjective (epistemological) and objective (ontological) aspect until it finally arrives at a point of “absolute knowledge,” the “scientific concept” [wissenschaftlicher Begriff], wherein both domains supposedly intersect and match up. These discrepant domains, which Hegel treated separately as early as his so-called “Jena System” of 1805 (vol. 8 of *Gesammelte Werke*) either as the philosophy of (subjective) spirit or as the philosophy of (objective) nature, constantly intermingle in the *Phenomenology*. The first chapter presents perhaps the most striking mix of these discrepant philosophical domains, since it treats the problem of temporal and spatial being—which are for Hegel, in contrast to Kant, ontological attributes of the object in itself—in conjunction with the problematic of subjective sensory intention or “meaning,” which traditionally pertains to epistemology. Yet these domains have to be mixed precisely because the *Phenomenology* is committed to introducing the system as a whole, that is to say, the very concept and logic of “scientificity” on which the *Wissenschaft der Logik* claims to be based (cf. *Werke*, 5: 17–18 and § 36 in the *Enzyklopädie* of 1817). Houlgate, “G. W. F. Hegel,” in *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 278–305 argues that the *Phenomenology* “transforms epistemology into phenomenology and serves as the introduction to a new, post-Kantian metaphysics” (278), which an Hegel’s account has to be a logic, precisely, rather than a traditional ontology. Similarly, Walter Jaeschke argues that the introductory role of the *Phenomenology* remains intact throughout Hegel’s *oeuvre*; cf. Hegel-Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Schule (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010), 175–81.

It is well known that Hegel describes the *Phenomenology*’s method of philosophizing as a “self-fulfilling skepticism” (PdG 72), more precisely as the portrayal (*Darstellung*) of the “way of doubt” [*Weg des Zweifels*] (ibid.) that consciousness pursues as it seeks absolutely true knowledge. Lesser known is the fact that this method is pretty much congruent with the one that Wilhelm Traugott Krug—one of Hegel’s preferred intellectual punching bags during the Jena period—envisions in his *Entwurf eines neuen Organon’s der Philosophie* (Meissen, Lübben: Erbstein, 1801). Krug here writes: “Wenn ich daher nur die Thatsachen meines Bewusstseyns richtig aufgefasst und verständlich dargestellt habe, so wird kein Philosoph in der Welt die von mir aufgestellten Prinzipien abläugnen können. Selbst der Skeptiker wird sie zugeben müssen” (30). As it happens, Hegel cites these exact words at the end of his sarcastic review of Krug’s philosophy of “common sense” [*der gemeine Menschenverstand*], published in the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie* in 1802 (cf. *Werke*, 2: 206)—not yet knowing that in just a few of years, he will employ the same method to achieve what Krug failed to achieve, namely: “in kurzer Zeit das ganze ungebildete Publikum in ein philosophisches umzukleiden” (Krug, *Entwurf eines neuen Organon’s*, 30).


Taylor, “The opening arguments of the ‘Phenomenology’,” 173. Taylor is certainly right in saying that the clash “between the two dimensions of a thing, as particular (*ausschließendes Eins*) and as ensemble of properties” does not necessarily present a contradiction: “We today would shrug this off as two ways of presenting the same object that have no need to be considered as opposed” (ibid.). However, it is in truth the dialectic belonging-together rather than the oppositional either/or of these aspects that Hegel propounds in the chapter. Taylor sees that: “The dependency” between the particular identity of a thing and its diversity of properties “is thus reciprocal. We cannot operate with property concepts without attributing them to particulars, and we cannot operate with particulars without applying some property concepts to them” (172–73).

The suspicion that the particular identity and the diversity of the object must be connected by some “causal background” explaining their mutual dependency leads consciousness on to speculations about “force” and “the law” as the supersensible causes behind these two aspects, Taylor suggests. Such a view would neatly explain the teleological movement from the second to the third chapter, yet it obfuscates the main theoretical point of the perception chapter: that a “truthful”—hence dialectic—notion of objecthood is a question of both simultaneous unity and identity and relational difference, which foreshadows a kind of relationality that for Hegel fully surfaces with self-consciousness. Otherwise, if “phenomenal causality” was indeed the suitable answer to the contradiction obtaining in perception, as Taylor (174–84) argues, the third chapter of the *Phenomenology* would end successfully instead of resulting in an “inverted world.” In that case, consciousness had simply no reason to leave the—profoundly Kantian—“world of understanding” in order to become self-consciousness. In other words, if causality could, on Hegel’s account, sufficiently explain the logic of perception as well as the phenomenal world, the
“Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewusstseyns”—the initial title of the book—would not have had to become the Phänomenologie des Geistes.

24 “Structure” is to be understood here in the dynamic sense that Jan Mukarovsky articulates in his 1940 article “Structuralism in Aesthetics and in the Study of Literature.” Since this article is not available in English translation, I am quoting from the German edition: “Ein weiteres Grundmerkmal der Struktur ist ihr energetischer und dynamischer Charakter. Die Energetik der Struktur beruht darauf, daß jedes der Elemente in der gemeinsamen Einheit eine bestimmte Funktion hat, die es in das strukturelle Ganze eingliedert, die es an das Ganze bindet; die Dynamik des strukturellen Ganzen ist dadurch gegeben, daß diese einzelnen Funktionen und ihre Gegenseitigen Beziehungen wegen ihres energetischen Charakters ständigen Veränderungen unterworfen sind. Die Struktur als Ganzes befindet sich daher in einer unaufhörlichen Bewegung, im Gegensatz zu einer summativen Ganzheit, die durch eine Veränderung zerstört wird” (Kapitel aus der Poetik [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967], 11). It is perhaps not far-fetched to identify this notion of structure with that dynamic constellation of elements or, better, “moments” for which the Hegelian lexicon offers the term “dialectic movement.”

25 Cf. PdG 22–29. Notice that Hegel here also claims the inverse, namely, that “subject must become substance,” which represents his charge against the “merely subjective” idealisms especially of Kant and Fichte. Jaeschke, Hegel-Handbuch, 182–83 elucidates this cryptic passage, including those principles which Hegel terms “subject” and “subjectivity.”

26 Hegel, Werke, 18: 55.

27 KrV A 822.

28 Stern, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, 55.

29 Hegel, Werke, 5: 114.

30 KrV A 19 / B 33 et seq. classifies sensuousness or sensibility—Sinnlichkeit—outright as Rezeptivität. KrV A 48 takes the same stance: “Wollen wir die Rezeptivität unseres Gemüts, Vorstellungen zu empfangen, so fern es auf irgend eine Weise affiziert wird, Sinnlichkeit nennen: so ist dagegen das Vermögen, Vorstellungen selbst hervorzubringen, oder die Spontaneität des Erkenntnisses, der Verstand.” KrV A 69 already appears a bit more ambivalent, in stating that concepts “are founded on” [gründen sich auf] spontaneity and intuitions (Anschauungen) on the “receptivity of the impressions” [Rezeptivität der Eindrücke]. At any rate, Kant quickly runs into difficulties because of the strict separation between receptivity and spontaneity. This becomes most apparent when he theorizes individuated space, viz. geometric objects. The result is a logical paradox: How can, for instance, optical “intuitions” [Anschauungen] appear as geometric shapes although sensuousness by definition has only the a priori form of infinite space at its disposal? How can spatial “intuitions” [Anschauungen] of objects be said to represent a discrete shape even though sensuousness, unlike the spontaneity of the understanding (Verstand), has no active capacity to synthesize a spatial manifold, to individuate the transcendental form of space? KrV B 160–61 brings this logical paradox to the light, in all its force. Here, in a pivotal footnote, Kant
notes that perceiving an individual spatial object hinges on a “Zusammenfassung des Mannigfaltigen.” But this Zusammenfassung, he admits, requires a kind of synthesis which, even though it “precedes all conceptual activity” [vor allem Begriffe vorhergehe], does “not belong to the senses” [die nicht den Sinnen angehört]. Indeed, it cannot belong to the senses because sensibility is a receptive faculty. Instead, this synthesis appears to be some “preconceptual” activity [vor allem Begriff] by which—nota bene—“alle Begriffe von Raum und Zeit zuerst möglich werden.” According to this footnote, then, the transcendental forms of sensibility, time and space, seem to be preceded by a synthetic faculty that transcends or precedes receptivity. Thus, Kant clearly realizes in this footnote that sensuousness also involves a kind of spontaneity, or at least needs to be endowed with some synthetic productivity. The same paradox can be observed in KrV A 24 and KrV B 136 (fn.). Kant’s unusually plain “solution” to the paradox can be found in the Third Critique, wherein he places the unity of sensuous intuition under the prerogative of the imagination: “Nun gehören zu einer Vorstellung, wodurch ein Gegenstand gegeben wird, damit überhaupt daraus Erkenntnis werde, Einbildungskraft für die Zusammensetzung des Mannigfaltigen der Anschauung, und Verstand für die Einheit des Begriffs, der die Vorstellungen vereinigt” (Kant, Werke, 10: B 28). KrV A 78–79 conveys the same argument, in stating that “das Mannigfaltige der reinen Anschauung” has to be synthesized “durch die Einbildungskraft.” However, Kant never clarifies how such a synthesis of the manifold through the imagination takes place. He never really accounts for the complicity of sensuousness and imagination in the process of perception that his system effectively prescribes. Interestingly, it seems that Hegel never elaborated on these sections. Together they would have furthered his case against the Kantian dualism between intuitions (receptivity) and concepts (spontaneity).


Not by coincidence, current neuroscientific research deals with a similar, if not the same crux, which it treats under the rubric of “the binding-problem.” Briefly put, this involves the question of how “the brain” is able to spontaneously associate or “bind” together different visual aspects, “such as color, motion, location, and object identity,” which “are processed in separate brain regions”; cf Adina L. Roskies, “The Binding Problem,” Neuron 24, no. 1 (1999): 7–9. Once again the notorious assumption that visual perception is a purely receptive task is recognized to conflict with the evident need for spontaneous organization (the “binding” of discrete sense data through the coordination of multiple brain regions), a rediscovery of a temporal, rather than solely locational, impasse compelling any reader of Kant and Hegel to ask, old wine in new bottles?


32 Westphal, Hegel, Hume und die Identität wahrnehmbarer Dinge, 70 advances the latter argument, yet without considering the former, Hegel’s departure from the theory of sensibility in Kant.

34 Cf. Jaeschke, Hegel-Handbuch, 350–53. For a discussion of the structure of knowledge according to Hegel, see, among others, Koch, “Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung,” 135–38 and Hans-Jörg Sandkühler, ed., Handbuch Deutscher Idealismus (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2005), 72–78. In contrast to the described logic of “oppositional doubling,” however, the Hegelian system as a whole aims also at a unifying vanishing point: total sublation, achieved through one final “speculative” act, a final “reconciliatory YES” [das versöhnende JA] (PdG 494). Hegel regarded this “speculative” act of reconciliation of oppositional doubles in fact as the “positive” and “reasonable” result of the dialectic that puts and end to the very negativity of the dialectic (cf. §§ 79–82 in the 1830 Enzyklopädie and Hegel, Werke, 5: 16–17). Clearly, this propensity for the elimination of differences—between, for example, philosophy and theology, or philosophy and works of art—represents the totalizing tendency of the Hegelian edifice, as has been critically noted by Adorno, Derrida, and many others. Resolving the differences into the identity of the “truly scientific” concept, which only (Hegelian) philosophy can provide, this edifice equals a prison cell to which an outside—difference—or indeed walls themselves are inconceivable precisely because this cell is said to contain everything there is. The concept is a monad without exit, or, Reason encapsulates all there is, as Hegel famously versified: “Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; / und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig” (Werke, 7: 24). Nevertheless, Hegel claims the exact opposite as well, namely: that all that counts is difference, more precisely the preservation of difference in the face of its speculative identity (cf. my n. Error! Bookmark not defined.).

35 Hegel (Gesammelte Werke, 11: 58 and Werke, 5: 113–15) provides in both editions of the First Book of the Wissenschaft der Logik a comprehensive definition of the nature of aufheben, calling it “einer der wichtigsten Begriffe der Philosophie, eine Grundbestimmung” that can keep oppositional moments in a union. The hypothesis that Hegel’s use of aufheben was inspired by Schiller has been put forward, among others, by Walter A. Kaufmann, Hegel: A Reinterpretation (Garden City, NY: Anchor books, 1966), 52–53 and William Desmond, “Art, Philosophy and Concreteness in Hegel,” The Owl of Minerva 16, no. 2 (1985): 131–46, here 132 n.3. Indeed, it is particularly Schiller’s eighteenth letter on Ästhetische Erziehung (in Sämtliche Werke, 5: 624–27) that pictures beauty as “einen mittleren Zustand” connecting “zwei Zustände miteinander, die einander entgegengesetzt sind,” specifically the opposition between sensible matter and intelligible form, such that “beide Zustände in einem dritten gänzlich verschwinden und keine Spur der Teilung in dem Ganzen zurückbleibt.” Thus sublating the division, Schiller concludes,
beauty reconciles intellect and sensuousness in a “pure aesthetic unity” [reinen ästhetischen Einheit]. Schiller’s Ästhetische Erziehung contains additional elements that Hegel adopted and expanded, most notably the logic of alienation (Entfremdung), as well as the idea of a synthetic—but not yet dialectic—mediation (Vermittlung) by means of a third term. For all those reasons Schiller’s aesthetics can be plausibly regarded an anticipation of certain Hegelian concepts. Kaufmann, Hegel, 46–58 draws further parallels between Ästhetische Erziehung and the Phenomenology, including parallels between Schiller’s notion of “play drive” [Spieltrieb] and the Hegelian concept of spirit. While Hegel notes such parallels and continuities in his lectures on Aesthetics (cf. Werke, 13: 89–91), crucial differences still separate Schiller from Hegel. Frederick Beiser, Schiller as Philosopher (Oxford University Press, 2005), 11 points out that Schiller argues, in complete opposition to Hegel, “that the idea of freedom has to be read into appearances.” Schiller thus remains rooted in a Kantian mind-set, according to which freedom cannot appear outside the realm of thought, even as he wished, in the Kallias letters, for beauty to be “Freiheit in der Erscheinung,” a freedom appearing by virtue of technē or art, as we would say today (cf. Schiller, Sämtliche Werke, 5: 409–26).

Bowman, Sinnliche Gewissheit, 236–37 provides a schematic overview on the sense-certainty chapter that also distinguishes three phases of sense-certainty. Koch, Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung, 141 distinguishes three phases that are similar to Bowman’s, yet he loosely identifies each phase with a certain epistemological regime, the first equalling, on his account, objectivist realism (an ultra-nominalism in other words), the second a subjectivist idealism, and the third a neutral monism.

Though the issue is discussed in the chapter on perception in a rudimentary way, the Phenomenology is hardly concerned with sensations (Empfindungen) as such. This changes, however, in Hegel’s later description of subjective spirit. According to a Zusatz to § 447 of the 1830 Enzyklopädie, Hegel is even said to have made the following remark in one of his lectures: “In der Empfindung ist die ganze Vernunft, der gesamte Stoff des Geistes vorhanden. Alle unsere Vorstellungen, Gedanken und Begriffe […] entwickeln sich aus der empfindenden Intelligenz” (Werke, 10: 248).

“An dem reinen Sein aber, welches das Wesen dieser Gewißheit ausmacht und welches sie als ihre Wahrheit ausagt, spielt, wenn wir zusehen, noch vieles andere beiein. Eine wirkliche sinnliche Gewißheit ist nicht nur diese reine Unmittelbarkeit, sondern ein Beispiel derselben” (PdG 83).

In contrast to the original print (*Gesammelte Werke*, 9: 64), the *Jetzt* of this sentence is rendered in the “Theorie-Werkausgabe” as a small cap *jetzt*.

Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 200–6 provides a provocative discussion of this first example of sense-certainty. However, liquidating the tangled problems raised by Hegel in the sense-certainty chapter solely through historical recourse, by regarding these problems as “eine Reprise oder Reflexion des Elementarschulwesens” (203), seems to me almost as speculative as Hegel’s so-called “historical” deductions. More convincing is Kittler’s point (204) that Hegel seeks to justify his theory of the speculative sentence with his grammatical manipulations. In contrast to philologists, philosophers tend to ignore Hegel’s odd use of grammar as they interpret the sense-certainty chapter, as a few selective examples can show. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 116–25 does not elaborate on it; nor does Willem de Vries, “Hegel on Reference and Knowledge,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (1988): 297–307, who only vaguely notes that “Hegel's mode of expression, as usual, is not overly transparent” (299) when introducing the first example.

For an original, critical introduction to Hegel’s concept of negativity, the motor of the Hegelian dialectic, see Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 109–64. Whereas Kristeva argues from an idiosyncratic standpoint, switching back and forth between the *Wissenschaft der Logik* and the *Phenomenology*, the explications to follow will consider the concept of negativity in its most “immediate” and concrete form: as a moment of sensuous experience, in other words, as it “first” appears to consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. Kojève was perhaps the first interpreter to vehemently base his existentialist interpretations of Hegel in the human “might of negativity” [*la puissance de la Negativité*], which for Kojève expresses the innermost drive of historical, empirical existence, namely: “the nothing that [*an*]nihilates (as action or real, ‘historical’ time) by ‘dialectically supplanting’ that which *is* and creating that which is not” [*le Néant qui néantit (en tant qu’Action ou Temps réel, ‘historique’) en ‘supprimant dialectiquement’ ce qui est et en créant ce qui n’est pas*]” (*Introduction à la lecture de Hegel: Leçons sur La phénoménologie de l’esprit*, ed. Raymond Queneau [Paris: Gallimard, 1947], 572).

In contrast to the first edition (*Gesammelte Werke*, 9: 65), the “Theorie-Werkausgabe” nominalizes most adjectives in this sentence (e.g. *Einfaches, das Allgemeine*), which makes them appear as though they were self-sufficient subjects and predicates. However, I read these words as attributive adjectives to the omitted noun das *Jetzt*, which I therefore insert in brackets.


Hegel does so most explicitly in the Second Preface to the *Wissenschaft der Logik* in arguing that the “form of language” is the solely proper “form of thinking”; cf. Hegel, *Werke*, 5: 20–30.

Hegel would perhaps not fully disagree with these assessments, because he variously emphasizes the proximity between the main questions of theology and his philosophy. For example, Hegel describes the scope of his concept of being in the *Wissenschaft der Logik* in the following terms: “Das Sein selbst sowie die folgenden Bestimmungen nicht nur des Seins, sondern die logischen Bestimmungen überhaupt können als Definitionen des Absoluten, als die *metaphysischen Definitionen Gottes* angesehen werden” (*Enzyklopädie* of 1830, § 85). Nonetheless, there are also striking differences between theology and Hegelian philosophy in terms of their respective methodology, which Hegel points out specifically in the second and the third preface to the *Enzyklopädie*. As to the vexed relationship between Hegelian philosophy and Christian theology, particularly Christology, consult Hamacher, “The Reader’s Supper: A Piece of Hegel,” *Diacritics* 11, no. 2 (1981): 52–67.

47 The pieces gathered in *Hegel and Language*, ed. Jere O’Neill Surber (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006) spotlight the formative role of language in as well as its impact on Hegelian thought and may therefore serve as an up-to-date introduction. Note also Adorno’s incisive remarks about Hegel’s philosophical language in his third study on Hegel, “Skoteinos oder Wie zu lesen sei,” reprinted in *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie / Drei Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), esp. 336–56. For Adorno, Hegel’s language is ultimately at odds with the ideal of a “strictly descriptive” terminology as posited by the natural sciences and Husserlian phenomenology, even if Hegel certainly *sought* to avoid terminological vagueness and fluidity. Yet the intention to define philosophical terms once and for all with univocal clarity, as determinate “Kennmarken für die Merkmaleinheiten einer Vielfalt” (345) that could be assembled in a lexicon, is undermined by the dialectical method itself, since this method consists, if construed progressively, precisely in the dynamization or movement of fixed distinctions and definitions, thus in the destruction of philosophy as nominalist lexicography. In Adorno’s words: “seine von der Sache unablösbare Methode will die Sache sich bewegen lassen” (343)—instead of arresting the subject matter through rigid and immobile, reified terms.

48 In the ninth lecture on *Philosophien der Literatur* (Berlin: Merve, 2013), Friedrich Kittler summarizes this critical move of the *Phenomenology* with a felicitous phrase: „Meine These […] war, daß Hegel an die Stelle des neuzeitlichen Grundbezuges zwischen Subjekt und Objekt einen anderen Grundbezug, den zwischen Subjekt und einem anderen Subjekt gesetzt hat. Wenn diese Relation zwischen Subjekten entwickelt genug ist, um sich als gegenseitige Anerkennung, als ‘Wir’, wie Hegel schreibt, im Medium Sprache zu vollziehen, hat sie den Namen Geist verdient” (183).

49 George di Giovanni, “Introduction” to *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), xxxiv. One of the most lucid articulations of the dialectic of form and content can be found in Hotho’s *Mitschrift* of Hegel’s 1822 lectures on subjective spirit: “Inhalt ist Formbestimmung und diese ist ihm wesentlich; was er [der Inhalt] ist, ist er durch sie. Der wahre Inhalt enthält die Form an ihm selbst, und die Bestimmungen der Formen sind ihr eigener Inhalt” (*Gesammelte Werke*, 25.1: 16–17).
Choosing this theatrical setup as chief means of theoretical explanation or, rather, representation (**Darstellung**), Hegel is as faithful to the etymology of the word “theory” as one could be. The Greek **théoria**, as is well known, is derived form the verb **theaomai** (“to look on, gaze at, behold”), while **theōros** or **theōmenoi** identify the “spectator” or “spectators” especially of a theatre play. Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel*, 134–37 associates the theatrical setup of the *Phenomenology* with Goethe’s *Faust*, such that the affirmative striving for knowledge would reflect the Faustian character, whereas the instances of negativity that variously undermine the will to knowledge would reflect Mephistopheles, “the spirit that negates.”

Kittler, *Philosophien der Literatur*, 169. Warmins, “Reading for Example” similarly argues that Hegel’s presentation of sense-certainty involves a theatrical “scene” (86) wherein the phenomenological observer must identify with the acting consciousness, thus partaking in the “play of substitutions (of one subject for another)” that “takes place” in language (88).

Pure being is therefore just as abstract and universal or **bestimmungslos** as pure thinking, as Hegel (*Gesammelte Werke*, 8: 11 fn. 2) seems to suggest in a marginal note: “im gegenständlichen Element geht [es] ebenso abstract zu als in unserem Kopf.” This note was written down presumably in fall 1805, so shortly before or indeed the while Hegel was sitting down to materialize the *Phenomenology*.


This manuscript, reproduced as vol. 8 of *Gesammelte Werke* and known by the editorial title *Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, was presumably written down in the fall of 1805 at Jena, making it the
closest chronological intertext to the Phenomenology. However, there is some uncertainty as to when Hegel stopped working on the manuscript, including revisions and marginal notes. Moreover, it is uncertain when and how often Hegel used it to lecture, and if so to what extent; cf. Gesammelte Werke, 8: 314–19 and 348–61. The editors argue that “late summer/fall 1805” (317) seems a plausible time during which Hegel would have drafted the manuscript since Hegel most certainly used these chapters as the basis for lectures held during the summer semester 1806. Nonetheless, it is unclear when Hegel was entirely done working on these manuscripts because they show various layers of revisions and also contain many detailed notes on the margins that “significantly differ” from the main text as to their Schriftbild (315). Assuming the later revisions and insertions were made by Hegel, the editors conclude, it seems possible that Hegel kept revising and expanding these manuscripts, especially by means of marginal notes, up until he became a full Professor of Philosophy at Heidelberg (1816), selectively using them for his teaching as Gymnasialprofessor at Nürnberg (1808–1816). With the appearance of the first edition of the Enzyklopädie in 1817, however, the manuscript became obsolete. As for the genetic import of this manuscript for Hegel’s intellectual development, see H. S. Harris, “Hegel’s Intellectual Development to 1807,” in The Cambridge Companion to Hegel, ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 25–51, here 38–51 and Otto Pöggeler, “Hegels Jenaer Systemkonzeption,” Philosophisches Jahrbuch 71 (1963): 268–318.

58 Hegel, Gesammelte Werke, 8: 11, 12–13.

59 Hegel, Werke, 9: 51–52 (§ 259). However plausible Hegel’s theory of temporality may read on paper, it is hard to locate the negativity of time, “these pure abstractions” [diese reinen Absractionen] (Gesammelte Werke, 8: 11) that constitute the succession of time, in our concrete experience. Experiential time seems to proceed in the form of continuity, like “a flow,” as we often say. But then, by what praxis can the theoretical negativity of time become real experience? In the Introduction to the Ästhetik (Werke, 13: 121), Hegel characterizes music as the foremost sensible medium of “negativity,” though he hardly substantiates this claim with musical examples, and whenever he does the point falls flat. In fact, the third and last part of the Ästhetik, detailing the distinctive features of the art forms, loses sight of the initial characterization and instead presents music as the apex of a Romantic “sensibility” [Empfindung], expressing the innermost movements of heart and “soul” [Gemüt] (Hegel, Werke, 15: 15). By contrast, Adorno has filled Hegel’s initial thought with concrete life. For him, music—the music of Beethoven—realizes the movement of negativity and gives it a sensible form: “Beethovens kritisches Verfahren, die vielberufene ‘Selbstkritik’ kommt aus dem kritischen Sinn der Musik selber, deren Prinzip in sich die immanente Negation all ihrer Setzungen ist. Das hat nichts mit Beethovens Psychologie zu tun” (Beethoven: Philosophie der Musik, 37; see also 34–51, which similarly conceives musical progression in Beethoven as a procedure of self-negation). No surprise, then, that Beethoven’s work represents for Adorno the better truth of the Hegelian philosophy, because Hegel, unlike Beethoven, is said to betray negativity in favor of some spurious identity (36). The Waldstein Sonata is a palpable instance of negativity “on the move,” so to speak, that Adorno singles out as such (90–91). Still, Adorno refers to more Beethoven pieces that, on his account,
employ “negation as the driving motor” [Negation als das Weitertreibende] (42). Pretty much all the pieces that Adorno presents as a realization of negativity belong to Beethoven’s middle period, his “heroic” style. The first movement of the Eroica thus represents “die reinsten Ausprägung des Prinzips [der Negation]; das sorgfältigste, das absolute Hauptwerk” (105).

60 Neither in the earlier notes and lectures on inner time consciousness (Husserliana, vol. 10), nor in the later manuscripts (Husserliana, vol. 33) does Husserl ever refer to Hegel, let alone his Phenomenology (which may very well be the specter of Husserlian phenomenology). The Phenomenology does not even come up when Husserl discusses, in the First Book of the Ideen, the indeterminate particular, which Husserl too renders as “‘Dies da!’ oder pure, syntaktisch formlose individuelle Einzelheit” (Husserliana, 3.2: 28) and explicitly connects to the notion of tode ti in Aristotle’s Metaphysics. To my knowledge, the only place where Husserl mentions Hegel is the famous essay “Philosophie Als Strenge Wissenschaft,” Logos: Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur 1, no. 3 (1911): 289–341. Naturally, Hegel here only figures as the flawed origin of a “skeptical historicism” or Weltanschauungsphilosophie in the vein of Dilthey (293), with which this essay takes issue. For a new perspective on the connection between Husserl and Hegel, see the contributions in Faustino Fabbianelli and Sebastian Luft, eds., Husserl und die klassische deutsche Philosophie (Cham: Springer, 2014). Derrida’s dialogue with Hegel both as a precursor and antipode is as extensive as it is multifarious; see Stuart Barnett, ed., Hegel after Derrida (London: Routledge, 1998) for a first orientation. With regard to the sense-certainly chapter, Derrida considered especially the insight into the negative universality of Here and Now—or, with Derrida’s words, their “citationality”—to be of seminal import: “what, after all, of the remain(s) [du reste], today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel? […] For us, here, now: these words are citations, already, always, we will have learned that from him” (Derrida, Glas, 1). Warminski, “Reading for Example” takes up this cue and unpacks the citationality of “here” and “now.” Martin Hägglund, Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life (Stanford University Press, 2008), 50–75 summarizes in what sense Husserl and Derrida conceive of presence as the result of difference, but also how their conceptions differ. Unfortunately, Hägglund sometimes understates the ingenuity and radicalness of Husserl because the declared mission of his study is to confirm Derrida’s major doctrines.

61 The informed reader will readily notice the parallel between Hegel’s conception of diachronic time as a self-negating differentiality and Husserl’s phenomenological model of inner time-consciousness, which Husserl conceives as the interplay between retention and protention, the present “now” being their differential result; cf. vol. 10 of Husserliana, esp. 31–47. She will also recall the Hegelian figure that Derrida employs to deconstruct, in La voix et le phénomène, the Husserlian model of time-consciousness, specifically Husserl’s insistence on an “absolute flow” of time and a “primal impression” [Urimpression] so as to safeguard the idea of an originary presence. Derrida here defines the moment of a present “now” precisely as a “non-presence”—as a “non-being,” one might say with Hegel’s word—that can only occur in and through complicity with past (retentional) and future (protentional) “nows,” thus through the retroactive effect of
différance; cf. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 60–69 and 84–88, where Derrida describes the being—or rather not-being—of différance.

62 W. de Vries, “Sense-certainty and the ‘this-such’,” 73.

63 Kant had already noted the entwinement of time and space in the *First Critique*. He argues here (KrV B 154–56) that the inner sense of time cannot be thought without “drawing a straight line” [im Ziehen einer geraden Linie], thus representing the synthetic unity of temporal succession by means of an “external figure” [äußerlich figürliche Vorstellung]. Similarly, the “circumscription of a concrete space” [Beschreibung eines Raumes], being the cognitive “act” [Handlung] that the subject imposes on the a priori manifold of space, is deemed the means to “bring temporal succession into being” [bringt so gar den Begriff der Sukzession zuerst hervor]. However, Kant seems anxious in this passage not to confuse the difference between inner and outer sense too much.


65 Cf. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 8: 4–14. In contrast to the *Phenomenology*’s sense-certainty chapter, Hegel departs in the Jena manuscript not from a consideration of time but from a discussion of space—a deductive sequence that returns in the *Enzyklopädie*. In the subchapter at the very beginning of the manuscript, entitled as “mechanics” [Mechanik], Hegel sets out to deduce from some absolutely selfsame and primordial, yet indeterminate “matter or ether” [Materie oder Äther] (3)—which he at once equates with “pure spirit”—the fundamentals of the physical world: first space and time, then movement, and finally mass. Unlike the conscious mind, which is typically conceived as a temporal substance without extension, the main attribute that is typically ascribed to matter is extension in space. Hegel follows this customary view in defining the selfsame matter of the beginning to be “immediately space” [unmittelbar der Raum] (4), which at once distinguishes itself into dimensions. From these dimensions of space, which express the inherent, yet implicit differentiability of space, Hegel goes on to deduce the concept of time. Time appears as the external unfolding of that differentiability into a discrete sequence, thus the becoming real of the dimensions of space through the difference of time. The curious but inevitable outcome of the deductive sequence is that temporality and even more the categories of movement and mass very much depend on spatial terms and concepts; especially the geometric elements of point, line, plane, and depth serve as explanatory analogies (cf. 12–34). Conversely, arguing from the standpoint of consciousness and thus departing from temporality, the *Phenomenology* usually proceeds in the opposite order, from time to space, as is evident in the
The dialectic entwinement of space and time is yet another point that Derrida develops with explicit recourse first to Husserl and then, at a later point, to Hegel. Some even think this problematic marks the very center of Derrida’s thinking. In a nutshell, Derrida argues that the passage of time, and specifically retention, depends on “spacing” or espacement, “writing” being the chief metaphor for this translation of time into space, while the simultaneity of space—“the with of spatial coexistence”—must be realized through “temporalization,” through a differentiation that happens in time. See Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 86: “the temporalization of sense is, from the outset, a ‘spacing’ [espacement] […] Space is ‘in’ time; it is time’s pure leaving-itself; it is the outside-itself as the self-relation of time.” Though this quote immediately concerns Husserl, it would be hard to miss the Hegelian phraseology obtaining in the second sentence. Derrida’s most explicit recourse to the Hegelian dialectic between time and space happens here: “Conversely, the space of possible coexistence, precisely that which one believes is known by the name of space, the possibility of coexistence, is the space of the impossible coexistence. In effect, simultaneity can appear as such, can be simultaneity, that is, a relating of two points, only in a synthesis, a complicity: temporally. One cannot say that a point is with another point […] without a temporalization. The with of spatial coexistence arises only out of the with of temporalization. As Hegel shows” (Derrida 1982, 55). However, Derrida then goes on to complicate the seeming simplicity of the dialectic between time and space in discussing the “with” or “together” of space. Hägglund, *Radical Atheism* regards espacement as the “key word in Derrida’s work” in that it is a “shorthand for the coimplication of temporalization and spatialization” (72), viz., a “shorthand for the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space” (2). This “coimplication” is effectuated, Hägglund argues (72–73), by the paradoxical operation that Derrida calls writing or, more precisely, “arche-writing.” Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* has noted the eminent “debt to Hegel” into which Derrida entered with this term, because with it Derrida “takes in [recueil] […] Hegelian negativity” (140–41)—thus mobilizing, I would add, the very motor of the dialectic between time and space.

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66 The definition is speculative in that it seeks to incorporate all of the previous moves while at the same time replacing them by a more reflected and sophisticated notion. In other words, the definition announces the first Aufhebung of natural consciousness.


68 Purpus, *Die Dialektik der Wahrnehmung bei Hegel*, esp. 32–35. Unfortunately, the quotations provided by the philologist Purpus—who claims “Alexandriner Hegels zu sein” (17)—are often corrupted and truncated. Additionally, the volume and page numbers referring to the first edition of the so-called “Freundesausgabe” are usually inaccurate.
Hegel, *Werke*, 18: 308. The Jena Philosophy of Nature of 1805 also mentions Zeno as the first one to have “articulated the dialectic” that connects the “here” and “now” especially in the case of a location or a “place” [Ort] (Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 8: 15–16).

For example, Seymour Chatman defines and employs the term “story” more or less in the former sense: as the simultaneous content or mythos of a narrative; cf. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1978), esp. 26. Mieke Bal, on the other hand, employs “story” in the latter sense: as the historical discursive form by which a narratives unfolds; cf. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), esp. 7–8. Naturally, the term “narrative” carries precisely the same ambiguity as “story,” in that it is also used to designate two aspects at once: the story as a whole, the simultaneous totality of signified events, and the very discursive form and process by which this totality is signified. As I noted in the Introduction, Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 3–36 proposed a synthetic concept of story, that is to say, a dynamic, generative notion of plot that cuts across the purely analytic distinction between discursive form and signified content of a story.

Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 10.2: 830; note also § 81 in the 1830 *Enzyklopädie*, as well as the following passage from the first Preface to the *Wissenschaft der Logik*, where Hegel provides perhaps the best summary of his dialectical method: “Der Verstand bestimmt und hält die Bestimmungen fest; die Vernunft ist negativ und dialektisch, weil sie die Bestimmungen des Verstands in nichts auflöst; sie ist positiv, weil sie das *Allgemeine* erzeugt und das Besondere darin begreift. Wie der Verstand als etwas Getrenntes von der Vernunft überhaupt, so pflegt auch die dialektische Vernunft als etwas Getrenntes von der positiven Vernunft genommen zu werden. Aber in ihrer Wahrheit ist die Vernunft Geist, der höher als beides, verständige Vernunft oder vernünftiger Verstand ist. Er ist das Negative, welches die Qualität sowohl der dialektischen Vernunft als des Verstandes ausmacht; – er negiert das Einfache, so setzt er den bestimmten Unterschied des Verstandes; er löst ihn ebensosehr auf, so ist er dialektisch. Er hält sich aber nicht im Nichts dieses Resultates, sondern ist darin ebenso positiv und hat so das erste Einfache damit hergestellt, aber als Allgemeines, das in sich konkret ist; unter dieses wird nicht ein gegebenes Besonderes subsumiert, sondern in jenem Bestimmen und in der Auflösung desselben hat sich das Besondere schon mit bestimmt. Diese geistige Bewegung, die sich in ihrer Einfachheit ihre Bestimmtheit und in dieser ihre Gleichheit mit sich selbst gibt, die somit die immanente Entwicklung des Begriffes ist, ist die absolute Methode des Erkennens und zugleich die immanente Seele des Inhalts selbst” (Hegel, *Werke*, 5: 16–17).

See Kaufmann, *Hegel*, 168: “Fichte introduced into German philosophy the three-step of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, using these three terms. Schelling took up this terminology; Hegel did not. He never once used these three terms together to designate three stages in an argument or account in any of his books. […] they impede any open-minded comprehension of what he does by forcing it into a schema which was available to him and which he deliberately spurned.” Clearly, Hegel’s dialectic does not boil down to a ready-made three-step “method of discovery,” as Kaufmann remarks; instead, it describes a complex “method of exposition” that “emphasizes
development through conflict” (175). One might add to Kaufmann’s remark that this conflictual nature of the dialectic is another reason why the textbook schema does not hold true, for it supposes a step-by-step linearity that is incompatible with a truly Hegelian dialectic. The three-step logic of thesis, antithesis, synthesis announces a mechanical sequence. Yet to conceive a dialectic as an interdependent opposition and more precisely as the “confusion and dynamization” of seemingly clear distinctions, as Hegel does (cf. my n. 71), undermines any seamless linearity. It would be quite impossible to tell which relata assumes logical or temporal supremacy, which one would represents the thesis and which the antithesis. Accordingly, the presumption of a linear progression, from thesis via antithesis to synthesis, does not capture the temporal circularity and logical recursivity of a Hegelian dialectic. The discussion below, on Hegel’s key terms of object perception, will further clarify and expand on this important point.

73 Houlgate, Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit,’ 26 points out that “strictly speaking, […] no shape of consciousness turns directly into the following shape,” and I believe rightly so, since these transformations never occur in a diegetic scenes. It is therefore the reader, Houlgate goes on, who “effect[s]” these sublations—yet he does so not randomly, one should perhaps add, but on the basis of narratorial remarks that connect the individual chapters teleologically, for example, at the beginning of the chapter on perception.


75 Evidently, the transition from sense-certainty to perception corresponds in principle to the transition from being to essence in the Wissenschaft der Logik. But whereas the Phenomenology simply presupposes “die bunte Szenerie des raumzeitlichen Mannigfaltigen,” as Koch “Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung,” 145 observes, the Logic first has to deduce these logical determinations of being and simultaneously prove their reality by way of a most tedious argument. Further, Koch continues, the perception chapter presupposes the main categories of reflection (reflection-in-itself, reflection-in-other, difference, and identity), which are the offspring of a no less intricate deduction in the second book of the Logic.

76 Hegel, Werke, 6: 47. Hegel’s account of perception as differentiation is echoed by Niklas Luhmann, Die Kunst der Gesellschaft (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 13–91. Drawing on a host of behaviorist and constructivist sources, Luhmann here defines perception similarly as a process of differentiation or, in his word, as the “Aktalisierung von Unterscheidungen (oder ‘Formen’)” (27). While the immediate “distinctions” [Unterscheidungen] through perception—which, being at first merely intrapsychic events, remain at first somewhat weak according to Luhmann—are partly influenced by language, the act of communication that “observes” the perceived distinctions, that is, their explicit articulation to others or just to one’s self, turns them into what Luhmann describes as “form.” “Form” designates, roughly, the selection of one or multiple distinctions from a given “medium.” Primary media may be, for example, light and air, sound, letters, or the most fundamental social medium there is for Luhmann: “meaning” [Sinn], but also more abstract media like genre or literary tropes.
Although Luhmann frequently refers to Hegel when conceptualizing difference and distinction (see 43 n. 44, 52, 56 n. 71, 72–73), he never makes mention of the perception chapter of the *Phenomenology*, wherein Hegel’s reflexive conception of difference emerges for the first time. Difference here displays a double nature: it take the shape of an external difference that is defined through opposition to something else (reflection-in-other), while difference also subsists internally as a reflection-in-itself that unifies and coordinates various elements. The *Wissenschaft der Logik* expounds this intricate dialectic pair. Hegel here declares difference—together with identity, which is nothing other than an internal difference or reflection-in-itself—to be the very fundament of his system: “[Der Unterschied ist das Ganze und sein eigenes Moment, wie die Identität ebensosehr ihr Ganzes und ihr Moment ist. – Dies ist als die wesentliche Natur der Reflexion und als bestimmter Urgrund aller Tätigkeit und Selbstbewegung zu betrachten” (Hegel, *Werke*, 6: 47). In light of this dictum, as well as related claims in the *Phenomenology* highlighting the necessity of “oppositional doubling”, it is puzzling that Luhmann—whose “systems theory” is often associated with Hegel’s system—only sees Hegel as attempting to undo the paradox of difference so as to arrive at some originary and undifferentiated “Unmittelbarkeit des Weltverhältnisses” (*Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, 73). This charge greatly oversimplifies Hegel’s ideas of both origin and immediacy, as well as the Hegelian doctrine that in what at first seems a purely immediate unity, “original” being, difference is already operative, and hence mediation (cf. Hegel, *Werke*, 6: 65–79, esp. 65–67). Surprisingly, Luhmann seems aware of this complex, because earlier on he noted that, according to Hegel, “im Rückblick sich für das Denken alle Unmittelbarkeit als vermittelt darstellt” (*Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, 43 n. 44), and so in a way undermines his later charge that Hegel ignores the paradox of difference. No doubt, Hegel was keenly aware of both the critical import of difference and the contradictory recursivity that is inherent to it: “Der Unterschied überhaupt ist schon der Widerspruch an sich; denn er ist die Einheit von solchen, die nur sind, insofern sie nicht eins sind, – und die Trennung solcher, die nur sind als in derselben Beziehung getrennte” (Hegel, *Werke*, 6: 65).

Notes to Part One – Hegel

77 Stern, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 62–71, 83–84 is a representative and current example of the pervasive tendency in Hegel criticism to understand One and Also basically as a version of the unity/plurality crux. I indicate further below (my fn. 88) the conflict between his explication of One and Also and mine. Westphal, *Hegel, Hume und die Identität wahrnehmbarer Dinge* was to my knowledge the first commentator to systematically explain the critical import of the concepts of diachronic and synchronic identity with regard to the perception chapter of the *Phenomenology*, and my own explication of the perception develops themes from his study.

78 As to the conflation of epistemological and ontological categories in Hegel, see Westphal, “Hegel and Hume on Perception,” esp. 112: “Hegel's epistemology is distinguished from the skeptical tradition, as well as from the skeptical underpinnings of modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant and his successors, precisely by his attempt to show that our basic conceptual categories are not only subjectively but also objectively valid—‘objectively valid’ in the sense that they hold of things which exist and have characteristics regardless of what we say or think about them—even though we construct these conceptions *a priori.*” Westphal terms this philosophical standpoint a “concept-pragmatism.”

79 I hesitate to refer to One and Also as concepts. From the viewpoint of the phenomenologist, One and Also of course represent rudimentary concepts—“thoughts” [Gedanken] upon which perception has unwittingly stumbled, as Hegel says right at the beginning of the third chapter (PdG 107). However, *during* the experience of perception, they are practical operations rather than conceptual reflections. One might therefore call these terms concepts *at work*—perceptible “thoughts” which are not yet fully understood as supersensible, logical structures. This happens, of course, in the following chapter, where consciousness enters the supersensible sphere of the understanding (*Verstand*).


81 It is possible to translate the formula *sich selbst gleich* with “selfsame” and *Sichselbstgleichheit* as “selfsameness” as some translators have chosen to do. However, since selfsame, unlike identical, “always implies that what is referred to is one thing and not two or more distinct things,” as the *New Oxford American Dictionary* dictates, I opt for “self-identical.” For according to the quote, the Also of thinghood encompasses not only one but multiple and various attributes.

82 Cf. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, ed. Mary J. Norton and David Fate Norton, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I: 125–26 (I.4.2.2). Hegel’s novel conception of substance as a complex subject of relations may have had Hume’s rejection of the category of substance as a self-imposed “fiction” in its sights. Westphal, *Hegel, Hume und die Identität wahrnehmbarer Dinge* documents the surprising parallels between Hume and Hegel, but also where they depart from each other. This is mainly on the question whether the perceptual object cohere in reality as a permanent substance, as Hegel holds, or only in fiction, as Hume holds. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 126–27 also regards Hegel’s perception chapter as a repudiation.
of “associationism of any kind,” specifically of the empiricist (Locke, Berkley) and rationalist (Leibniz) kind.

83 The *Wissenschaft der Logik* reproduces the view that the One, the “moment of negation” and “negative unity,” pertains to both aspects of the thing, the microscopic level of individual properties and the macroscopic level of the thing as one distinct unit. Here, too, the thing is considered a One insofar as its individual properties are the contrastive result of an “external reflection” or a “negative relation.” Simultaneously, the thing represents a One insofar as it gathers multiple properties in one and the same place or “point.” In other words, as a specific Also-concatenation the thing is “wesentlich auch als negative Einheit bestimmt,” namely as the “Punktualität des Dinges.” Cf. *Werke*, 6: 139–47.

84 Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext*, 95–156 highlights the reciprocity of the dialectic between substance and subject, specifically the “Substanzcharakter des Subjekts” (96). In the *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Henrich argues, this problematic figures as the strange relation between purely immediate being (*Sein*) on the one hand and appearing essence (*Wesen*) on the other. Although based on reflection and hence differentiation and negativity, essence is nevertheless said to have “immediate” existence by the end, thus attaining once again self-identical being or substantiality.

85 I find support for my terminological choice in A.F. Koch’s lectures on “Hegel’s Science of Logic” at Emroy University (Spring 2009). In his manuscript, he describes the consciousness that is operative in the *Phenomenology* as a “computing device” (13), more specifically as an “input/output device for categorical forms” (16). Koch, *Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung*, 135–39 similarly explains consciousness as a computing device.

86 Indeed, the recursive and therefore inseparable relation between One and Also illustrates that “the structure of things is fundamentally holistic,” as Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), vii summarizes Hegel’s conception of thinghood, so that “concrete objects […] cannot be treated as compounds of more fundamental atomistic entities, and […] have a unity which is not properly analysable into a plurality of self-subsistent and externally related parts.” Unfortunately, Stern only glosses the chapters on sense-certainty and perception in this study (cf. 44–45), because they represent, on his account, “incoherent” (45) standpoints.


88 In light of my explications, it seems wrong to identify that principle which Hegel calls the Also of thinghood as an “individual” or as “the concept of a particular” that is made up of a “bundle of universals [viz. properties],” as Stern, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 63, 65 does. In a paradigmatic yet misleading fashion Stern thus reduces the Hegelian Also to a form of plurality (cf. 62–71, 83–84). Yet on my account, the Also of thinghood represents not merely numeric “plurality” and also signifies the exact opposite to particularity, namely the principle of universality. This is so because the Also designates primarily the self-identical and universal
“medium” wherein the properties—which are in fact the synthetic result of both operations, One and Also, and therefore no subclass of the Also (cf. PdG 96: “die vielen Eigenschaften selbst, die Beziehung der zwei ersten Momente”)—behave as indifferent and indeterminate to one another. Since Stern ascribes the specificity and particularity of the object to the Also, he necessarily renders that principle which Hegel terms the One simply as “a unified substance or substratum over and above its properties” (64) that cannot be properly “differentiate[d]” (86) from other unified substances, hence as the moment of universality. However, on my account Hegel makes it quite clear—and Stern even quotes the passage—that the One signifies above all the moment of negation that determines by means of exclusion and opposition the particularity of the thing. Instead of representing a unified substance, as Stern would have it, the One thus puts difference and negativity into operation. One reason for this strange inversion may be that Stern deliberately neglects the “mutual dependency” (65) or the dialectic between these terms. Instead, he interprets Also and One as two alternative and unrelated conceptions of thinghood. At any rate, in writing, at the end of the second chapter, that perception gave rise to “die Gedanken von jener Allgemeinheit und Einzelheit, vom Auch und Eins” (PdG 106) Hegel clearly signals that the Also represents the universal nature of thinghood as such, while the excluding oneness determines its particularity.

89 Note, for example, the following expressions: “das Ding von vielen Eigenschaften” (PdG 94) or “eine unterschiedene, bestimmte Eigenschaft” (PdG 94), all of which precede the explicit definition of a property (PdG 96).

90 See the following passage from Hegel’s philosophy classes taught at Nürnberg: “Die kantschen Antinomien sind im Normativ angegeben, in Rücksicht auf Kosmologie; sie enthalten eine tief Grundlage über das Antinomische der Vernunft, aber diese Grundlage liegt zu verborgen, und – so zu sagen – gedankenlos und zu wenig in ihrer Wahrheit erkannt in ihnen” (Hegel, Gesammelte Werke, 10.2: 831). Koch, “Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung,” 151–52 arrives at the same conclusion, arguing that the contradiction of perception anticipates the later experience of reason in the Phenomenology: “Der Gegenstand als die absolute Negation seiner selbst ist demnach der eigentümliche Gegenstand des Verstandes. Das ist eine verblüffende und verblüffend starke These. Denn ihr Zufolge ist der Widerspruch und ist die Antinomie dem diskursiven Denken nicht äußerlich als eine zwar stets drohende, aber stets auch zu vermeidende Störung, sondern vielmehr sein Kern und Zentrum. Der Diskurs als solcher ist widerspruchsvoll, und ebendies macht die unbedingte und absolute Allgemeinheit seines Gegenstandes aus.” However, Koch does not quote the aforementioned passage.

91 It would be plausible to understand Kant’s third relational category of “Gemeinschaft (Wechselwirkung zwischen dem Handelnden und Leidenden)” (KrV B 106 / A 80) as a conceptual answer to the two main problems Hegel is dealing with in the perception chapter. And indeed, in the Wissenschaft der Logik, Hegel invokes precisely the category of Wechselwirkung to reconcile a thing with its properties: “Diese mehreren verschiedenen Dinge stehen in wesentlicher Wechselwirkung durch ihre Eigenschaften; die Eigenschaft ist diese Wechselbeziehung selbst, und das Ding ist nichts außer derselben” (Hegel, Werke, 137). However, Hegel makes here no
attempt whatsoever to relate his definition to Kant, so that my following extrapolation establishes only a speculative link between Kant and Hegel. Far from having no true significance, as some have claimed, or being just a concealed form of causation, as others have claimed, the Kantian category of Wechselwirkung would seem to resolve precisely the tension between simultaneity and diachronicity on the one hand and the contradiction between One and Also on the other; it would seem to terminate these recursive loops. This suggestion may be clarified by considering the “Third Analogy of Experience,” where Kant attempts to proof the objective, experiential validity of the category of Wechselwirkung. The first half of Kant’s proof maintains that the tension between spatial simultaneity—the “coexistence” [Zugleichsein] of objects in space—and their necessarily sequential apprehension is mediated by the concept of reciprocity: “Zugleich sind Dinge, wenn in der empirischen Anschauung die Wahrnehmung des einen auf die Wahrnehmung des anderen wechselseitig folgen kann (welches in der Zeitfolge der Erscheinungen, wie beim zweiten Grundsätze [concerning causation] gezeigt worden, nicht geschehen kann). So kann ich meine Wahrnehmung zuerst am Monde, und nachher an der Erde, oder auch umgekehrt zuerst an der Erde und dann am Monde anstellen, und darum, weil die Wahrnehmungen dieser Gegenstände einander wechselseitig folgen können, sage ich, sie existieren zugleich. Nun ist das Zugleichsein die Existenz des Mannigfaltigen in derselben Zeit. Man kann aber die Zeit selbst nicht wahrnehmen, um daraus, daß Dinge in derselben Zeit gesetzt sein, abzunehmen, daß die Wahrnehmungen derselben einander wechselseitig folgen können. […] Folglich wird ein Verstandesbegriff von der wechselseitigen Folge der Bestimmungen dieser außer einander zugleich existierenden Dinge erforderlich, um zu sagen, daß die wechselseitige Folge der Wahrnehmungen im Objekte gegründet sei, und das Zugleichsein dadurch als objektiv vorzustellen.” (KrV 256–57). In that sense, we know that two objects exist simultaneously precisely because the perceptual sequence, the diachronic order in which they are perceived, can be reversed with the same result; which means in turn that they do not stand in a relationship of cause and effect, viz. necessary succession. On Kant’s account, therefore, the mutual ground of simultaneity and diachronicity would be precisely their reciprocity. The second half of Kant’s proof indicates why the category of reciprocity solves the contradiction between the One and the Also of the perceptual object: “Nun ist aber das Verhältnis der Substanzen, in welchem die eine Bestimmungen enthält, wovon der Grund in der anderen enthalten ist, das Verhältnis des Einflusses, und, wenn wechselseitig dieses den Grund der Bestimmungen in dem anderen enthält, das Verhältnis der Gemeinschaft oder Wechselwirkung. Also kann das Zugleichsein der Substanzen im Raume nicht anders in der Erfahrung erkannt werden, als unter Voraussetzung einer Wechselwirkung derselben untereinander; diese ist also auch die Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Dinge selbst als Gegenstände der Erfahrung” (KrV 257–58). Importantly, this type of interaction establishes that the determining ground cannot be ascribed to one single element—in contrast to a causal relationship, wherein the cause (the antecedent) is the determining ground of the effect (the following result). In conceiving the interaction between two elements as a simultaneous “relationship of influence” rather than of successive causation, they share a mutual ground and therefore form a “eine reale Gemeinschaft (commercium) der Substanzen” (KrV A 214 / B 261). This notion of Wechselwirkung, wherein both elements are
equally primordial since each of them serves as the determining ground of the other, would consequently avoid the logical contradiction between One and Also, as they would be both grounds—at the same time (zugleich).

92 In full, the first scenography of perception reads: “Der Gegenstand, den ich aufnehme, bietet sich als rein Einer dar; auch werde ich die Eigenschaft an ihm gewahr, die allgemein ist, dadurch aber über die Einzelheit hinausgeht. Das erste Sein des gegenständlichen Wesens als eines Einen war also nicht sein wahres Sein; da er das Wahre ist, fällt die Unwahrheit in mich, und das Auffassen war nicht richtig. Ich muß um der Allgemeinheit der Eigenschaft willen das gegenständliche Wesen vielmehr als eine Gemeinschaft überhaupt nehmen. Ich nehme nun ferner die Eigenschaft wahr als bestimmte, Anderem entgegengesetzte und es ausschließende. Ich füße das gegenständliche Wesen also in der Tat nicht richtig auf, als ich es als eine Gemeinschaft mit anderen oder als die Kontinuität bestimmte, und muß vielmehr um der Bestimmtheit der Eigenschaft willen die Kontinuität trennen und es als ausschließendes Eins setzen. An dem getrennten Eins finde ich viele solche Eigenschaften, die einander nicht affizieren, sondern gleichgültig gegeneinander sind; ich nahm den Gegenstand also nicht richtig wahr, als ich ihn als ein Ausschließendes auffäßte, sondern er ist, wie vorhin nur Kontinuität überhaupt, so jetzt ein allgemeines gemeinschaftliches Medium, worin viele Eigenschaften als sinnliche Allgemeinheiten, jede für sich ist und als bestimmte die anderen ausschließt. Das Einfache und Wahre, das ich wahrnehme, ist aber hiermit auch nicht ein allgemeines Medium, sondern die einzelne Eigenschaft für sich, die aber so weder Eigenschaft noch ein bestimmtes Sein ist; denn sie ist nun weder an einem Eins noch in Beziehung auf andere. Eigenschaft ist sie aber nur am Eins und bestimmt nur in Beziehung auf andere. Sie bleibt als dies reine Sichaufsichselbstbeziehen nur sinnliches Sein überhaupt, da sie den Charakter der Negativität nicht mehr an ihr hat; und das Bewußtsein, für welches jetzt ein sinnliches Sein ist, ist nur ein Meinen, d. h. es ist aus dem Wahrnehmen ganz heraus und in sich zurückgegangen. Allein das sinnliche Sein und Meinen geht selbst in das Wahrnehmen über; ich bin zu dem Anfang zurückgeworfen und wieder in denselben, sich in jedem Momente und als Ganzes aufhebenden Kreislauf hineingerissen” (PdG 97–98).


94 Cf. the famous passage in the Prolegomena where Kant qualifies his “so-called idealism” as a “critical” idealism (Kant, Werke, 5: 254).

95 Kant includes “inherence and subsistence (substance and accident)” into the table of categories (KrV A 80). The Third Critique identifies “substance” likewise as one of the “pure concepts of the understanding” [reine Verstandesbegriffe] (Werke, 10: B XXIX). While this constructivist angle renders the skeptical doubts of empiricism invalid with regard to the self-identity of the thing in experience, the ontological or noumenal nature of the thing is nonetheless open to the same skepticism: The permanent identity of thinghood, that is, its substantiality, may still be a fanciful human invention—a fictional category, indeed, that we impose on “a heap or collection...
of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos’d, tho’ falsely, to be endow’d with a perfect simplicity and identity,” as Hume claims in his *Treatise*, I: 137 (I.4.2.39).


However, since Frank criticizes, much like Henrich (cf. my n. Error! Bookmark not defined.), the reflexive theory of consciousness that dominates the Idealist tradition and several newer attempts in the philosophy of mind, such as “self-representationalism” (cf. 7–27), he would naturally object to Hegel’s reliance on “reflection” with regard to object perception. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 132 emphasizes the close proximity between Hegel and Kant with regard to apperception: “Kant, as we saw, argued that for anything to count as a representation of mine, I must be self-consciously representing such an object, implicitly taking myself to be representing thusly. […] Hegel, in a similar way, has tried to show that, for an object to count as an object of my experience, I must be able to attend to it, differentiate it as that object. […] They both assume, that is, that the results of any natural or causal relation between an object and a sensory episode in me could not count as my representing the object unless I take myself to be representing that object [my emphasis], unless the object is ‘for me’ the object of my representing activity, and this self-conscious activity requires an account of its conditions.” Note also the lemma “Apperzeption” in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, which highlights specifically Leibniz’s conception. Leibniz is here said to have introduced “das Wort ›A[pperzeption]‹ im mehrdeutigen Sinne von Selbstbewußtsein, Ich und Person in die Philosophie.” This lemma also quotes a marginalia by Kant, which reads “Sich einer Vorstellung bewust seyn, ist, wißen, daß man diese Vorstellung hat; d.h.: diese Vorstellung von den andern unterscheiden.” KrV B 93 is even more plainspoken, in that Kant here equates self-consciousness and apperception: “Das Bewußtsein seiner selbst (Apperzeption).”

Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 8: 194–95
Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 8: 186. Hegel uses more strong imagery to describe this inner “treasury,” the pitch-dark stage whereon all sensuous intuitions (*Anschauungen*) appear. He calls it in the same context the “empty nothing” [diß leere Nichts] (187) of pure subjecthood and the “night of preservation” [*Nacht der Aufbewahrung*] (186, fn.2). This night, which contains in principle an “infinite wealth of different images,” is in fact a terrifying space of absence, thus showing the primordial “night of the world”: “Der Mensch ist diese Nacht, diß leere Nichts, das alles in ihrer Einfachheit enthält – ein Reichthum unendlich vieler Vorstellungen, Bilder, deren keines ihm gerade einfällt –, oder die nicht als gegenwärtige sind. Diß die Nacht, das Innre der Natur, das hier existirt – reines Selbst, – in phantasmagorischen Vorstellungen ist es rings um Nacht, hier schießt dann ein blutig Kopf, – dort eine andere weis se Gestalt plötzlich hervor, und verschwinden ebenso – Diese Nacht erblickt man wenn man dem Menschen ins Auge blickt – in eine Nacht hinein, die furchtbar wird, – es hängt die Nacht der Welt hier einem entgegen.”

Conspicuously, the “phantasmagorical” images summoned by Hegel’s description resemble the drastic effects of contemporary magic lantern spectacles, which served around 1800 as popular entertainment. Johann Georg Schröpfer (1738–1774), a pioneer of the field, and Etienne-Gaspard Robert (1736–1837), a contemporary of Hegel and the inventor of what became known as “phantasmagoria” (moving ghostly apparitions projected on fumes), are names that come to mind in this context. Friedrich Kittler has demonstrated, in several publications of the nineties (such as “Die Laterna magica der Literatur: Schillers und Hoffmanns Medienstrategien,” *Athenäum: Jahrbuch der Friedrich Schlegel-Gesellschaft* 4 [1994]: 219–37) and in his lectures on optical media (*Optische Medien: Berliner Vorlesung 1999* [Berlin: Merve, 2002]), the deep fascination of Romantic writers with optical media and the magic lantern in particular. It should be noted that Kittler counts also philosophers among Romantic writers: “Auch der deutsche Idealismus ist der Geschichte der optischen Medien entsprungen” (*Optische Medien*, 123). Stefan Andriopoulos has taken up precisely that cue; cf. *Ghostly Apparitions: German Idealism, the Gothic Novel, and Optical Media* (New York: Zone Books, 2013), 16 n. 22. In line with Kittler but “more nuanced” (13), Andriopoulos details in his study “the various surreptitious or overt adaptions of the ghostly and the magic lantern in the work of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer” (15). With regard to Hegel (cf. 10–11, 15–16, 60–71), Andriopoulos argues that the quoted passage from the Jena Philosophy of Spirit is “Hegel’s only conspicuous reference to the magic lantern and the visual medium of the phantasmagoria” (67), whereas the end of the *Phenomenology*, which describes the history of spirit as a “gallery of images,” is a concealed emulation of the magic lantern, yet “without naming it” (69). However, whether “the conclusion of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* abandons ‘the labor of the concept’” because it alludes to the optical effects of the magic lantern, as Andriopoulos thinks (69), remains I believe an open question. The fact that Hegel’s philosophy is suffused with the period-specific fascination for optical media—the ideology and metaphorology that comes with it—does not automatically devalue its philosophical content.

Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, 8: 187. With regard to this quote, one cannot but reprove Hegel’s shamelessly ignorant representation of associationism. Westphal, it has been noted, claims a direct genetic influence of Hume on the perception chapter. Supposing that Hegel “reached his results [in the perception chapter of the *Phenomenology*] through an exacting reconsideration of a
crucial section from Hume's *Treatise*” (“Hegel and Hume on Perception,” 123), the ignorance of the above passage—written down roughly a year earlier—appears even more striking. If Hegel was indeed that closely acquainted with Hume, one would perhaps expect more accuracy and detail in a place that invokes the key terms of associationism. Unfortunately, Westphal does not discuss this important passage from the Jena Philosophy of Spirit.

101 Cf. Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 67–79, concerning “subjective vision,” and 97–102, concerning the temporalization of vision as described by Goethe, Schelling, Herbart. In the latter passage, Crary cites also Hegel as a protagonist partaking in the discourse about “subjective vision.” While this assessment can be supported, for instance, with the Jena Philosophy of Spirit, as we have seen, the phrase Crary picked from the preface of the *Phenomenology* to prove Hegel’s discursive involvement is not a very convincing choice. Unless you cite it in J.B. Baillie’s translation, as Crary does, it is very hard to see how the quoted phrase—“Dagegen muß behauptet werden, daß die Wahrheit nicht eine ausgeprägte Münze ist, die fertig gegeben und so eingestrichen werden kann” (PdG 40)—would be “referring to the Lockean notion of ideas ‘imprinting’ themselves on passive minds” and so “implicitly refute[] the model of the camera obscura” (*Techniques of the Observer*, 99), a model which Crary ascribes not only to the Cartesian but also to the Empiricist tradition, Locke in particular (41–42).

102 The activist tendency of Fichte and the Jena Romantics with regard to sense perception, of which Crary is unaware, can be shown easily. In multiple passages of Fichte’s at the time popular treatise *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1799), Fichte argues that external perception emanates not from the objects themselves but in truth from productive acts of cognition. It is the “inner force” [innere Kraft] of subjectivity, *das Ich*, Fichte writes, which projects the object outward, thus establishing its reality as well as its externality: “Du bist zur wahren Quelle der Vorstellungen von Dingen ausser dir hindurchgedrungen. Diese Vorstellung ist nicht Wahrnehmung, du nimmst nur dich selbst wahr; sie ist ebensowenig Gedanke; die Dinge erscheinen dir nicht, als ein bloss gedachtes. Sie ist wirklich, und in der That absolut unmittelbares Bewusstseyn eines Seyns ausser dir […] – Lass dich nicht durch Sophisten und Halbphilosophen übertäuben: die Dinge erscheinen dir nicht durch einen Repräsentanten des Dinges […] und es giebt kein anderes Ding, als das, dessen du dir bewusst wirst. Du selbst bist dieses Ding; du selbst bist durch den inneren Grund deines Wesens, deine Endlichkeit, vor dich selbst hingestellt, und aus dir selbst herausgeworfen; und alles, was du ausser dir erblickst, bist immer du selbst. Man hat dieses Bewusstseyn sehr passend Anschauung genannt. In allem Bewusstseyn schaue ich mich selbst an […] In dieser Rücksicht ist dieses Bewusstseyn – ein thätiges Hinschauen, dessen, was ich anschaeue; ein Herausschauen meiner selbst aus mir selbst: Heraustragen meiner selbst aus mir selbst durch die einige Weise des Handelns, die mir zukommt, durch das Schauen” (*Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte, 8 vols. [Berlin: Veit und Comp, 1845], 2: 228–29). Fragments by Novalis, to cite a representative Jena Romantic, portray visual perception similarly as a productive activity, as my next chapter will show. For the time being, note N II: 123 #301 as one striking example: “Gefühl ist – passive Thätigkeit. Ansch[auung] – active Thätigkeit,” and shortly thereafter
Notes to Part One – Hegel

(#302): “Wahr – Derivation von währen – Wahrnehmen – beharrlich ergreifen. /Nehmen – ist active Rezeptivität.” Novalis notes this down in the papers known as Fichte-Studien, which in light of the preceding Fichte quote makes even more sense. Similarly, Friedrich Schlegel argues in his Philosophische Vorlesungen held at the University of Cologne between 1804 and 1806—hence, just the while Hegel was lecturing on the Philosophy of Spirit at Jena—that the “image” [Bild] of an object is “eine Hervorbringung des Ichs, ein erster Schritt zur Freiheit” (Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, 12: 344).

103 Hegel, Gesammelte Werke, 8: 188.

104 Hegel’s account of vision in the Jena Philosophy partly resonates with Schiller’s Ästhetische Erziehung. Schiller claims in the 26th letter that visual and aural objects rest on “a form that we [perceivers] create”: “In dem Auge und dem Ohr ist die andringende Materie schon hinweggewälzt von den Sinnen, und das Objekt entfernt sich von uns, das wir in den tierischen Sinnen unmittelbar berühren. Was wir durch das Auge sehen, ist von dem verschieden, was wir empfinden; denn der Verstand springt über das Licht hinaus zu den Gegenständen. […] der Gegenstand des Auges und des Ohrs ist eine Form, die wir erzeugen” (Sämtliche Werke, V: 657). But unlike Hegel, Schiller ascribes this moment of form-giving only to visual and aural perception, not to the other three senses, which thus remain purely passive, a physiological “force to be endured” [eine Gewalt, die wir erleiden]. Clearly, this disjunction in Schiller represents the discursive shift from older passivist models of sense perception as affect to activist accounts. Welsh, Hirnhöhlenpoetiken, 139–53 details Schiller’s pivotal role with regard to this shift.

105 See Hegel, Gesammelte Werke, 8: 188–95 for this and the following citations.


107 Hegel, Gesammelte Werke, 8: 188. Interestingly, Friedrich Schlegel—this “merely critical” mind who only “thirsts for distinction” [Sucht nach Auszeichnung], as Hegel (Werke, 13: 92) characterizes his much despised enemy in the Ästhetik (though, that was a mutual feeling)—makes a similar point in the aforementioned Cologne lectures (fn. 102). Whereas the seen image, although a self-generated product, cannot fully overcome the “Herrschaft des äußern Gegenstandes” and therefore remains fundamentally unfree, “nur eine erste Annäherung zur Freiheit,” the word, Schlegel goes on, sets the subject free as it makes the image available to the will of the subject: “das Wort aber ist gleichsam die Bestätigung und Bekräftigung der im Bilde gewonnenen Freiheit. Es ist dem Menschen die Bestätigung, daß er bei der Anschauung doch nicht ganz der Tyranni der Dinge unterliege […] im Wort [wird] viel mehr Freiheit und Willkür ausgeübt […] und die Verallgemeinerung und Verbreitung der Bilder durch Worte [gibt] dem Ich immer mehr und mehr Spielraum und Freiheit” (Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, 12: 344). Thus for Schlegel, too, it is the name-giving power of the word that completes the creative transformation of received sensory data (the unfree material basis) into perceptions.

Philosophie nicht anders verstanden werden soll – bloss durch die Einbildungskraft hervorgebracht werde."

109 This is Fichte’s main argument in Die Bestimmung des Menschen. On his account, it is the “inner sense” of consciousness that determines our sensations and so truly produces them: “Sehen, Schmecken u. s. w sind ja nicht selbst wirkliche Empfindungen, denn ich sehe oder schmecke nie schlechweg, wie du schon vorhin bemerkt hast, sondern sehe immer roth oder grün u.s.w., schmecke immer süss oder bitter u.s.w. Sehen, Schmecken und dergleichen, sind nur höhere Bestimmungen wirklicher Empfindungen, sind Klassen, denen ich die letzteren, jedoch nicht willkürlich, sondern durch die unmittelbare Empfindung selbst geleitet, unterordne. Ich sehe sonach in ihnen überall keine äusseren Sinne, sondern nur besondere Bestimmungen des Objects, des inneren Sinnes, meiner Affectionen” (Fichte, Sämmtliche Werke, 2: 214–15). But if the “inner sense” is indeed the determining origin of sensations, reasons Fichte, their nature is “not at all extension” [schlechthin nichts Ausgedehntes] and their qualitative difference is not spatial but temporal: “Empfindungen, als Affectionen meiner selbst, sind schlechthin nichts Ausgedehntes, sondern ein Einfaches; und verschiedene sind nicht neben einander im Raume, sondern sie folgen nach einander in der Zeit” (211).

110 Hume, Treatise I: 145 (I.4.3.2).

111 Although making no direct reference to Hegel, the main argument that Donald Davidson develops in “Seeing Through Language” (Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, no. 42 [1997]: 15–28) perfectly encapsulates Hegel’s conception of objecthood and perception (which are “interwoven” according to Hegel) as resulting from reflection and articulation. Against the traditional dichotomy between percepts and concepts, Davidson holds, similar to Hegel, that there can be “no simple relation between the stimulus and the resulting thought” (23) because “the abilities to speak, perceive and think develop together, gradually” (27). Thus “[w]e perceive the world through language, that is, through having language” (27), and therefore “language is not an ordinary learned skill; it is, or has become, a mode of perception” (22). The prevalence of Hegelian themes in this article is astonishing, though not entirely surprising given that Davidson received the prestigious Hegel-Preis in 1991. For example, Davidson here argues against the widespread “scepticism about the power of language to capture what is real” (18). This corresponds to Hegel’s point in the sense-certainty chapter that language is has the “divine nature.” Moreover, Davidson’s final discussion of “ostension” and the critical “difference between belief and [objective] truth” (25–27) resonates with Hegel’s treatment of indexicals and the ambivalence of sensory intention (Meinung).

112 Pippin, Hegel’s Idealism, 139.

113 Hegel, Werke, 6: 255. Note also Hegel’s fragment “Zum Erkennen” (Gesammelte Werke, 12: 257–58), which was supposedly written down during Hegel’s tenure at the Bamberger Zeitung 1807/8, as the editors conjecture (328–31). This fragment similarly defines cognition as the reflection upon, and determination of, the inherent “Thätigkeit des Erkennens” (258).

Another famous passage from the Preface of the *Phenomenology* expresses the same point, the necessary entwinement of process and result: “Das Wahre ist das Ganze. Das Ganze aber ist nur das durch seine Entwicklung sich vollendende Wesen. Es ist von dem Absoluten zu sagen, daß es wesentlich *Resultat*, daß es erst am *Ende* das ist, was es in Wahrheit ist; und hierin eben besteht seine Natur, Wirkliches, Subjekt oder Sichselbstwerden zu sein” (PdG 24).


This is probably not exactly what Kant had in mind when he identified, in concluding the *First Critique*, “the history of pure reason” [*die Geschichte der reinen Vernunft*] as the “place” [*Stelle*] of the critical system that “remains to be filled out” [*künftig ausgefüllt werden muß*] (KrV A 852). But it would seem that Hegel has taken this particular appeal very seriously, not just in the *Phenomenology* but also, and probably more evidently so, in his historical works as well as in the *Rechtsphilosophie*. Here, Hegel narrates a historical progression (e.g., the history of art, religion, philosophy, the state) so as to unveil the historically specific stories—the concepts and ideas—underlying this progression.

Cf. PdG 584: “*Die Zeit ist der Begriff selbst, der da ist* und als leere Anschauung sich dem Bewußtsein vorstellt; deswegen erscheint der Geist notwendig in der Zeit, und er erscheint so lange in der Zeit, als er nicht seinen reinen Begriff *erfaßt*, d. h. nicht die Zeit tilgt. Sie ist das *äußere* angeschaut, vom Selbst *nicht erfaßte* reine Selbst, der nur angeschaut Begriff; indem dieser sich selbst erfaßt, hebt er seine Zeitform auf, begreift das Anschauen und ist begriffenes und begreifendes Anschauen.”

Cf. PdG 582: “Diese letzte Gestalt des Geistes, der Geist, der seinem vollständigen und wahren Inhalte zugleich die Form des Selbsts gibt und dadurch seinen Begriff ebenso realisiert, als er in dieser Realisierung in seinem Begriffe bleibt, ist das absolute Wissen; es ist der sich in Geistsgestalt wissende Geist oder das *begreifende Wissen*. Die *Wahrheit* ist nicht nuran *sich* vollkommen der Gewißheit gleich, sondern hat auch die *Gestalt* der Gewißheit seiner selbst.”

Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Cornell University Press, 1990), 10–15 defines the two main features of an “argumentative” textual discourse as follows: it is primarily driven by consequential reasoning and it does not generate an internal, diegetic temporal logic that diverts from its discursive presentation.
Notes to Part Two – Novalis

1 N II: 533 #331.

2 The context of the quoted phrase from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, for example, indicates the synonymity between *Dichten* and *Poesie*: “Es ist recht übel, sagte Klingsohr, daß die Poesie einen besondern Namen hat, und die Dichter eine besondere Zunft ausmachen. Es ist gar nichts besonderes. Es ist die eigenthümliche Handlungsweise des menschlichen Geistes. Dichtet und trachtet nicht jeder Mensch in jeder Minute?” (N I: 335). Klingsohr seems to refer here in the two ensuing sentences to *die Poesie* with the at first puzzling pronoun *es*—puzzling because of the pronoun’s ostensibly wrong gender. Yet the third sentence, “Dichtet und trachtet nicht jeder Mensch in jeder Minute?,” suggests that the neuter of the preceding pronoun derives in fact from *das Dichten*. It thus seems that this *es* refers in this passage not only to *die Poesie* but to *das Dichten* as well. With this example in mind, I believe a translation of both *Dichten* and *Poesie* as “poetry” is warranted whenever Novalis employs these terms to signify the poetic potential and activity of the mind. Alternatively, one might consider translating both *Dichten* and *Poesie* as “poesy,” which designates, according to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, the “art or composition of poetry.” Yet this old-fashioned word belongs to “fairy lands forlorn,” as Keats writes in the *Ode to a Nightingale*, which is why I will not use it.

3 Friedmar Apel, *Das Auge liest mit: Zur Visualität der Literatur* (München: Carl Hanser, 2010), esp. 9–31 points out the parallels between current neuro-scientific and Romantic conceptions of vision. These conceptions overlap, Apel maintains, in that each of them represents vision as a poetic activity, specifically as “ein ästhetischer, sowohl erzählformiger wie metaphörischer Prozeß” that takes places as a retrospective “Selektion und Kombination unter bestimmtem Orientierungsinteresse” (44). This thesis repeats in a nutshell what Apel presents as Novalis’s conception of vision (65–74).

4 To Fr. Schlegel on November 7, 1798: “Eins von den auffallenden Beyspielen unserer innern Symorganisation und Symevolution” (N I: 672). The example of coevolution Novalis singles out in this letter is that both friends recently came to think of “die Idee der Bibel […] als des Ideals jedweden Buchs” (N I: 673).

5 *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 18: 146 #279. The interplay between the first and the second half of this fragment alludes to the ambiguity of *wahrnehmen*. In the second half, “alles unser Empfinden, Fühlen, Wahrnehmen ist ein Dichten,” *Wahrnehmen* is used in the sense of “perception.” In the first half, “[a]lle Bilder d[er] Dichter sind buchstäblich wahr,” Schlegel asserts that the “images of the poets” are “literally true,” so that the reader—to continue the thought—would be indeed entitled to “take” these images to be “true.” This first half
consequently alludes to a second, literal meaning of wahr-nnehmen: “to take (something) to be true.” As mentioned before, Hegel exploits just that ambiguity of Wahrnehmen in the Phenomenology to expose its false promise. Perception here at first appears to be the direct apprehension, the immediate “taking-to-be-true” (Wahr-nnehmen) of external objects. What the philosophical observer learns, however, is that the apprehension of the external object is in fact “entwined” [verflochten] with “the movement of consciousness” [die Bewegung des Bewusstseins] (PdG 108).

6 Caroline Welsh connects Novalis’s mention of Chiffernschrift and Figuren to Soemmering’s model of the brain: “Dabei gilt es zunächst die These zu belegen, daß es sich hier [as concerns the term Chiffernschrift] um eine Variation jener bereits bei Soemmering dargestellten Wellen-Klangfiguren in der Hirnflüssigkeit der Hirnhöhlen handelt” (Hirnhöhnenpoetiken, 205). With these terms, however, Novalis alludes also to the ancient practice of discerning omens—or, indeed, hidden figures—in natural appearances, such as the interpretation of cloud formations or the behavioral pattern of birds as prophetic signs. This connection is evidenced by the fact that the apprentices attempt to discern figures also “in clouds” (N I: 200) and that they are instructed at a “temple” (N I: 231)—the institution with which the practice of reading omens is traditionally affiliated.

7 Utz, Das Auge und das Ohr im Text, 224


9 Apel, Das Auge liest mit: Zur Visualität der Literatur, 69. In contrast to Apel, who highlights the visual elements in the Lehrlinge, Utz regards it “eher als akustische Welt” (Das Auge und das Ohr im Text, 224).


11 Pedagogues of the time variously advise parents to train the senses of their children so as to enhance their sensory acuity. J. H. Campe, for example, proposed in 1785 various exercises to enhance the sense of seeing, hearing, and touching of infants; cf. Utz, Das Auge und das Ohr im Text, 186.

12 Cf. N II: 792 #251: “Sehn – hören, schmecken – tasten, riechen sind nur Zersplitterungen der allgemeinen Wahrnehmung.” Utz, Das Auge und das Ohr im Text, 195–212 describes synaesthesia—a widespread topos in Romantic texts—as a figuration that restores a lost totality through literary means, in that synaesthesia functions as a “sprachlicher Schmelztiegel” to blur the boundaries between the senses (201–2). Moreover, Utz observes that the Romantic fragment represents the counterpart of the utopian synesthetic unity, especially in the case of Novalis (213–
24). The form of the fragment reflects the fundamental impossibility to overcome the fragmentation of perception in reality. Wellmon, “Lyrical Feeling: Novalis’ Anthropology of the Senses,” identifies “feeling” as “the metonymic figure for individual senses” in Novalis and, therefore, as the sensory modality that underlies all synesthetic perceptions (468).


14 According to Hans Jürgen Balmes’s Kommentar (i.e. N III: 104–5), all of the aforementioned fragments were written roughly during the time that Novalis was working on the Lehrlinge. Note also N II: 335–39 passim, 374–75 #253, 535–36 #338, 708 #1075; all these fragments describe the perception of the artist in a similarly “magical” fashion.

15 Silvio Vietta, Ästhetik der Moderne: Literatur und Bild (München: W. Fink, 2001), 121–25 heralded this notion as the “Copernican turn” of modernist aesthetics, in that it replaces older mimetic paradigms with a “transcendental aesthetic of expression,” which leaves all empirical constrains behind.

16 N II: 377 #264: “/Sprache im eigentlichen Sinn ist, Function eines Werckzeugs als solchen. Jedes Werkzeug drückt, prägt die Idee seines Dirigenten, aus. / […] Das Werkzeug, was dem Geiste am willigsten dient, am leichtesten manichfacher Modificationen fähig ist, wird vorzüglich sein Sprachwerkzeug.”

17 This aspiration to “speak” the senses like a language is paralleled by an expression in Heinrich von Ofterdingen: “Die Sprache, sagte Heinrich, ist wirklich eine kleine Welt in Zeichen und Tönen. Wie der Mensch sie beherrscht, so möchte er gern die große Welt beherrschen, und sich frey darinn ausdrücken können” (N I: 335; my emphasis). The arch-poet Klingsohr details, in the seventh and eighth chapter of Heinrich von Ofterdingen, the ways and means to become a poet; cf. N I: 327–32, 333–35. Amongst those, the “exercising” [Übung] of “language” and the “reflection” [Nachdenken] on language usage is a foremost task (N I: 334), as is, on his account, the sharpening of the senses and the cultivation of a sober mind (N I: 328–31).


19 Similar to these two speeches by “the one,” the aforementioned fragment (N II: 366–67 #235) discusses Aufmerksamkeit as the cognitive operation to modify perception at will. Apel 2004 explains Novalis’s “poetics of Aufmerksamkeit” in detail.
20 Novalis comments the 116th Athenäum fragment (Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, 2: 182–83) with the following words: “Zu herausgerissen eigenthümlich – nicht genetisch – oder generirend – der letzte Satz hebt d[as] Ganze Vorhergehende auf” (Novalis Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard H. Samuel, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960], 2: 623 #28.4). But he still conceives of poetry as an act of translation. Note, for instance, Novalis’s letter to A.W. Schlegel: “Am Ende ist alle Poësie Übersetzung” (November 30, 1797; N I: 648); moreover, the notation “Die Einbildungskraft”—which traditionally names the poetic organ, that is, the faculty of poetry—“ist der wunderbare Sinn, der uns alle Sinne ersetzen kann” (N II: 423 #479). Recall, finally, Novalis’s sustained attempts at “poeticizing the sciences” (N I: 662), which means above all the translation and incorporation of scientific principles and terminologies into a poetic tale, as Klingsohr’s Märchen does, for example, with regard to contemporary physics and chemistry. On the basis of these and similar quotes, Kittler, Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900 concludes that Romantic poetry is generally conceived around 1800 as a translational operation (87–91) and meant to function as “Ersatz sinnlicher Medien” (139–143).

21 Hegel describes the semantic complications that speculative sentences create in the Phenomenology (PdG 57–60). A speculative sentence represents the basic expression of what Hegel terms a dialectic, namely, the “dynamization and confusion” [Bewegung und Verwirrung] of those distinctions that would appear self-evident to the common understanding (Gesammelte Werke, 10.2: 830)—to rehearse the point one last time.

22 My translation of Druckerstock as “woodcarvings” stems from the Grimms’ Deutsches Wörterbuch. Referring to a passage in Goethe, Druckerstock is herein defined as “holzschnitt” or “vignette und dergleichen für bücher. ”

23 Speaker B, who makes the utterance just quoted, opposes the pessimistic opinion of his interlocutor. Against Speaker A, B contends that the inflation of books is actually not responsible for drying up the five bodily senses: “die Chifferwelt […] kann nichts dafür, daß wir […] unsre 5 leiblichen Sinne beynah […] nicht mehr haben” (N II: 428). Speaker B desires even more books, yet books that he authored himself: “Ich möchte eine ganze Büchersammlung aus allen Kunst, und Wissenschaftsarten, als Werck meines Geistes, vor mir sehen” (N II: 429). Novalis expands on the challenge posed by an ever-growing amount of possible readings in several notes; cf. esp. N II: 598 #550, 602 #571, 603 #573–75. As for the ostensible conflict between reading and the senses, frequently thematized in literature and popular journals at the turn of the eighteenth century, see Erich Schön, Der Verlust der Sinnlichkeit, oder, Die Verwandlungen des Lesers: Mentalitätswandel um 1800 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987).


27 Fichte, Sämmtliche Werke, 1: 91–98.


29 Fichte, Sämmtliche Werke, 1: 96: “Das Ich setzt sich selbst, und es ist, vermöge dieses bloßen Setzens durch sich selbst; und umgekehrt: Das Ich ist, und es setzt sein Sein, vermöge seines bloßen Seins.”

30 Fichte, Sämmtliche Werke, 101–5, esp. 104: “So gewiss das unbedingte Zugestehen der absoluten Gewissheit des Satzes – A nicht = A unter den Tatsachen des empirischen Bewusstseyns vorkommt: so gewiß wird dem Ich schlechthin entgegengesetzt ein Nicht-Ich. Von diesem ursprünglichen Entgegensetzen nun ist alles das, was wir soeben vom Entgegengesetzten überhaupt gesagt haben, abgeleitet; und es gilt daher ursprünglich: es ist also der Form nach schlechthin unbedingt, der Materie nach aber bedingt.” Thus, as a formal act, the Entgegensetzung of a “Not-Me”—a procedure that is invoked here in the passive voice (“wird entgegengesetzt”), hence without ascribing it to the ego—is just as “original” [ursprünglich] and “unconditioned” [schlechthin unbedingt] as the ego’s act of self-positing. Yet the result of this act, the empirical cognizance of, say, a certain tree, is of course not unconditioned—a self-sufficient creation of the ego—but conditioned by its material specificity.
31 Henrich, “Selbstbewusstsein,” 20. Due to his critical stance vis-à-vis reflexive theories of consciousness, Henrich here takes issue with Fichte’s second step. In grounding the act of Entgegensetzung in the absolute unity of the ego or self-consciousness, Henrich criticizes, Fichte betrays his “original insight” [ursprüngliche Einsicht] that a prior opposition is the necessary precondition for all acts of differentiation and identification.


33 The essentially diachronic nature of all experience is clearly stated in Die Bestimmung des Menschen. Fichte here holds that the perception either of an external object or the self can never proceed simultaneously—“next to each other”—but only diachronically: “Empfindungen, als Affectionen meiner selbst, sind schlechthin nichts Ausgedehntes, sondern ein Einfaches; und verschiedene sind nicht neben einander im Raume, sondern sie folgen nach einander in der Zeit” (Sämmtliche Werke, 2: 211). For that reason, Fichte negates, not unlike Hume, the reality of spatial permanence. The experience of an object consists for Fichte solely in the diachronic experience of its properties, while their permanence and unity is no objective fact but created through mental acts.

34 N II: 133 #323: “Nicht die Handlung, sondern das Produkt ist fixierbar.”


36 Manfred Frank, Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik, 228–29. Frank deduces the claim that the Jena Romantics remained oriented towards “the absolute” chiefly from quotes by Fr. Schlegel and Novalis (cf. 224–30). He finally groups these quotes around Schlegel’s assertion that “all knowledge is symbolic,” reading this assertion as an allusion to the absolute: “‘alles Wissen [ist] symbolisch’; das meint: nicht demonstrativ, sondern allegorisch aufs Absolute bezogen (es deutet in seiner Relativität die Tendenz auf Absolutheit symbolisch nur an, ohne sie einholen zu können)” (229). Novalis in fact made a similar remark: two years earlier than Schlegel he notes that all “meaning” or “sense” is necessarily based on a symbolic code or “medium”: “Aller Sinn ist repraesentativ – symbolisch – ein Medium” (N II: 339 #118). At any rate, Frank’s interpretation, which centers on the category of the absolute, crumbles if one considers the context of Schlegel’s assertion that “all knowledge is symbolic,” namely, the lectures on Transzendentalphilosophie held at Jena and recorded by one of his students (cf. vol.
12 of *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. In line with Novalis’s anti-foundationalist notion of *Wechselbestimmung* (on which the preceding quote might shed a first light), Friedrich Schlegel maintains in these lectures that knowledge can neither be understood nor expressed immediately. Instead, the comprehension of an epistemic content as well as its communication requires on Schlegel’s account symbolic representation. His key term for this detour, which he derives from Fichte, is *Wechselerweis* (or, synonymously, *Wechselgrundsatz* and *Wechselbegriff*), and much like Novalis, he considers it at once the most fundamental and universal principle of philosophy. Indeed, in an earlier note Schlegel insists already on the “*Allheit der Wechselerweise* (Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, 18: 505 #2). The epistemic content to be understood and communicated needs to be represented or symbolized in a form that differs from the epistemic domain in question. According to this logic of reciprocal representation found both in Schlegel and Novalis, one would have to communicate, for example, a philosophical problem in the language of poetry to fully grasp this problem. Such a logic hardly involves an orientation towards “the absolute.” Like his “symphilosophic” partner Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel makes a case in his lectures on *Transzendentalphilosophie* to the contrary: he denounces the idea of first origins and absolute foundations.


40 Beiser, *German Idealism*, 434.


44 Fichte, Sämtliche Werke, 1: 227.

45 Note also N II: 618 #627: “Ein junger Gelehrter muß mit specieller Kritik anfangen. Am fremden Faden und Gewebe lernt er eigene Ideen entwickeln und zu Fäden und einem vollständigen, regelmäßigen Gewebe ausspinnen.”

46 “Empirischer Wust” refers to Novalis’s current study of mining and related subjects, such as physics, chemistry, and mineralogy, that he had taken up in 1797 at the Bergakademie of Freiberg.

47 To A.W. Schlegel on January 12, 1798 (N I: 658).

48 In print (N II: 657 #767), this diagram is rendered as follows:

Given this trajectory, it is easy to understand why Novalis scholars stress time and again that rationalism—meaning both the study of logics and mathematics—and romanticism are entwined in Novalis. Remigius Bunia, Romantischer Rationalismus: Zu Wissenschaft, Politik und Religion bei Novalis (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013), for example, makes precisely that point: “Nein, der Rationalismus und die Frühromantik sprechen nicht nur keine unterschiedlichen Sprachen, sondern sie sprechen dieselbe Sprache. […] Novalis steht fest in rationalistischer Tradition, die er nicht nur nicht verlässt, sondern radikalisirt” (9).

49 To Fr. Schlegel on January 10, 1797: “Meine Hand hat mich 8 Tage faul seyn lassen, welches mich häßlich quält – Selbst Lesen kann ich nicht recht, weil ich dabey unaufhörlich die Feder haben muß” (N I: 607–8; my emphasis).

50 Rahel Villinger summarizes her findings as follows: “Aber wenn auch die Fragmente [of the Brouillon] sich auf höchst abstrakte Begriffe konzentrieren, sind die Mittel, mit denen auf diese Weise extreme semantische Dichte produziert wird, immer auch und primär sinnliche. Durch sichtbare, schriftbildlich-grafische und hörbare, klangliche Formen der Darstellung und eine
excessive Wiederholung, Vervielfältigung und wechselseitige, intramediale Durchdringung ihrer Muster, werden die Fragmente rhythmisch derart strukturiert, dass das Vermögen mannigfach möglicher stofflicher Assoziationen (der Einbildungskraft) mit dem Vermögen begrifflicher Verbindungen (des Verstands) verquickt wird und beide in ihrer Leistung gesteigert werden. Der Gegenstand eines Begriffs erscheint jetzt unendlich bestimbar und der Begriff selbst von einem Kranz assoziierter Begriffe umgeben” (“Gedankenstriche: Theorie und Poesie bei Novalis,” Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 86, no. 4 [2012]: 547–77, here 569). She also points out “die konstitutive Rolle des Lesers als ‘Vollbringer’ der Theorie im Fragment” (569 fn. 30). The sense that Novalis’s fragments elicit is, on her account, a “Sinn für Rhythmus und Stimmung, für die Struktur einer Bewegung zwischen Wahrnehmbarem und Denkbarem als solcher,” hence a feeling that cuts across distinct sensory modalities (572). Although the “sense of rhythm” plays a vital role in her argument, Villinger does not discuss the letter to A. W. Schlegel (N I: 654–57) wherein Novalis discusses the question of rhythm at length.

51 To Coelestin August Just, the superior of Friedrich von Hardenberg in his professional capacity as mining inspector, on December 26, 1798 (N I: 680).

52 Since Novalis could neither select nor ready most of his fragments for publication during his lifetime, all these characterizations apply even more urgently to those that were posthumously gathered, ordered, and published under editorial titles, such as the Fichte-Studien or Das allgemeine Brouillon. A self-critical remark of the year 1798 confirms the transitory nature of his fragments, as well as their nonsystematic character. Novalis here describes his notations as “rough” and hardly “ready for publication,” but concedes at the same time that the fragment is still the “most bearable form” to communicate a few “individual curiosities” that do not add up to a system: “Was in diesen Blättern durchgestrichen ist – bedürfte selbst in Rücksicht des Entwurfs, noch mancherley Verbesserungen etc. Manch es ist ganz falsch – manches unbedeutend – manches schie lend. […] Von dem Übrigen ist nur weniges reif zum Drucke – z.B. als Fragment. Das Meiste ist noch roh. Sehr – sehr vieles gehört zu Einer großen höchstwichtigen Idee. […] Durch Fortschreiten wird so vieles entbehrl ich […] so daß ich vor der Ausführung der großen, alles verändernden Idee, nicht gemg etwas Einzelnes ausgearbeitet hätte. Als Fragment erscheint das Unvollkommene noch am Erträglichsten – und also ist diese Form der Mittheilung dem zu empfehlen, der noch nicht im Ganzen fertig ist – und doch einzelne Merckwärdige Ansichten zu geben hat” (N II: 384 # 318).

53 Frischmann, *Vom Transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, 25 points out that “ohne die Fichtesche Dialektik der Wechselbestimmung, ohne die Konzeptualisierung der Einbildungskraft als unabhängigem Vermögen und als Schweben zwischen Endlichkeit und Unendlichkeit, wäre Schlegels Ironiekonzept undenkbar.” She substantiates this claim on 198–200 and 335–38.
The development of the concept of reciprocal determination takes up almost half of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (cf. *Sämtliche Werke*, 1: 131–227). This underscores the key role Fichte assigned to this concept in resolving the oppositional tension between the operations of *Setzen* and *Entgegensetzen*. Frischmann, *Vom Transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, 86–90 summarizes the meaning of *Wechselbestimmung* according to Fichte.

As for Novalis’s immediate reception of the principle of *Wechselbestimmung*, see N II: 42 #48 and N II: 111–24 passim. Novalis discusses the term in several other places; cf. the index by Doris Strack, in Balmes’s *Kommentar* (N III: 767).

Fichte’s foundationalist tendency becomes increasingly dominant in subsequent attempts to express the main principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, for example, in the 1797 “Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre” (*Sämtliche Werke*, 1: 519–34, esp. 526–28). However, the nature of Fichte’s foundationalism is rather “peculiar,” as Robert Pippin points out, in that the absolute foundation—the ego—designates a potentially infinite process of self-determination: “To understand ‘the I as the ultimate foundation’ simply means that there is no ‘end’ to the self-critical, self-adjusting activity that makes up the ‘whole’ of the self's posittings” (“Fichte’s Alleged Subjective, Psychological, One-Sided Idealism,” in *The Reception of Kant’s Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sadgwick [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 147–70, here 157).

It is not entirely clear to what the “es” refers in this last fragment from the *Kant-Studien* (N II: 220 #13), especially since Novalis separates the conclusive statement quoted above from the preceding sentences through oblique strokes (/…/). It could be *das Unbedingte*, which Novalis mentions in the preceding sentence paraphrasing Kant (cf. KrV B XX–XXI). But “es” could also refer, more simply, to *etwas* or *das Objekt* in general, which is the reading that I would propose.

However, Fichte himself struggles with the paradoxical reciprocity of the dual *Tathandlung* of consciousness, as mentioned before. In that Fichte conceives the ego not as a fixed state but as a dynamic activity that can be inferred only from its empirical results, his theory constantly undermines the stability and the seeming positivity of the first cause that it means to pinpoint down by invoking a self-positing ego. This intrinsic paradox of Fichte’s system—an origin that can never be shown but only inferred in retrospect—is not far from the kind of *Nachträglichkeit* and “originary non-originality” Derrida describes with the (in)famous word *différance*. While Fichte grounds the primordial act of differentiation, the *Entgegensetzung* that makes difference possible as such, at least formally in a first cause, the “absolute” ego, Derrida, like Novalis, does not take this step prescribed by the logic of causality. Yet there are also more progressive, anti-foundationalist readings of Fichte, as see Harald Münster, *Fichte trifft Darwin, Luhmann und Derrida: ‘Die Bestimmung des Menschen’ in differenztheoretischer Rekonstruktion und im Kontext der ‘Wissenschaftslehre novo methodo’* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

Novalis had leveled his critique against the idealisms after Kant, wherein foundationalist premises prevailed. By the end of the 19th century, however, the heyday of idealism was over.
Historicist methods of explanation also prevailed in philosophy. Even the chief concerns of idealism—true knowledge, subjectivity, and freedom—were reduced to a genetic sequence of inherently relative viewpoints that issue themselves from contingent historical circumstances. This kind of historicism or Geistesgeschichte was the immediate target of Nietzsche’s critique. In Der Wanderer und sein Schatten, he writes: ‘Am Anfang war. ’ — Die Entstehung verherrlichen — das ist der metaphysische Nachtrieb, welcher bei der Betrachtung der Historie wieder ausschlägt und durchaus meinen macht, am Anfang aller Dinge stehe das Werthvollste und Wesentlichste” (Nietzsche, Kritische Studienausgabe, 2: 540 no. 3). This critique turns into an incisive self-critique if leveled against some of Nietzsche’s own attacks, his critique of scientific rationality as a Socratic inheritance, for instance, or his attack of Christianity as a fabrication by Saint Paul. In these cases, Nietzsche himself unduly privileges the beginnings of a development—against his earlier creed.

60 In the Phenomenology, the transition from the understanding to self-consciousness is initiated by the sentence: “Es ist der reine Wechsel, oder die Entgegensetzung in sich selbst, der Widerspruch zu denken” (PdG 130). Naturally, the unity of self-consciousness—its self-identity through difference—manifests the true structure of “opposition” and “contradiction.”

61 “Robinson Crusoe ist ein höchst lehrreiches Buch […] [ein Buch, wie Robinson] muß die Lieblingslektüre […] das Handbuch des klugen Mannes sein” (To his brother Erasmus, in June 1793; N I: 536).


63 Haering, Novalis als Philosoph, 143–94) characterizes, with direct reference to Hegel, the basic principle of Novalis’s thinking as “universale Repräsentationslehre,” specifically as “Wechselbeziehung, also dialektische[ ] Wechseleinheit” (169). Thus for Haering, the pervasive logic of reciprocity in Novalis is ultimately resolved by a “dialectic unity” that provides the higher ground of all difference and opposition. However, there are obvious historical and even stronger theoretical reasons to hesitate to explain the notion of reciprocal determination in Hegelian terms. The most important theoretical cause for hesitation is that this identification means to inflict a bunch of problems on a theoretical thinking and a poetic practice that prudently eschews these problems. Novalis considers the quest for absolute foundations an “unphilosophical” tasks, as we have seen, whereas Hegel conceptually restores an absolute foundation, namely Wissenschaft—even if this foundation turns out to be a retroactive achievement, the result of a dialectic development. Novalis’s notion of reciprocal determination presents the reciprocity of the relata as an irreducible opposition, whereas Hegel, in order to not end up in an “unhappy,” negative dialectic that merely confuses oppositions and distinctions, insists on the necessity of a speculative sublation, by virtue of which the ground of the opposition is comprehended. Still, true Hegelians like Karl Rosenkranz, Hegel’s biographer, remarked an affinity between Hegel and Novalis, at least in terms of style. Perusing Hegel’s Enzyklopädie of...
1817 for the first time, Rosenkranz recognized “eine Verwandtschaft mit den Fragmenten des
Novalis [...], die ich auch als höchste Offenbarung des Geistes verehrte, ohne sie verdaut zu

64 Käte Hamburger, Philosophie der Dichter: Novalis, Schiller, Rilke (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer,
1966), 11–82 first detailed the importance of mathematical concepts in Novalis, above all that of
functional calculus (22–28). She also appraises the accuracy of Novalis’s mathematical studies in
light of contemporary sources. Martin Dyck, “The Relations of Novalis to Mathematics” (Ph.D.,
University of Cincinnati, 1956) is still the most detailed study of the subject.

65 A note from the Kant-Studien reads almost alike: “Sollte es nicht mit unserm
Apperceptionsvermögen, wie mit den Häuten im Auge seyn – die Vorstellungen müssen durch
entgegengesetzte Media durch um endlich richtig auf der innern Pupille zu erscheinen” (N II: 221
#16).

66 N II: 482 #61: “Das Wort Sinn, das auf mittelbares Erkenntnis, Berührung, Mischung
hindeutet.” According to Wellmon, this phrase alludes to a “moment of non-distinction,” more
precisely, a “feeling” that is “anterior to the differentiation” into five distinct sensory modalities
(“Lyrical Feeling,” 468).

67 Wellmon, “Lyrical Feeling” similarly concludes that “Novalis imbues sense and sensibility
with both a formal (or ideational) and material (or physiological) character. Taken as a formal
category, total sense is a ‘product of the imagination,’ but, taken as the differentiated senses,
sense is a physiological function” (461). Since, however, Novalis considers the senses as the
paradigmatic “medium of reciprocity,” one should perhaps add here that the formal-ideational
caracter of perception cannot be subtracted from the physiological process of sensing. This holds
ture even in the case of the poet-magician, who is said to possess the magic faculty to direct the
senses at will. Although his imagination functions as “der wunderbare Sinn, der uns alle Sinne
ersetzen kann” (N II: 423 #479), these deliberate acts of imagination nonetheless require
physiological expression, that is to say, an active usage of the sensory organs.

68 “Die Welt hat eine ursprüngliche Fähigkeit durch mich belebt zu werden – Sie ist überhaupt a
priori von mir belebt – Eins mit mir. Ich habe eine ursprüngliche Tendenz und Fähigkeit die Welt
to beleben” (N II: 343 #125).

69 Uwe C. Steiner, “Die Tücken des Subjekts und der Einspruch der Dinge: Romantische Krisen
der Objektivität bei Novalis, Eichendorff und Hoffmann,” in Schläf ein Lied in allen Dingen?
Romantische Dingpoetik, ed. Christiane Holm and Günter Oesterle (Würzburg: Königshausen &
Neumann, 2011), 29–42 investigates this crisis of objective permanence and substantiality along
the lines of different fragments by Novalis, yet he too recognizes a “prozessuale Auflösung des
Dings und seines Begriffs in eine Relation sich wechselseitig konditionierender Elemente” (35).

70 Externalization, self-alienation, and animation are equally vital to Rilke’s scenographies of
looking, as the following chapter will show. Moreover, Fichte’s concept of external perception is
informed by similar notions, as see my remarks on Die Bestimmung des Menschen in the preceding chapter on object perception in Hegel. The same could be said about Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Similar to Novalis’s claim that object perception involves an act of animation, Husserl posits that objects are perceived by means of “immanente Empfindungsdaten und vermöge des sie gleichsam beseelenden Bewußteins” (Husserliana, 11: 17). Merleau-Ponty’s central dictum that “consciousness is being-towards-the-thing [l’être à la chose] through the intermediary of the body” could be related to the idea of self-alienation (Phenomenology of Perception, 159–60).

71 N II: 499 # 137: “MAGIE. (mystische Sprachlehre) Sympathie des Zeichens mit dem Bezeichneten (Eine der Grundideen der Kabbalistik.).”

72 Notice how Novalis here transitions from an egological or, with Novalis’s term, “psychological” problem—namely, the determination of the ego through the non-ego—to epistemic or “encyclopaedic” concerns—namely, the comprehension of the science of mathematics. The suture between Fichtean and “encyclopaedic” problems is clearly visible in this fragment, which in turn indicates the seamless connection between Wechselbestimmung and Wechselrepräsentation. Note also N II: 687 #924, a fragment at the end of the Brouillon in which Novalis once more emphasizes the necessity of reciprocal representation: “Man muß d[ie] Wahrheit überall vergegenwärtigen – überall repraesentiren (im thätigen, producirenden Sinn) können.”


74 N II: 665 #795; note also N II: 556 #431, which equates Encyklopaedistik with Analogistik.


76 Mentioning “sand” and a “copper plate” as the experimental means to convert acoustic into graphic figures, this fragment (N II: 539–40 # 362) refers to the experimental setup by means of which the German physicist Ernst Chladni produced what has since then become known as Klangfiguren; cf. Bettine Menke, “Töne – Hören,” in Poetologien des Wissens um 1800, ed. Joseph Vogl (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1999), 69–95 and Welsh, Hirnhöhlenpoetiken, 55–112, 205–52.

77 Like Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis calls the mental faculty to recognize similarities or the “Princip der Verwandtschaften” Witz (N II: 251 #57). But the recognition of similarities qua wit is no passive act; it is a spontaneous act of creation: “Der Witz ist schöpferisch — er macht Ähnlichkeiten” (N II: 649 # 732).

78 Balmes, Kommentar (N III: 149).
An interpretation of Klingsohr’s Märchen in aesthesiological terms, alongside the opening of the *Hymnen an die Nacht* and some of the late poems, while beyond the scope of the present study, may be fruitfully pursued as well. The late poems that come to my mind because of their scenic qualities are “Es färbe sich die Wiese grün...” and “Der Himmel war umgezogen...” (N I: 139–42).

I elaborate on this and similar quotes by Novalis in the Introduction so as to make a case for the necessity of readerly aesthesis, that is, the recasting of text into diegetic scenes.


85 N I: 482. A letter to Caroline Schlegel (N I: 685) indicates a similar tendency; Novalis here admits: “Ich fange an das Nüchterne, aber ächt fortschreitende, Weiterbringende zu lieben.” Note also the similar fragments N II: 803 #304, #305.

86 Cf. N I: 328–30; Klingsohr continues this train of thought in the next chapter, N I: 333–35.

87 Novalis discusses the question of poetic cohesion usually with regard to Goethe’s Meister and the structure of a Märchen; note esp. N II: 369–71 #242, 546–47 #390, 692 #953, 693 #959, 696–97 #986, 769 #113, 807 #321. The most sustained discussion of poetic cohesion occurs in the fifth chapter of Heinrich von Ofterdingen (N I: 304–7). Here, the Graf Hohenzollern explains the formation of series (Reihenbildung) and the concatenation (Verkettung and Verknüpfung) of both fictional stories and the structure and historical narratives or historiography as such. In the Lehrlinge, too, the catenation of elements (Reihenbildung) play an important role. Yet here the arrangement of natural artifacts, their ordering and re-ordering in “series” (Reihen), is the point of discussion; cf. N I: 203, 207–9.

88 Circa 1800, Novalis notes: “Hülfsmittel zu Romanen. […] Übung in Erzählung wirklicher Szenen. […] Idiotika und alte Bücher. […] Aufmerksamkeit auf die sonderbaren Wirkungen von Menschen aufeinander – in verschiedenen Zuständen” (N II: 780 # 207). This note calls to mind Wordsworth’s contemporaneous remark about the poet’s task in the Preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads (London: Longman, 1992): “What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; […] he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment” (75; my emphasis).


91 Heinrich’s affectionate response to the motherly interruption of his dream could be read as an instance of transference. Instead of embracing the flower, which at the end of Heinrich’s dream “neigte sich nach ihm zu” as though she wanted to kiss him, Heinrich “erwiederte” his mother’s “herzliche Umarmung” not at all “unwillig” (N I: 242). Kittler, “Die Irrwege des Eros und die ‘Absolute Familie’: Psychoanalytischer und diskursanalytischer Kommentar zu Klingsohrs Märchen in Novalis’ ‘Heinrich von Ofterdingen,’” in Psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Literaturinterpretation, ed. Bernd Urban and Winfried Kudszus (Darmstadt:

92 The occurrence of a dream within Heinrich’s dream calls to mind Novalis’s *Athenäum* fragment: “Wir sind dem Aufwachen nah, wenn wir träumen, daß wir träumen” (N II: 232 #16). Heinrich’s dream can illustrate the equivocal meaning of this fragment. On the one hand, Heinrich is about to wake up from his dream in a literal sense: The sudden intrusion of his mother’s voice will wake him shortly. On the other hand, Heinrich is about to wake up in a metaphoric sense: The second-order dream, in which Heinrich witnesses the blue flower for the first time, initiates Heinrich’s poetic awakening or “Erleuchtung” (N I:242), as the passage reads—his waking up in the land of poetry.

93 Retention and protention are Husserlian terms that designate, roughly, “momentary recollection” and “momentary expectation”; cf. my explanation and adaptation of these terms in the Introduction.

94 I quote here from two poems from the “Berliner Papiere,” namely, “Wenn nicht mehr Zahlen und Figuren / Sind Schlüssel aller Kreaturen…” (N I: 395) and the so-called *Lied der Toten* (N I: 399–403). These poems seem to describe aspects of that “secret” and “supernatural” world of poetry (N I: 392) or “Märchenwelt” (N I: 394) that Heinrich was supposed to discover after his “Verklärung” (N I: 394), on the basis of which he “erräth den Sinn der Welt” (N I: 395) and has “wunderliche Gespräche mit den Todten” (N I: 397). Yet, it remains uncertain whether, and if so how, Novalis would have used these poems in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* if he had been given the time to finish the novel.
Notes to Part Two – Rilke

1 Novalis in *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* (N I: 224). — Parts of this chapter have been published, in German, as “‘Das Anschauen ist eine so wunderbare Sache, von der wir noch so wenig wissen’: Szenographien des Schauens beim mittleren Rilke,” *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 59, no. 1 (2014): 141–60.

2 With only a few incisive words, Adorno leveled the charge of Dingkult against Rilke. In the “Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft,” Adorno proclaims: “Die Idiosynkrasie des lyrischen Geistes gegen die Übergewalt der Dinge ist eine Reaktionsform auf die Verdinglichung der Welt, der Herrschaft von Waren über Menschen […] Auch Rilkes Dingkult gehört in den Bannkreis solcher Idiosynkrasie als Versuch, noch die fremden Dinge in den subjektiv-reinen Ausdruck hineinzunehmen und aufzulösen, ihre Fremdheit metaphysisch ihnen gutzuschreiben; und die ästhetische Schwäche dieses Dingkults, der geheimnistüerische Gestus, die Vermischung von Religion und Kunstgewerbe, verrät zugleich die reale Gewalt der Verdinglichung, die von keiner lyrischen Aura mehr sich vergolden, in den Sinn einholen lässt” (*Noten zur Literatur*, ed. Tiedemann Rolf [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981], 52).


4 Deriving his claims chiefly from Rilke’s biography and self-expressions, Norbert Fuerst, *Phases of Rilke* (Bloomington,: Indiana University Press, 1958) aligns the “peculiarly ocular method” (64) of the *Neue Gedichte* with sculpture: “The New Poems stand, in crowded galleries, like immovable statues” (67). This essentially biographic interpretation remains influential to this day. For example, Rick Barot, “Rilke’s Blue Flower,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 82, no. 4 (2006): 225–39 describes the *Neue Gedichte* as a “secret homage to what Rilke had seen upon first visiting the studio at sculptor Auguste Rodin’s villa” (226).

5 Hamburger, *Philosophie der Dichter*, 85. The prominence of looking and seeing as topoi in Rilke are widely recognized; cf. Karine Winkelvoss, *Rilke, la pensée des yeux* (Asnières: PIA, Institut d’allemand d’Asnières, 2004) and Anette Horn and Peter Horn, “Ich Lerne Sehen”: *Zu Rilkes Lyrik* (Oberhausen: Athena, 2010). In Rilke’s middle period these topoi become
particularly prominent, as Ralph Köhnen, *Sehen als Textkultur: Intermediale Beziehungen zwischen Rilke und Cézanne* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1995) and In-Ok Paek, *Rilkes Poetik des "neuen" Sehens in den 'Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge' und in den 'Neuen Gedichten'" (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 1996) show. Note also my remarks below (n. 7), concerning Rilke’s poetic imperative to look and “to learn to see.”

6 Hamburger, *Philosophie der Dichter*, 84–88. Wolfgang G. Müller, “Rilke, Husserl und die Dinglyrik der Moderne,” in *Rilke und die Weltliteratur*, ed. Manfred Engel and Dieter Lamping (Zürich: Artemis und Winkler, 1999), 214–35 revisits Hamburger’s seminal essay and reaffirms her leading thesis of a phenomenological structure in Rilke’s poetry: “Was seine [Rilkes] Dinglyrik in hohem Maße auszeichnet, ist vielmehr ein außerordentliches Verständnis für die Dinge als durch die Wahrnehmung konstituierte Phänomene” (224). But unlike Hamburger, Müller refuses to regard Husserl’s concept of phenomenological reduction as an inherent aspect of Rilke’s poetry (224–27). David Wellbery, “Zur Poetik der Figuration beim mittleren Rilke: ‘Die Gazelle,’” in *Zu Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. Egon Schwarz (Stuttgart: Klett, 1983), 125–32 takes a very critical stance vis-à-vis Hamburger’s phenomenological approach. Wellbery asserts (131–32) that Rilke’s thing poems, such as *Die Gazelle*, cannot be read as “Vergegenwärtigung eines gegenständlichen Wesens.” Instead, Wellbery insists, the figurative language of these poems should be understood as interweaving “sprachlich-poetologische, mythologische, religiöse, und psycho-sexuale Sinnkomplexe,” so that the Freudian idea of “Traumtext” would represent the more suitable paradigm of reading. In contrast to such a critical verdict on a phenomenological reading of Rilke, Jennifer A. Gosetti, “Phenomenological Literature: From the Natural Attitude to ‘Recognition,’” *Philosophy Today* 45 (2001): 18–27 once more highlights the proximity between basic elements of Husserlian phenomenology and works from Rilke’s middle period. Regrettably, Gosetti does not relate her arguments to Hamburger’s essay, of which she seems entirely unaware.

7 “Ich lerne sehen” is the programmatic statement by which Malte Laurids Brigge describes his self-imposed mission. This dictum is reiterated three times in the *Aufzeichnungen*, right at the beginning (R VI: 710, 711, 723), and may therefore count as one of the main threads of this prose work. No surprise, then, that “‘sehen,’ ‘schauen,’ und ‘anschauen’ sind die am häufigsten vorkommenden Vollverben” in the *Aufzeichnungen*, as August Stahl observes in his “Kommentar,” in Rilke, *Werke: Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1996), III: 913. This conspicuous fact has brought Helmut Naumann, *Malte-Studien: Untersuchungen zu Aufbau und Aussagegehalt der ‘Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge’ von Rainer Maria Rilke* (Rheinfelden: Schäuble Verlag, 1983) to the conclusion that “der lange und mühevolle Vorgang des Sehen-Lernens mitsamt der dadurch bewirkten Veränderung Maltes ist die Handlung der *Aufzeichnungen*” (56). However, the prominence of looking and seeing is not particular to the *Aufzeichnungen*, nor do they pertain exclusively to Rilke’s middle period. These topoi recur throughout Rilke’s entire work, even in his late poetry. Recall, for example, *Die Vierte Elegie*, or *Die Neunte Elegie*, which explicitly recalls the phrase of “learning to see,”
though *ex negativo*: “Ach, in den andern Bezug, / wehe, was nimmt man hinüber? Nicht das Anschauen, das hier / langsam erlernte, und kein hier Ereignetes. Keins.” But “learning to see” is no merely literary topos; it is as far as we know also a personal aspiration of Rilke’s. Hamburger, *Philosophie der Dichter*, 84–87 documents a few early expressions of that wish, whereas Rilke’s letters and critical writings engaging with the visual arts—*Worpswede*, the texts on Rodin, and the letters on Cézanne above all—represent the concrete instances of putting the intent to learn to see to work. For these texts try to articulate in writing the experience of looking, for example, looking at sculptures and paintings. Rilke notes in a letter to Clara Rilke that in pursuing the laborious process of looking, we are also “dem Gesetz unseres eigenen Wachstums auf der Spur” (June 28, 1907; all letters by Rilke are quoted after *Gesammelte Briefe in sechs Bänden*, ed. Ruth Sieber-Rilke [Leipzig: Insel, 1936–1940] and referred to by date and addressee.) Consequently, the self-imposed task “to learn to see” was for Rilke as much a specular training as it was a means to reflect upon poetological issues. And, naturally, it was meant as an imperative to work more and harder. “Travaille, petit, regarde […] et tu auras la grâce des grandes choses” (R V: 161): these are the words by a nameless monk quoted right at the beginning of the *Rodin* monograph. Rilke took this motto clearly to heart—at least the first and the second imperative.


10 During his visit of the Salpêtrière, Brigge hears an anonymous voice demanding of someone “*Dites-nous le mot: avant,*,” reiterating this demand by spelling out the letters “*a-v-a-n-*” (R VI: 764). Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 383–85 has a piercing reading of this passage, though he arrives at the radical conclusion that I have just ruled out—to see only words in Rilke and nothing more: “Brigge entkoppelt sein Schreiben von Mündlichkeit und Kommunikation […] Das Medium Schrift kehrt seine Kälte hervor; es ist Archivieren und sonst nichts. Deshalb kann es das Leben nicht ersetzen, darstellen, sein, sondern nur erinnern, wiederholen, durcharbeiten” (385).
11 Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 372: “Die Literatur deckt keine Phänomene auf, erschließt keine Fakten; ihr Feld ist ein Wahnsinn, den es […] nur auf dem Papier gibt.” Similarly, Paul de Man denounced the phenomenality of literature, though for reasons that pertain on his account to the very nature of literary language. De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 107 declares—to repeat the catchphrase one more time—that “a literary text is not a phenomenal event that can be granted any form of positive existence […] but merely solicits an understanding that has to remain immanent.”

12 Wellbery, “Figuration beim mittleren Rilke,” 128–29 uses “Handlungsablauf” or “fabulakonstruktion” as umbrella terms to capture the scene and the story—the “narrative dimension”—of a poem such Rilke’s *Die Gazelle*. These two concepts, however, are insufficient means to unpack the scene of looking that *Die Gazelle* outlines. My earlier reading of Durs Grünbein’s poems develop this point in detail, in that I demonstrate here the insufficiencies of a merely chronologic notion of plot and story.


14 A formulation by the psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Viktor Emil von Gebsattel will help me to define my usage of the term cathexis. In his treatise “Über Fetischismus,” Gebsattel defines a “fetishistic” procedure as “das Einstrahlen der fremden leib-seelischen Wesenheit in den Bereich der Sachwelt, derart, dass diese wie beseelt und durchdrungen erscheint vom Fluidum solcher Wesenheit” (*Prolegomena einer medizinischen Anthropologie: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* [Berlin: Springer, 1954], 151 fn. 1). The result of such “animating radiation,” one could extend this though, would be a residual energy that was thus impressed onto the thing. This mental imprint left on the thing (in practice, the imagination of it!) I want to call “cathexis,” which is Strachey’s translation for the Freudian term *Besetzung* in the *Standard Edition* of Freud’s works. While Freud used the term to describe all kinds of libidinal investments vis-à-vis ideas, objects, and persons alike, I will employ the term cathectic in the more narrow sense of a personal signature of possession and ownership that imaginatively occupies an object. This cathectic signature in turn stabilizes future interactions with that particular object. Incidentally, Gebsattel was the analyst of Clara Rilke-Westhoff and had almost become the analyst of Rilke himself if he had not shied
away “von diesem großen Aufgeräumtwerden, das nicht das Leben tut, – von dieser Korrektur der
ganzen bisher beschriebenen Seite Leben, die ich mir dann so rot durcheverbessert denke wie in
einem Schulheft,” as Rilke writes to Gebsattel on January 14, 1912. On the connection between
Rilke and Gebsattel, see Erich Simenauer, Rainer Maria Rilke: Legende und Mythos. (Bern: P.
Haupt, 1953), 134–35, 192. As to the impact of psychoanalysis on Rilke, see Engel (ed.), Rilke-
Handbuch, 165–74. Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis (London:
The Hogarth Press, 1973), 62–65 provide a summative definition of “cathexis” according to
Freud.

15 It is not insignificant that “dieses ängstlich gehütete Zimmer,” in which Chamberlain Brigge
chose to die, was also the room in which his mother died (R VI: 715). In a way, her former
presence seems to amplify the Chamberlain’s cathectic powers, and so it could be argued that the
thought of the Mother is one of the main cathectic forces by virtue of which Brigge can stabilize
his object perception; cf. my “Szenographien des Schauens beim mittleren Rilke,” 150–51 fn. 31.

16 Rilke’s Vortrag über Rodin presents Gefäß as a synonym for Ding (cf. R V: 269).

17 Recall, in this context, the basic definition of aesthesis in the Introduction as the activity of
perceiving, including bodily affectations.

18 19th century empirical psychology has particularly strengthened this finding. For example,
Ernst Mach claims, in his popular treatise Die Analyse der Empfindungen, that object perception
is ultimately based on the psychological recognition of “functional relationships”
[Functionalbeziehungen] in an otherwise indistinct bundle of sensations; cf. Judith Ryan’s
summary of the “new psychologies” emerging around 1900 in The Vanishing Subject: Early
psychological theories of vision oppose even more polemically the assumption that objective
properties are received in the form of readily available impressions or percepts. In his Ecological
Approach to Visual Perception, which develops the influential “theory of affordances,” James J.
Gibson writes: “Perceiving is an achievement of the individual, not an appearance in the theater
of his consciousness. It is a keeping-in-touch with the world, an experiencing of things rather than
a having of experiences. […] The act of picking up information, moreover, is a continuous act, an
activity that is ceaseless and unbroken. The sea of energy in which we live flows and changes
without sharp breaks. Even the tiny fraction of this energy that affects the receptors in the eyes,
ears, nose, mouth, and skin is a flux, not a sequence. […] Hence, perceiving is a stream […]
Discrete percepts, like discrete ideas, are ‘as mythical as the Jack of Spades’” (239–40).
Perceiving means to experience “things” that emerge and submerge in a “sea of energy,” says
Gibson in a somewhat metaphorical way. This conclusion, it will be shown, is not all too far away
from the basic aesthesiology of Rilke’s scenographies of looking.

19 Rilke’s admiration for Cézanne finds its poetic expression in the recurrent motif of the “looking
dog”; cf. my n. 52.
20 See Michael Doran (ed.), *Conversations with Cézanne* (University of California Press, 2001), 198.


22 To Clara Rilke, on October 9, 1907: “La réalisation nannte [Cézanne] es […] die Dingwerdung.” Ted Gundel, “Rilke’s Prose-Poetry as ‘Sachliches Sagen,’” *Modern Austrian Literature* 15, no. 3–4 (1982): 91–111 describes how Cézanne’s notion of réalisation is reflected by Rilke’s prose-poems and the *Aufzeichnungen*: “first, the identity and essential meaning of the object-image evolves (Rilke refers to this as ‘the realization of the thing’); secondly, as this realization takes place, the object-image moves deeper into the subject’s consciousness and leads to a new self-awareness; and finally the artistic presentation of these processes assumes a spontaneous but definite form” (105). Martina Kurz, *Bild-Verdichtungen: Cézannes Realisation als poetisches Prinzip bei Rilke und Handke* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) considers the poetological significance of réalisation or Dingwerdung. Vukiević, *Cézannes Realisation*, 230–54 also discusses the relation between Cézanne’s practice of réalisation and the notion of Dingwerdung in Rilke.

23 To Clara Rilke, on March 8, 1907.

24 Andreas Kramer, “Rilke and Modernism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, ed. Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113–30 has noted this perceptual confusion. Kramer argues that texts from Rilke’s middle period, in particular the *Neue Gedichte*, “present a range of encounters between subject and object, interior and exterior, man and animal, beholder and work of art, during which the boundaries of either party are being called into question” (120). But he explains the destabilization of boundaries with the notorious “modernist malaise,” alienation, though “not in a Marxian but in a vitalist sense” (121). He invokes precisely the letter of March 8, 1907 to establish that modern “alienation” is the cause of the perceptual confusion. I, however, will develop the argument that, from a phenomenological perspective, this confusion of boundaries is an essential moment of looking itself.

25 In fact, Husserl scrupulously investigated the workings of perception throughout his lifetime—and inevitably so, since phenomenology, Derrida reminds us, is always phenomenology of perception: “And contrary to what phenomenology—which is always phenomenology of perception—has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes [se dérobe toujours]” (*Speech and Phenomena*, 104). Nonetheless, *Ding und Raum* is, together with later manuscripts published as *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis* (vol. 11 of *Husserliana*), Husserl’s most extensive phenomenological

26 Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sinnesschwellen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 145–46; emphasis in original.

27 Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 240–61, a passage that conceptualizes the “anonymous generality” of sense perception: “Every perception takes place in an atmosphere of generality and is presented to us anonymously [...] I ought to say that one perceives in me, and not that I perceive. Every sensation carries within it the germ of a dream or depersonalization” (250). In his phenomenological “autopsy” *Das Mich der Wahrnehmung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), which takes up cues from Descartes, Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, Lambert Wiesing has systematically explored this insight—and draws a provocative conclusion. For Wiesing it is the very process of perceiving that actualizes me (*mich*), my corporeal self-awareness, at every moment. This thesis, he argues (7–9), reverses the common view that the subject produces and owns “his” perceptions. The problem with this radical reversal of the egological model of perception, however, is that the one extreme—the primacy of subjective cognition—is just replaced by another—the primacy of the perceptual object.


30 Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (1927), ed. Friedrich Wilhelm von Herrmann, vol. 24 of *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1975), 244–45. Twenty years later, however, this emphatic endorsement will be tacitly revoked. In “Wozu Dichter?,” Heidegger dismisses in a single stroke the entirety of Rilke’s poetic oeuvre, with two exceptions: “Das gültige Gedicht Rilkes zieht sich in geduldiger Sammlung auf die beiden schmalen Bände der Duineser Elegien und der Sonette an Orpheus zusammen” (*Holzwege*, 274). For the late Heidegger, therefore, Rilke’s middle period is hardly of any consequence. Rilke’s middle period, including the *Aufzeichnungen*, interests Heidegger only insofar as some of Rilke’s writings about things would shed light on “das unerfahrene Wesen der Technik” (*Holzwege*, 291).

31 As mentioned before (n. 7), Brigge repeats this phrase three times (R VI: 710, 711, 723) to characterize the mission of his Paris existence.

32 This conclusion might also suggest to differentiate the common view that “Malte is one of the most radical deconstructions of the notion of self we find in modernist writing” (A. Kramer, “Rilke and modernism,” 123). Surely, selfhood appears fragile and displays severe fissures in
Brigge’s Aufzeichnungen; after all, Brigge thinks of himself as “der Eindruck, der sich verwandeln wird” (R VI: 756). But the Aufzeichnungen, it could be argued, retain and defend at the same time a more fundamental notion of selfhood and subjective agency in presenting anxiety—Brigge’s innermost Eigentum—as the condition of possibility of object perception.

33 Since the publication of Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie..., Husserl refers with the term “noema” to the external counterpart to which the immanent experience or “noesis” of an aisthēton refers. The noema, in other words, is the modality by which a perceiver relates his perceptions to the external object; it is “der Gegenstand im Wie seiner Bestimmtheiten” (Husserl 1950ff., 3/1: 321). This means, however, that the noema of a momentary perceptual experience cannot directly appear within that experience, within the immanence of conscious experience (noesis), but only indirectly—as a “transcendent” point of reference. For that reason, Husserl defines the noema as an “implicit” and “irreal” [nicht-reell] element of consciousness. Cf. Husserliana, 3/1: 200–313 (§§ 87–135).

34 In his chapter on Rilke in Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 20–56, De Man makes in fact two observations. First, he identifies the “priority of the phonic element” that “governs” Rilke entire oeuvre, though in an increasingly concealed way (38). Second, de Man identifies “the determining figure of Rilke’s poetry” as “chiasmus,” a term that designates “the crossing that reverses the attributes of words and of things” (38). De Man maintains that, due to the structural import of this figure, Rilke chooses to represent in his only those objects whose “attributes allow for such a [chiastic] reversal and for such an (apparent) totalization” (40). For an incisive critique of de Man’s method of reading, not only in the case of Rilke, see Stanley Corngold, “Error in Paul de Man,” Critical Inquiry 8, no. 3 (1982): 489–507. Corngold’s main charge (500–3) is that the chiastic inversion that de Man sees at work in Rilke’s poetry describes in truth the rhetoric of his own writings: “de Man's procedure, like Rilke’s procedure, is invariably, first, to call attention to, establish, or otherwise mark a difference, a line distinguishing an inside from an outside—between, for example, ordinary language and ‘literary language’ […] This refined distinction, however, is no sooner formulated than it is taken away, the opposition tampered with and effaced. The specific difference creating the exclusion is shown to be untenable” (501).

35 De Man, Allegories of Reading, 44–45.

36 There is no direct mention of an “observer” or “observers” in this poem; only the observed object, the torso, is mentioned and described expressly. However, if the reader is to envision—or recast—this and other texts from Rilke’s middle period as scenes of looking, as I proposed at the beginning of this chapter, this requires the presence of one or multiple observers. This inclusion of an observer thus results form the proposed aesthesiological mode of reading, which of course competes with other readings this poem that understand it, for example, as an “image” of a torso (R. Simon), or as an semiotic entity without positive existence (de Man), all of which can do without observers.
37 R V: 149–50; one of many passages in which Rilke addresses the vivid surface structure of Rodin’s sculptures. That Rilke would revamp motifs pertaining to the Rodin monograph in Archaïscher Torso can hardly surprise, since this poem describes an encounter with a sculpture and, moreover, belongs to a cycle that Rilke dedicated to “mon grand Ami Auguste Rodin.”

38 Carsten Strathausen, The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision around 1900 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003) hints at such a reading of Archaïscher Torso: “For Rilke, to see is to be seen in return. […] Things look back at us once we have learned to look at them, enabling a mutual recognition process that gives way to self-awareness: ‘denn da ist keine Stelle, / die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern’” (27).

39 PdG 145–146: “Das Selbstbewußtsein ist an und für sich, indem, und dadurch, daß es für ein anderes an und für sich ist; d.h. es ist nur als ein Anerkanntes. […] Die Auseinanderlegung des Begriffs dieser geistigen Einheit in ihrer Verdopplung stellt uns die Bewegung des Anerkennens dar. Es ist für das Selbstbewußtsein ein anderes Selbstbewußtsein; es ist außer sich gekommen. […] Dies hat die gedoppelte Bedeutung, erstlich, es hat sich selbst verloren, denn es findet sich als ein anderes Wesen; zweitens, es hat damit das Andere aufgehoben, denn es sieht auch nicht das Andere als Wesen, sondern sich selbst im Anderen.”

40 The German term unerhört is hard to translate because, in the context of Rilke’s poem, it has multiple connotations. The head could be unerhört in the sense of “having never been heard of” or “unprecedented” in either a positive or a negative way. Additionally, the unerhört appearance of the head could be imagined either as “shocking” and “grotesque,” even “bizarre,” or else as “exceptional” and “extraordinary.”

41 Even if the earlier identification of “we” with both observer(s) and torso seemed too extreme, because we wanted to hold that at least the torso once “knew” its head, the claim about the head’s Nachträglichkeit would nonetheless retain its validity.

42 Laplanche on “Deferred action,” in Alain de Mijolla, ed., International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, 2 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, Thomson Gale, 2005), I: 378. Derrida’s notions of “différence” and “trace” could be mentioned in this context too, because they both involve “the problem of the deferred effect (Nachträglichkeit) of which Freud speaks” (Of Grammatology, 66–67), more precisely the paradoxical temporality conveyed by this term.

43 Fuerst, Phases of Rilke, 75: “It is characteristic of many of these chiseled and sculptured poems [i.e., Neue Gedichte] that on can read them backwards, or that one can read back and forth in them. They are more spatial than temporal.”

44 Not to mention the complication induced by the simile in the last stanza, which suggest that, just as the rose windows now captivate the cats with their gazes, so they used to seize a human heart: “So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein / der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen / ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein.”
Accordingly, the specter that the first line mentions indeed returns by the end of the poem, as Ralf Simon concludes in his reading of Schwarze Katze, revealing itself as a déjà vu: “Das Überkreuz der Blicke [in Schwarze Katze] entpuppt sich als Déjà-vu dergestalt, dass der fremde Blick der eigene als Gespenst ist” (Der poetische Text als Bildkritik, 99). Simon stresses throughout his reading (94–101) the chiastic inversion of looking that this the poem gives to see. However, in line with his elaborate conception of iconicity, Simon considers “das ganze Kraftfeld, welches die Szene des Blickenden und des Angeblickten [in Schwarze Katze] umfasst” ultimately as an “image” [Bild] (96), whereas I consider this poem as a scenography of looking, because vision is not the exclusive sense of the scene, although predominant. The tangible descriptions of the surface qualities of the black fur, for example, its sleek, glossy and upholstered (“Gepolster”) appearance, convey also a strong sense of touch—even if these might be secondary qualities obtained through sight.


To Clara Rilke, October 22, 1907. See Doherty’s important remarks about “der große Farbenzusammenhang [bei Cézanne]” in her “Introjektion, Übertragung, and literarische Medienreflexionen in Rainer Maria Rilke’s ‘Briefe über Cézanne,’” in *Literarische Medienreflexionen: Künste und Medien im Fokus moderner und postmoderner Literatur* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2008), 40–64, here 52–60.


Kittler has noted the impact of psychophysics on literature circa 1900, also in Rilke’s case. The repercussions of the psychophysical dissections of sense perception and cognitive processes such as imagination, memory, and literality, all of which were formerly conceived holistically, were immense, he argues: “Schreiben um 1900 geht mit Notwendigkeit auf Operationen und Apparate, die zwei einzigen Zugänge zum Realen. Und von Realem kann es tatsächlich keine Miniaturgemälde geben, wie Innerlichkeit sie geliebt und Einbildungskraft sie hervorgebracht hat. Sachverhalte, die ‘aus vielen einzigen Einzelheiten zusammengesetzt’ sind, entgehen jeder Hermeneutik; sie müssen angeschrieben und abgezählt werden. […] Die grundsätzliche Unvorstellbarkeit von Realem erzwingt Autopsien, die seine diskreten Elemente eins nach dem anderen verzeichnen” (Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*, 396). Concerning Rilke’s relation to psychophysics, see also Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject*, 51–62.

*Husserliana*, 16: 130.

*Husserliana*, 11: 3.
52 The motif of the looking dog is scattered throughout the Briefe über Cézanne. Here it seems to symbolize Rilke’s ideal: Cézanne’s brave, stubborn, persistent, sober, and humble way of looking at the matter at hand. Note, for example: “Wie ein Hund hat er [Cézanne] davorgesessen und einfach geschaut, ohne alle Nervosität und Nebenabsicht” (October 12, 1907); moreover the passage that foregrounds the “humble objectivity” of Cézanne’s looking: “Und wie groß und unbestechlich diese Sachlichkeit seines Anschauens war […] mit so viel demütiger Objektivität […] mit dem Glauben und der sachlich interessierten Teilnahme eines Hundes, der sich im Spiegel sieht und denkt: da ist noch ein Hund” (October 23, 1907). Just a few months earlier, the looking dog was prominently featured in the puzzling story Eine Begegnung (R VI: 981–85). Rilke wrote the story during a stay on Capri in January and first published it in May 1907. It narrates an eventful but quiet encounter between a walker and a dog. It would appear that this encounter between a dog and a nameless person, which involves basically an intensive exchange of meaningful but, again, nameless winks, addresses the questions of this essay in a profound manner. But ultimately, I fear, this story defies a coherent reading; it is simply too enigmatic. Finally, Der Hund, a poem from the second part of Neue Gedichte, captures this idealized way of looking in a poetic form: “um dennoch immer wieder sein Gesicht / hineinzuhalten, fast mit einem Flehen, / beinah begreifend, nah am Einverstehen / und doch verzichtend”.

53 For a rudimentary definition of noema, see my previous n. 33.

54 This is why most theories of object perception impose transcendental constraints on the potentially endless procedure of perceiving, for example, concepts such as a transcendental unity of apperception (Kant), a self-determining Begriff (Hegel), a perspectival will to power (Nietzsche), the apriority of intentional consciousness (Husserl), but also a historically contingent “regime” of perceptual norms and techniques (W. Benjamin, Foucault, Crary).

55 Rilke expressed the ambition to make “written things” in a famous letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, dating August 10, 1903: “Irgendwie muß auch ich dazu kommen, Dinge zu machen, nicht plastische, geschriebene Dinge, – Wirklichkeiten, die aus dem Handwerk hervorgehen. Irgendwie muß auch ich das kleinste Grundelement, die Zelle meiner Kunst entdecken, das greifbare unstoffliche Darstellungsmittel für alles . . .”

56 In his essay on “Figuration beim mittleren Rilke,” David Wellbery distinguishes four levels on which poetic figuration operates: the material-textual discourse (a), narrative plot (fabula) (b), pragmatic and communicative situation (c), and intertextual relationships (d). One might be inclined to say that the previous readings primarily concentrated on (b), to some extent on (a) and to a lesser extent on (c). But recasting, on the basis of the textual discourse, various scenes of looking so as to analyze the structure of their phenomenality, specifically the aesthesiological regime regulating the procedure of looking, entails dramatically more than a mere reconstruction of a sequential plotline, which I hope has become clear by now. Consequently, the proposed aesthesiological readings did not seek a “Vergegenwärtigung eines gegenständlichen Wesens (eidos)” (131), which is Wellbery’s charge against Käte Hamburger’s Husserlian approach to
Rilke and phenomenological approaches to Rilke’s poetry in general. Instead, the aesthesiological readings sought to elucidate the processuality and also the operationality of looking in Rilke; which is why the appearance and shape—the image—of the objects looked at played no role at all.

57 “Knowing things”: a puzzling cipher Rilke used repeatedly. Here is a late example from a letter to his Polish translator, Witold Hulewicz: “Die belebten, die erlebten Dinge, die uns mitwissenden Dinge gehen zur Neige und können nicht mehr ersetzt werden. Wir sind vielleicht die Letzten, die noch solche Dinge gekannt haben” (13 September 1925).

58 Cf. Hans Blumenberg, Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998) and Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007). According to Blumenberg, an “absolute metaphor” cannot be substituted by a non-figurative expression because the very imagery that the metaphor exhibits has become the quintessential content and the only possible representation of the designated meaning or idea. In his words, metaphors must be regarded as absolute “[falls] sie sich gegenüber dem terminologischen Anspruch als resistent erweisen, nicht in Begrifflichkeit aufgelöst werden können” (Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit, 11). An example for an absolute metaphor would be the phrase: “God is the eternal light,” the predicate “eternal light” representing here the concept of the term “god” such that it cannot be replaced by a non-figurative expression of what the subject “god” would actually mean.

59 In his Ästhetische Theorie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003), Adorno insists on the critical potential of the work of art to make seen the “blind spots” of socially preformed experience, in that the work of art negates these standardized categories of experience: “Kunstwerke sind Nachbilder des empirisch Lebendigen, soweit sie diesem zukommen lassen, was ihnen draußen verweigert wird, und dadurch von dem befreien, wozu ihre dinghaft-auswendige Erfahrung sie zurichtet. […] Lebendig sind sie als sprechende, auf eine Weise, wie sie den natürlichen Objekten, und den Subjekten, die sie machten, versagt ist. […] Kunst negiert die der Empirie kategorial aufgeprägten Bestimmungen und birgt doch empirisch Seiendes in der eigenen Substanz“ (14–15.)

60 Blumenberg, Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit, 74: “weil es Weltmetaphern gibt und geben muß [in order to express the totality of experience], weil dies eine Vakanz des Begriffs ist, die nur von der Imagination erfüllt werden kann, deshalb schließen sich Metaphern zusammen zu Metaphernwelten mit einer eigenen Logik ihrer Assoziation” (my emphasis).
Notes to Part Two – Proust

1 Rilke in November 1907 (R VI: 1228)—just around the time when Proust’s never-ending Recherche began to take shape. — An earlier version of this chapter will appear under the title “Music and Musical Semiology in Marcel Proust’s ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’,” Narrative 23, no. 1 (2015): 1–26.

2 In accordance with two allusions in La Prisonnière 67, 147 (V: 77, 172), I will call the narrator of the Recherche by his supposed “Christian name,” “Marcel.”

Music and musicality have been widely discussed as key issues of Proust’s Recherche. They still receive a lot of attention, and it is quite impossible to give a comprehensive overview here. One of the earliest systematic investigations is the remarkable Proust chapter in André Cœuroy, Musique et littérature: Études de musique et de littérature comparées (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1923). The conclusion reads: “On sait maintenant pourquoi la musique est pour Marcel Proust une si merveilleuse excitatrice. C’est parce qu’elle suscite sans trêve le souvenir dont elle est la grande pourvoyeuse. C’est parce qu’elle surgit soudain de l’inconscient à l’appel d’une puissance attentive. Pour quiconque tente comme Proust la résurrection d’une vie par las mémoire, la musique est le plus précieux auxiliaire. Sans souvenir musical, Swann serait-il Swann ? La petite phrase de Vinteuil, signe d’un amour complexe [...] cette petite phrase est la clé de son âme, comme elle est, en un autre sens, la clé de la théorie d’art de Proust” (260–61); for a shortened English translation, see Cœuroy, “Music in the Work of Marcel Proust,” The Musical Quarterly 12, no. 1 (1926): 132–51. The most comprehensive study on the subject is still Georges Matoré and Irène Tamba-Mecz, Musique et structure romanesque dans La recherche du temps perdu (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973). This study would have been impossible without Pierre Costil’s innovative essay “La construction musicale de la ‘Recherche du Temps perdu,’” Bulletin de la société des amis de Marcel Proust, no. 8–9 (1958/59): 469–89, 83–110. Jean Jacques Nattiez, Proust as Musician (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) serves as a point of departure for most critical inquiries to date that consider specifically the connection between Proust and Wagner. For more critical literature, consult the entry “musique” and related items in the Dictionnaire Marcel Proust, ed. Annick Bouillaguet and Brian G. Rogers (Paris: H. Champion, 2004). Françoise Leriche maintains here that “en dehors de la literature, Proust était essentiellement musicien.”

3 For a classic definition of narrative discourse and plot/storyline, or discours and histoire, the two interdependent facets of a narrative (récit), see Tzvetan Todorov, “Les catégories du récit littéraire,” Communications 8, no. 1 (1966): 125–51, esp. 126–27. Monika Fludernik, An Introduction to Narratology, 1–7 summarizes the ways in which discourse and plot have been used in narratology, while Brooks, Reading for the Plot, 14–23 problematizes their ostensibly antithetical nature.
4 The impression that the *Recherche* is pervaded by recurring leitmotifs has been articulated early on. Ernst Robert Curtius (*Französischer Geist im neuen Europa* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1925], 15–16), for example, remarked the import of “recurring phrases,” yet without qualifying this observation. Costil, “La construction musicale de la Recherche,” 90 concedes that a leitmotif technique (“le procédé du leitmotiv”) is essential to the composition of the *Recherche* as a whole, though without singling out individual leitmotifs. The entry “leitmotiv (en literature)” in Timothée Picard, ed., *Dictionnaire encyclopédique Wagner* (Arles: Actes sud, 2010) reads: “Proust donnera une signification assez semblable au leitmotiv wagnérien. Rappelons qu’il considère lui-même que le début d’A la recherche du temps perdu est régis par un jeu de leitmotive: « Ce sera comme des morceaux dont on ne sait qu’ils seront des leitmotiv quand on les a entendu isolément au concert dans une ouverture » […] Proust donne alors nous sens ontologique au principe de répétition, d’analogie, de loi et de série qui organise l’œuvre et la vie du narrateur” (1085). Clearly, in the wake of Baudelaire’s writings on Wagner, which variously claim an analogy between the repetition of words and phrases in a literary discourse and musical leitmotif (or rather phrases melodiques, as is the common translation for melodische Momente, one of Wagner’s own terms for leitmotif), and moreover under the sway of French Wagnerism at the turn of the century, it would surprise if the Wagnerian Marcel Proust would not have intended to invest his work with musicality and leitmotifs. Nonetheless, the impression that the *Recherche* would contain recurring leitmotifs has scarcely been supported by detailed analysis. There is still some truth to Tadié’s pronouncement: “Mais c’est aller trop loin que de donner à la Recherche une structure musicale, c’est remplacer la critique par la métaphore” (*Lectures de Proust* [Paris: A. Colin, 1971], 196) The most notable exception to this verdict is the little known German study *Strukturen des Romans: Studien zur Leit- und Wiederholungsmotivik in Prousts ‘A la recherche du temps perdu’* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1976) by Inge Backhaus, which presents the most rigorous account of leitmotif technique in the *Recherche*. Despite some overlap, there are two fundamental differences between her findings and mine: First, and oddly, Backhaus did not hear the leitmotif that I will trace—the systematic recurrence of the word “longtemps.” Second, the way she conceives of a leitmotif differs from my account since she situates it exclusively within the diegetic world, instead of locating its sonic existence on the level of the narrative discourse and, hence, in the reader’s ear, as I will do. Vinteuil’s “little phrase,” for example, constitutes on her account a leitmotif because Swann—and not the reader—hears it multiple times (16–24). The madeleine, on the other hand, counts for her as the leitmotic of Combray because Marcel has tasted it. I will, by contrast, also insist on the acoustic character of a leitmotif, its being a discursive utterance or a sound on the level of the narrative discourse, in addition to its diegetic representation—its appearance within a scene.


6 The term “leitmotif” owes its popular technical currency especially to Hans von Wolzogen’s guides to Wagner’s operas, such as the *Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik zu Richard Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde* (Leipzig: Feodor Reinboth, 1888).


8 I quote only in French to stress the sonority of the original phrase, which Moncrieff translates as “For a long time I would go to bed early” (I: 1).

9 This we can infer, for example, from rough drafts for *Le Temps retrouvé*, which were published in 1982 under the title *Matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes*. Herein, the artist is advised to represent reality as “truly musical moments” that can be compared to “the sound material of the symphony” (cit. Nattiez, *Proust as musician*, 29). But in that case the artist cannot neglect the musical underpinnings of his artistic medium: sound and rhythm of his composition. Thus, “as early as 1910–11,” Nattiez sums up (ibid.), “music, and most particularly the ‘Good Friday Spell’ [from Wagner’s *Parsifal*] was seen as a model for the literary enterprise.”

10 Inspired by the opening passage of the *Recherche* (*Swann*, 6; I: 4–5, to be specific), Merleau-Ponty describes the crucial role of corporeality in the constitution of self-awareness, specifically the “attitudes” we take by means of our body (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 210–11).

11 Claudia Brodsky, “Remembering Swann: Memory and Representation in Proust,” *MLN* 102, no. 5 (1987): 1014–42 explains the importance of the little bell (*clochette*), succinctly here: “The sound of the bell at Combray, having never ceased in the narrator’s memory, serves as the final sensory element which ties the narrative together, one now said in closing to demonstrate the unbroken continuity of the life in which it occurred and is recalled” (1032).

12 For a more detailed characterization of involuntary memory, see Joseph Frank, “Spatial Form in Modern Literature,” 235–40.

13 Richard Wagner, whom Marcel identifies at one point as the “grandfather” of Vinteuil (*Prisonnière* 148; V: 174), was well aware of the close analogy between the workings of (involuntary) memory and music. For Wagner often referred to his leitmotifs—a term he never used (cf. Jörg Riedlbauer, “Erinnerungsmotive’ in Wagner’s ’Der Ring Des Nibelungen,’” *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 [1990]: 18–30, here 30)—by the suggestive word *Erinnerungsmotive*, “reminiscence motive.” Alternatively, Wagner used the term “melodic moments” [*melodische Momente*], which on his account “serve in a way as emotional guidelines through the complex architecture of the drama” [werden uns […] gewissermaßen zu Gefühlswegweisen durch den ganzen vielgewundenen Bau des Dramas], as he stipulates in *Oper und Drama* (Wagner,
Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen, 4: 200). But here too he considers their essence to be “anticipation and remembrance” [Ahnung und Erinnerung] (ibid.).

To consider involuntary memory a semiotic mechanism and ultimately an artistic technique that Marcel must learn to fulfill his literary “vocation” would be in line with Deleuze’s claim, in Proust and Signs (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), that the specific content of involuntary memory, past experience, is of much less importance than the semiotic potential it manifests, namely: a totally self-sufficient way of “signification” and, by extension, the possibility to create “sensuous signs” that contain their significance “rolled within” (57). A leitmotif technique, as I explain in the following paragraph above, makes this mode of signification available to a written discourse.

Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980) defines “pseudo-iterative[s]” as “scenes presented, particularly by their wording in the imperfect, as iterative, whereas their richness and precision of detail ensure that no reader can seriously believe they occur and reoccur in that manner, several times, without any variation” (131).

I rely here on the classic nomenclature of Hans von Wolzogen, Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik zu Richard Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde, 15:


In Der Fall Wagner, Nietzsche writes: “Wagner war nicht Musiker von Instinkt. Dies bewies er damit, dass er alle Gesetzhlichkeit und, bestimmter geredet, allen Stil in der Musik preisgab, um aus ihr zu machen, was er nöthig hatte, eine Theater-Rhetorik, ein Mittel des Ausdrucks, der Gebärenden-Verstärkung, der Suggestion, des Psychologisch-Pittoresken. Wagner dürfte uns hier als Erfinder und Neuerer ersten Ranges gelten — er hat das Sprachvermögen der Musik in’s Unermessliche vermehrt —: er ist der Victor Hugo der Musik als Sprache” (Kritische Studienausgabe, 6: 30). Concerning motific derivation and conflation in the Ring, see Dahlhaus, Richard Wagners Musikdramen, 118–203. For a systematic explication of the semiotic dimension


19 Dahlhaus also underscores the metamorphic nature of a leitmotif, its somewhat indicative but never fully conventionalizable meaning, which is to say, the impossibility to pin its meaning down with a name: “Das Verfahren, den Wagnerschen Leitmotiven starr identifizierende Namen zu geben, ist ebenso fragwürdig wie unumgänglich: fragwürdig, weil die Übersetzung musikalischen Ausdrucks in Begriffe niemals adäquat ist – gelänge sie, so wäre das Urteil über die Musik gesprochen; unumgänglich, weil die Idee eines wortlosen Gefühlserkennnisses musikalischer Motive, unter Verzicht auf die Vermittlung durch Sprache, eine Illusion ist. Der Name, der die Sache halb verfehlt, ist zugleich der einzige Weg, um zu ihr zu gelangen” (*Richard Wagners Musikdramen*, 90–91).

20 Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Fontana Press, 1977) refers to Beethoven’s *Diabelli Variations* as a prime example for a type of music that is fundamentally “inaudible” and, hence, must be “rea” (153). This tendency in Western music towards the inaudible is most tangible in 20th century art music. John Cage’s piece 4’33’, which consists of three movements prescribing *tacet*, is perhaps one of the most famous manifestations of this tendency. Music here reaches its inaudible telos; it becomes utterly grammatical, a pure schema—the notational instruction to remain silent (*tacet*). This piece no longer resounds, even though the audience will inevitably produce noise the while it is playing, so that the joint aspects of Western art music—sound and score, or phenomenal actuality and notational representation—are torn apart.


23 Whether music-dramatic or literary in kind, a leitmotif naturally requires an ongoing explication through the dramatic scene. Otherwise, the leitmotif would appear to be nothing but
the dumb repetition of the always-same acoustic figure—sheer physics, a purely physical mechanism acting upon the “guts” and the “spinal cord” of a listener, as Nietzsche suggested in Der Fall Wagner (Kritische Studienausgabe, 6: 24). Enriching its more or less identical acoustic substance with changing scenes is a necessary means to sustain interest and, most importantly, keep up the expectation for its “redemption”—the ostensible revelation of the innermost meaning of the leitmotif by way of a final gesture of transfiguration, as it often happens at the end of Wagner’s operas. In truth, however, this place remains empty, as Adorno remarked with regard to Wagner, and no theatrical splendor can obscure this void: “In der innersten Zelle der Erlösungskonstruktion wohnt das Nichts. Auch sie ist leer” (Die musikalischen Monographien [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971], 139–40). It might be said, perhaps, that the same sword of Damocles hangs over the kind of “redemption” and transfiguration that Marcel seeks to bring about by writing his book. Leo Bersani, “‘The Culture of Redemption’: Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein,” Critical Inquiry 12, no. 2 (1986): 399–421 addresses the issue of “redemption” in the Recherche. He shows how the strange circularity of the Recherche effectively undermines the belief of a redemptive power of art, which it advocates at the same time so forcefully.

24 Nattiez, Proust as Musician, 12–33 shows overlappings between Wagner’s Parsifal and Proust’s work, the subtle kinship between the figure of Swann and Amfortas on the one hand and Marcel and Parsifal on the other being perhaps the most striking features of his account. Furthermore, Nattiez explains the particular importance of Wagner for Marcel’s final moment of apprehension at the Guermantes.’ As Proust notes in a draft, he had originally intended to “present the discovery of Time regained in the sensations induced by the spoon, the tea, etc., as an illumination à la Parsifal” (cit. Proust as Musician, 31). Even the performance of Vinteuil’s septet had been conceived in early drafts as a performance of the “Good Friday Spell” (in French “L’Enchantement du Vendredi” Saint) from Wagner’s Parsifal (ibid. 27–31). Margaret Mein, “Proust and Wagner,” Journal of European Studies 19, no. 3 (1989): 205–22 suggests that the ingestion of the madeleine recalls the ingestion of the love potion in Tristan (206–7). Mein shows, moreover, the parallel between Tristan’s sickening love for Isolde and Swann’s fatal love for Odette, both of which became eventually “inoperable” (208). However, whether Marcel is, like Parsifal, Amfortas, and other Wagnerian protagonists, on a quest for “redemption,” as both Mein and Nattiez maintain, is open to question, I believe.

25 The andante movement of the sonata is described in a wording that alludes to typical characterizations of Wagner’s music (cf. Swann, 205–9; I: 250–54); note characterizations such as “a sort of liquid rippling [un clapotement liquide] of sound, multiform but indivisible, smooth yet restless [plane et entrechoquée], like the deep blue tumult of the sea [comme la mauve agitation des flots]” that blurs between “phrase and harmony”—this is an unmistakable allusion to the scenery and timbre of Tristan und Isolde; and “impression […] sine materia”—Wagner made the orchestra disappear in the famous orchestra pit of Bayreuth, thus visually detaching the sound from its material source. In a dedication to Jacques de Lacretelle, dating April 1918, Proust himself names, along with compositions by Franck, Saint-Saëns, Fauré, and Schubert, specifically


27 The Introduction details the conception on which this statement is based, namely, the necessity of readerly participation and concretization with regard to literary works. According to this conception, also the plot of a given text is the generative achievement of a reader, not a pre-established fact that predates the act of reading. In Reading for the Plot, Peter Brooks described this generative activity as “plotting,” meaning the “active interpretive work of discourse on story” (27) by means of which the sequence of events is endowed with coherence. This “active interpretive work,” however, ultimately belongs for Brooks “to the reader’s literary competence, his training as a reader of narrative” (19). Accordingly, my claim that Vinteuil’s music forms the thematic nucleus of the Recherche’s story does not simply repeat textual facts—such as the fact that Vinteuil is named the composer of a sonata that provides Swann with “exquisite and inexpressible pleasure” (Swann 208; I: 253). Rather, this claim is the result of my “active interpretative work” on the text.

28 Brodsky, “Remembering Swann,” 1022–36 analyzes this complex but seminal episode. She demonstrates that two core issues of the Recherche are inextricably intertwined here: the memorization and the narrative transcription of this event.

29 Before he fell in love with Vinteuil’s “little phrase,” when he was “one of the most distinguished [élégants] members of the Jockey Club” (Swann 15; I, 16), Swann would take a fancy preferably to “the good-looking daughter of a local squire or town clerk” [la fille du hobereau ou du greffier] (Swann 188; I, 229).

31 Luhmann describes “romantische Liebe” as “eine eigentümliche Kombination von zirkulärer Geschlossenheit und Offenheit für alles, was die Liebe anreichern kann” (Liebe als Passion, 177). Still wandering in Swann’s footsteps, Marcel too uses artworks to arouse and maintain his “love” for Albertine. First he (ab)uses Elstir’s paintings to see her face, as it were, in a more flattering light; and in La Prisonnière, Vinteuil’s music helps to maintain his tender feelings for her, despite his rampant jealousy. Backhaus, Strukturen des Romans, 91–113 describes the importance of music in this dynamic, but also how Marcel’s behavior differs from Swann’s (ab)use of Vinteuil in matters of the heart.

32 John W. Kneller, “The Musical Structure of Proust’s ‘Un Amour de Swann,’” Yale French Studies, no. 4 (1949): 55–62 traces the recurrences of the “little phrase” throughout “Swann in Love” in greater detail. Kneller’s general argument is that Swann’s love follows a musical route: the form of the “sonata-allegro.” However, in contrast to my assertions, Kneller regards Odette as the “principal” but Vinteuil’s little phrase only as the “subordinate subject” (57).

33 Obviously, D.J. Enright here failed to implement the changes of the second and current Pléiade edition of Le temps retrouvé, which I am quoting.

34 Taking up the term Swann mentions during a conversation with Marcel (Swann 96; I: 115), many critics have argued for such a teleological “hierarchy” of art forms and associate this idea with Schopenhauer; cf. Anne Henry, Marcel Proust: Théories pour une esthétique (Paris: Klincksieck, 1981), esp. 87 and Nattiez, Proust as Musician, 53, 78–87.

35 The narrator of “Un amour de Swann” suggests that “purely musical impressions” are, “so to speak, sine materia,” without matter, thus “vanishing in an instant” (Swann 206; I: 251).

36 For a striking example of such “iridescent” [irisée] metamorphoses of the little phrase, see the Saint-Euverte Soirée (Swann 339–47; I: 415–25).

37 “Poésie = Gemütherregungskunst” is Novalis’s shorthand for poetry (N II: 801 # 292).

38 Cf. Nattiez, Proust as Musician, 34–57, esp. 56.

39 The performance of the Vinteuil sonata during the Saint-Euverte Soirée makes Swann realize that the object of his love, Odette, is lost forever: “From that evening onwards, Swann understood that the feeling [sentiment] which Odette had once had for him would never revive [ne renaitrait jamais], that his hopes of happiness would not be realised now [ne se réaliserait plus]” (Swann 347; I: 425). Does this mean, by the same token, that Swann detaches the “little phrase” from Odette and so comes to appreciate Vinteuil’s sonata as an autonomous artwork? The text provides no explicit answer to this question. On my interpretation, this is not the case, since Swann’s realization that his love has come to an end can hardly eradicate its memory. Vinteuil’s “little phrase” would still remind Swann of the passionate love he once felt for Odette. The Saint-Euverte Soirée would thus effect the final metamorphosis of Swann’s leitmotif, transforming
Vinteuil’s petite phrase, in happier days the “national anthem” of his love for Odette (Swann 215; I: 262), into its funeral march.

40 “‘Poor M. Vinteuil,’ my mother would say, ‘he lived for his daughter, and now he has died for her, without getting his reward [son salaire]. Will he get it now, I wonder, and in what form? It can only come to him from her’” (Swann 158; I: 192).


43 This is perhaps the most famous line from Baudelaire’s “Advice to Young Writers” [Conseils aux jeunes littérateurs].

44 Joshua Landy documents the formulations found in the Recherche that betray the sorrow to run out of time before the work is finished; cf. “Proust, His Narrator, and the Importance of the Distinction,” Poetics Today 25, no. 1 (2004): 91–135, here 119–20 fn. 47.
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Acknowledgments

While a dissertation is written in Einzelhaft, I could not have survived such isolation without the friendship and care of a few critical individuals. I must express my gratitude to the following persons for saving me from quietly expiring in my solitary study.

I thank

Claudia: for the many things you taught me, for your friendship and endless support, for your utter devotion to this work, which has been beyond belief.

Brigid: for your keen insight and prudent advice, and for your vigilant support in practical and institutional matters.

Hamish: for many conversations about all the things that matter, for reading me often and carefully, for our wonderful friendship.

Stanley: for our smart lunches, during which your speech would fuse Geist and esprit in a way that one can only call...Corngoldesque, and for your generosity as a friend and mentor.

Klas: für die ununterbrochene Nachricht, die aus Stille sich bildet, for that never-ending Gespräch that has been, and always will be, the signature of our friendship.

My fellow graduate students inside and outside the Department of German, especially Frederic, Rachel, Mladen, and Megan: for all the things you have taught me in seminars and elsewhere, for making Princeton a friendlier and more habitable place.

My last-minute readers Sean, Anat, and Antonio: for your spontaneous help and the elegant suggestions that improved my prose greatly.

Mike Jennings and Nikolaus Wegmann: for your support and guidance, for the original insights I derived from your writings and your teaching.

My Alma Mater: for providing me with the means to enjoy five and a half years of unencumbered study, including a Hyde Fellowship that facilitated my time at the ETH Zurich in 2012–2013.
Andreas: für die vielen intensiven Gespräche in Princeton und Zürich, die mir so manchen neuen Gedanken eingaben, für Deine fürsorgliche Gastfreundschaft, und für eine chancenreiche Zukunft.

Den Zürcher Freunden, Emanuel und Phibu, außerdem Alex, Jörg und Philipp: für die freundschaftliche Aufnahme des Fremdlings, für eure Begeisterungsfähigkeit, für die ausgezeichneten Exaltationen zu Tisch und andernorts.


Meinen Eltern: für die tägliche Sorge und Liebe aus der Ferne, ohne deren Gewissheit ich diesen Weg nicht hätte beschreiten können.

Kani: for your sweet love and magic enthusiasm, for your boundless support, and for the joys we shared—and will share; wheeeeee!