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Epilogue

At the 2012 dOCUMENTA 13, while marching proudly among the venues of the event as part of the critical art loving crowd hungry for experience, I stumbled upon a space that looked at first sight like a large garden-shed. The door was open, the arrow pointing to a dark space, indicating that visitors were welcome to enter, so I did. My self-assurance shattered as soon as I stepped in. I found myself in a pitch-dark, humid room, literally without being able to see anything. The total darkness was filled with buzzing and humming. I could sense that I was not alone, there were some bodies shifting next to mine. A most disturbing sensation. Where was I? What was going on? Soon I realized that many of us were in that space, bodies crawling all over the room, the humming got louder and the performers, while constantly in motion broke out in a dynamic concert that sounded like free jazz mixed with pop music but there were no instruments. My insecurity did not get any better though. I had no idea what was happening. All I could sense was that the whole situation was way beyond what I was comfortable with – being surrounded by invisible bodies in a cloud of sounds not knowing where they come from in a dark space where I completely lost directions. What was happening to me? I felt I wanted to disappear, just not be there, get lost, not wanting to know what was going on in that room or actually anywhere else in the world. I went through a complete and intense regression. But why? Why did I feel like an embarrassed infant? I was a self-conscious adult at an art venue after all. I had to admit that this experience was one of those moments one cannot prepare for; being fully overtaken by an art experience one is not able to ignore or contemplate with rational distance. How is it possible that an artwork could put me in a state in which I do not recognize my own behavior? This experience left me most curious about why and what can possibly happen to me through the force of contemporary art.

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1 Documentas are contemporary art exhibitions and art events organized every five years in Kassel, Germany since 1955, initially created to reflect upon the avant-garde and bring the cultural life back to the place torn apart by the Second World War and by the Nazi regime.
The artwork that I am referring to – as I learnt later – was that of Tino Sehgal, entitled *This variation* (2012). The aim of this epilogue is to return to the gist of this research that underlies all previous chapters, namely to the importance of the *personal encounter*. It is done through the demonstration of the ability of contemporary art to capture the beholder at an (often unconscious and bodily) intimate, personal level. It is argued that through these deep connections with the artwork, no matter how uncomfortable, it is possible to revisit of how one sees oneself in the world. This personal, rather than interpretive relationship with the artwork, is a prerequisite and a characteristic of the transitional space of contemporary art outlined throughout the book. Therefore, in some sense, through *This variation* this epilogue serves as a summary of what has been elaborated upon so far, in order to be able to grasp the entirety and potential of the transitional space of contemporary art. I take *This variation* as a case study. In the subsequent pages I will describe the work and its context, and this is followed by going beyond the cognitive, analytical realm to that of the experience. Subsequently, I aim to grasp the potentials of this experience by exploring it from the perspective of the characteristics of the transitional space of contemporary art. I will explore if and how the artwork has the ability to take one beyond representation, if/how it exercises its force of rupture along with its ability to open up a space of absence and work as some kind of transformational object. Having explored the art experience, I will summarize what the matters discussed bring us to. First I return to why it is most important to listen to and ‘theorize’ the personal experience. Then I will revisit and summarize how personal, theoretical and societal relevances merge and emerge within this unique contemporary art experience that might lead us to shape our reality and future differently, and enable us to imagine the world otherwise.
I encountered *This variation* that the artist calls ‘constructed situation’\(^2\) at one of the busiest and most prestigious art forums today. First of all, the location for situating the performance had already made an impact on me and in a sense (could have) prepared me for the experience, so it is important to give a thorough description. The door for the Sehgal work (fig. 34.) opened from the courtyard of a unique place called the Huguenot House. The place is a complex historical heritage in the sense that it used to shelter Huguenots, a French Protestant sect who were persecuted by the Catholics and state, and forced to leave France to settle in more tolerant places. The building that had housed these ‘refugees’ was transformed into a community space of creativity and faith by Chicago based artist Theaster Gates in a project called *12 ballads for Huguenot House* (2012).\(^3\) Gates’ crew created a fascinating site from the building, reconstructing parts and tearing down others, revealing the old structure. In his project Gates ‘went down to the basics’ by showing the old skeleton of the house that had served as temporary settlement during the 1600s for the rejected

\(^2\) A term invented by Sehgal to indicate that his artworks are not performances, rather orchestrated sites into which the beholder might enter.

\(^3\) For more information on his project you can visit: http://theastergates.com/section/232115_12_Ballads_For_Huguenot_House.html http://12balladsforhuguenothouse.tumblr.com/.
‘heretics’ on the run. During the documenta13, the ‘workers’ – meaning Gates’ team - lived in the house, did a lot of restoration, reconstructed furniture from the material they took out from different parts of the building, hid artworks in niches and invited African-American musicians to ‘heal’ the place through live performances and (Christian) faith.

It was after this experience of the physically altered building, that I found myself in the garden from which a pitch dark room opened. I walked in, not being able to see anything. I could sense that people were humming, there were noises that sounded like music but I could not make out if it was people making the sounds or if they were actually using instruments. There was very little movement initially. I thought that the insecurity would pass and I would get bored quickly but I wanted my eyes to adjust so I could find the way back to the entrance. Still, I stayed on as the music started to become louder and I noticed that there were bodies and people walking and moving around me. It took me quite sometime to figure out that I was actually standing in a large dark space with about thirty people around me. The hissing, humming, stumping and the singing got even louder, it was coming from all over the place, from floating bodies, the music turned smoother then stronger, gradually becoming loud and powerful, like a choir in motion. The bodies fluctuated in space, crawled on the floor, rubbed against the walls, encircling visitors, embracing the space and dancing way too close to me. I held tight to the friend I was with and I would not let go of her, praying not to be physically touched by any of the performers, their presence was too intense, and I felt that an actual physical touch might be way too intrusive. I saw that one of the performers did touch a woman and they were holding each other really tight. The performers finally broke out in a loud song of *Ain’t got no money*, and although they stood meters from each other, musically it was perfect, so were the dances. Again they danced close to us, sang into my ear than swam off in darkness. Minutes went by in this intense musical darkness, then slowly it calmed down and the performers crawled back to the wall resting and continuing with the humming. This might have lasted for 35-40 minutes or so, then we had to get going.

Because of the intensity of the experience, I could not begin to think as an art historian about what I was undergoing. Thoughts came much later, and along with them art

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4 I use past tense in this chapter occasionally because *This variation* – as its title suggests – does not exist anymore. I am also referring to a past experience.
historical associations surfaced, however I quickly realized that they did not cover the experience I had encountered. Of course, it was important and interesting to find the connection between Sehgal and 20th-century participatory artist practices, and it was interesting to note how Sehgal is critical of capitalism and consumerism. It was also possible to see the work as an abstract painting, some kind of black canvas in which many things happened yet all remained beyond representation. Certainly, it is important to draw these analogies and know how and where Sehgal fits into art history. However, *This variation* could not be grasped through these theories. The work pointed beyond the cognitive analysis one uses for decoding, analyzing, grasping the artwork, and finding some explanation for one’s vulnerability and child-like behavior. In such cases, analysis does not help, even when the observer already guesses that they are being subjected to a performance. In order to grasp such an artwork, we need to move away from analysis.

Why is that? It appears that the physical is for some reason beyond the cognitive. Let me explain this with an example. I am afraid of dogs and I cannot stand when they bark at me. When I walk down the street and see a dog in someone’s garden, behind the fence, I notice that the dog is there and most likely it is going to run up to the fence and start barking. I am fully aware that it cannot hurt me, as it is separated by a fence. Yet, although I know all this very well, when all of a sudden the dog is there by the fence and starts barking and snarling -- to the amusement of the people with me-- I still get terrified. This suggests that these reactions are somehow beyond our rational control. Back to the Sehgal experience, Anne Midgette (2007) for the New York Times has summarized the reactions of a well-known curator at one of the Sehgal’s constructed situations:

Yasmil Raymond, the curator of the Walker show, described a recent visit to the Biennal in Lyon, France, where she did not realize that a piece by Mr. Sehgal was on display. ‘He had a Dan Flavin, a Larry Bell and a Dan Graham in the corner’ she said. ‘The minute I entered the space, the guard came in and started stripping. I slowly crawled behind the Dan Graham. I was so embarrassed I didn’t know what to do with myself. I wanted to know the title of the piece, and I had to wait. At the end, when he takes off all this clothing, he says the title and then puts his clothes back on. It was called ‘Selling Out.’
The state the curator was drawn into is easy to imagine. Similarly to the barking dog analogy, it is most likely that she was armed with all art history possible, and most probably she quickly realized that she was in the midst of a performance work. Yet, embarrassment overcame her, and she probably could not have imagined looking at the guard stripping naked as if it were art.

The irresistible physicality evokes emotional and instinctual responses that are outside of the domain of learnt behavior. Once ‘caught’ by the work, one cannot resist the experience because the conscious cognitive control has been tricked. Because of the extreme physicality of the work, one cannot resist involvement, or to put it differently, the shattering of the ego-boundaries is experienced in its intensity. This kind of involvement, as I see it, cannot be anything else, but personal. And indeed, there is no chance of resisting, or keeping a distance. One cannot simply interpret or look for meaning within a Tino Sehgal constructed situation; in other words a quest for meaning and theoretical references leaves one empty-handed.

And maybe this is precisely what Sehgal’s intentions are, namely to make art that does not (simply) work on a rational, cognitive level. In his work in general and also in This variation, it is most obvious that art starts ‘happening’ to the beholder. By terms such as ‘working’ and ‘happening’ I refer back to the initial proposition of this book, namely to the fact that art should not be looked upon as merely a representation from which meaning can be deducted. Instead, art should be granted agency through which one welcomes the ‘doings’ of the work, no matter in which realm it aims to exercise its force on us, beholders.

If artworks are to be treated as entities that ‘do’ things to us, it is suggested that it is the experience that one should pay attention to. Furthermore, it is the personal experience and its inherent possibilities that become the object of study. In this case, the artwork is not treated as a dead object to be observed and dissected, but it is looked upon as something with which we, beholders of the present, can develop an intimate and active relationship. In this engagement, as Didi-Huberman suggests (2005), one should let art work on oneself as the coming together of subject (viewer) and object (artwork). This has been one of the underlying theoretical positions of this research, namely that it is the personal experience that is outside theory that should be paid attention to. Throughout the research and in this chapter, too, it is argued that it is the personal experience that is able to make a difference. Through the personal, art is able to have an impact on us as individuals and on
collectives in a way that will shape our future differently from how we now live on the planet. Thus the possibility of the meaningful personal encounter is of utmost importance.

How can art establish such meaningful meetings? It has been suggested that for such engagement to take place, the artwork has to overcome its own objecthood and draw the beholder beyond its representational attributes. In the case of paintings, this may not be easy as it is difficult to overcome the fact that we are looking at an object. In the case of a film – as shown through the Wedemeyer work – it might be easier, as the medium itself helps overcome the distance. With *This variation*, one is physically drawn into the situation.

Because of this extreme involvement and immersion with the artwork, the work can also be seen as a close-to-real life experience. The work erases the distance between art and life, as in that moment, art becomes one’s life as lived, not a temporary pastime in a cultural institution. Given that art and real-life fuse, I suggest that the experience I discover while looking at the artwork might also become applicable for how I relate to life in general. Probably it is in this realm that art can actually reach real life and encourage us to relate to the world ‘otherwise’. At least, these are Sehgal’s claimed intentions, namely to evoke an altered attitude towards the world through targeting physical boundaries. For instance, Sehgal created a work for the 2013 Venice Biennale entitled *L’opera alla Biennale di Venezia* during which the actors were on their knees throughout the entire performance. It appears to be an insignificant detail, yet, as Sehgal explains, this – again physical – gesture was essential to the work.

I think the 20th century was the century of individualism and philosophies of solitude, and I hope that in the 21st century we can kind of adjust that a little bit... The 20th century was very much about the human as masters, especially in art... we control everything we can shape the world... we don’t kneel anymore. In the 21st century maybe we can understand that we don’t control everything. We and the stones are not so different. If you try at home and go on your knees you feel different. And I do not mean it in a religious sense. Just a simple act of going on your knees puts you in a different mindset ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUReasWFXmg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUReasWFXmg)).
In spite of my discontent with his work in Venice, Sehgal’s comments are very telling. He wants to generate thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations in us through the physicality of the situation. What is this experience, really? How can it be grasped and what does it consist of? Furthermore, why is this experience important for the beholder and what does it have for us in the pressing times of the 21st century? In the subsequent paragraphs I recapitulate various aspects of this experience, ranging from ‘rupture’ to the concept of the ‘transformational object’.

What struck me in experiencing Sehgal’s performative art was my inability to maintain a distance. I simply did not understand why I could not keep a distance. Adrian Searle (2012) in his review refers to the fact that not everybody found this work so powerful. I also noticed that some people entered the space, leant against a wall, and started or continued chatting as if they were in a bar. They then left after five minutes, completely oblivious of the situation. Well, we all have our defense mechanisms, I guess. Nonetheless, if one did not initially resist the experience, there was probably no way of turning back. As some kind of rupture, the artwork pierces through one’s cognitive control and defense mechanisms, shattering the ego-boundaries. This ‘demand’ of the artwork, this almost violent dragging of the beholder into themselves is something that I identify in the force of contemporary art as rupture. As explained in Chapter Four, this is not a shock that is imposed upon us by some scandalous artworks, like the Study of perspective by Ai Weiwei, for instance. In the case of such artworks, one is shocked within a particular framework, as one is, in a sense, directed and ‘told’ to be shocked and conducted towards how to change one’s thinking about certain matters. This is what happens in the case of the Ai Weiwei work about symbols and constructions of power.

Unlike this kind of shock, the rupture of This variation arrives without any teleological implications, without any directions. By cutting through the cognitive control, in

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5 Personally, I think that his piece in Venice was not nearly as successful as the one in Kassel. In Venice the performers looked like some distant lunatics sitting down and singing, looking very artsy. The profound effect of This variations was nowhere to be found.

6 It is not surprising that some people decided to block out the experience. Although I have not seen such things, Adrian Searle in the Guardian tells us that people separated from such sensations in different ways. He writes: “I don’t quite hear what comes next because two Spanish women have wandered in and are chatting as if they were taking an evening walk to a bar for a drink” (Searle 2012). Apparently the women stayed there for a while, kept on chatting to each other and walked out still talking loudly.
other words through the ego boundaries, one finds oneself in an extremely vulnerable position. What actually takes place is a rupture on the Lacan-ian Symbolic. The conscious control is eliminated and one finds oneself in the realm of the Real, in the world of bodily reactions, angst, desires and drives. What might be the reason behind this immersion? One of the factors is darkness, the audience/participants in the dark are already regressing into a vulnerable position. Also by being so physical, the closure, the sound and the living bodies in action generate all kinds of (infantile) reactions that are beyond the carefully built layers of behavior.

Does the medium help the force of rupture? I argue that due to the darkness, the sound and the motion of living bodies, the intensity of the experience increases. Darkness really comes as a surprise and becomes even more unexpected in the framework of a show (documenta) that is predominantly about seeing. In This variation there is nothing to see, only to hear and sense with one’s body. There is nothing to visually hold onto, no artwork to grab and ‘digest’ with our usual art expert routine. If there were any object to look at, at least those would generate some kind of a point of reference, and the security of knowing that we are there to look at art. However, Sehgal does not grant us this means to escape and rescue ourselves by holding tight to a piece of visual information.

Aside from darkness, there is the sound factor that again is something one cannot avoid. Music climbs into one’s ear and the information cannot be shut out. The disrespect towards physical boundaries also has a powerful effect as one instinctively reacts to being approached too close. So all these factors adding up, one starts to have gut-reactions in this situation that is way beyond the cognitive, art interpretive distance. By tearing into the Symbolic and arriving at the Real, what is it that one encounters? What is in this space? Is it full, yet empty like the space of trauma, a phenomenon mostly associated with the Real? Is it the world of the infant in which we return to the pre-verbal phase of our personality development? Probably it is neither of these, as firstly there was no trauma experienced, secondly the space of trauma is frozen and dead, and thirdly by being an adult one cannot return to the state of a six-month-old infant. This space might rather resemble the type of experience the psychoanalyst, Christopher Bollas, refers to as that of psychoanalysis, namely a space of the adult (and not the infant) in regression. This is no longer the space of the child – there is no return to states that one has already passed – but a current state that is characterized by parts of our personality that do not disappear with time, but as dynamisms
define how we might be in the world. My reactions to this work surprised me the most, as they were in direct collision with the ego of the confident art expert. I felt as if I had descended to the uncontrollable, to the inexpressible, or to the unrepresentable, to a realm that Bollas defines as the unthought-known.

I felt stupid, lost and useless while I was stumbling around in the dark. I was also anxious because of not knowing what kind of space I had been thrown into. The security of the idea that I was in an art venue made me feel a bit safer – nothing lethal can happen in an art space after all. I was also aware that the uncertainty that I felt was nonsensical. My physical reaction was quicker than my realizing that I was frightened; I immediately pulled myself closer to my friend. I started giggling and making strange scream-like sounds when the performers walked too close to me, holding my hand out in front of me so no one could approach too close. There was a woman who was hugged by one of the performers and she provoked strange fantasies in me. I was repulsed; it felt as if the man was using the power of the situation to seduce someone completely unknown to him. It felt like I was witnessing a scene in which the woman had no say; she was vulnerable and being subjected to the man. I also had fantasies of her possibly enjoying this situation, and in that case it felt as if I was witnessing a secret get-together where in the dark room it is all right to do anything: whatever happens does not belong to real life after all; this space is an empty space in which one can let go of constraints and physically live one's fantasies. It was most surprising how bodily aware and infantile I had become all of a sudden. How sexual the entire experience was and how embarrassed this hidden sexuality in the dark made me – like a child who is not supposed to see what s/he has found. How uncanny and intruded I felt by this ‘adult world’, that is for those whose life is about sexuality, politics, entertainment and relationships. My gut-reaction was to retreat to the infantile position of holding onto someone for protection. As one can tell, these are realms of one’s personality one is not very happy to revisit or confront. Nonetheless, in such situations, one does not have a choice.

Why is it important that one confronts his or her unthought-known? From the viewpoint of this research, in what way might this experience be transformative? Maybe the irresistibility is the real gift of such experiences, namely that one cannot hide behind defense mechanisms and the grip of the ego. It is not by accident that Bollas defines the world of the unthought-known as transformative, defined by the transformational object. In
psychoanalysis, he identifies this object initially with the mother. In adulthood, it is the transformational object in various forms that – as a motivating object - can open space for one to revisit those hidden, yet very much present drives, urges, anxieties that obviously define how we are in the world. *This variation*, as transformational object, disturbs and interrogates. With one cut, it tears through the beholder’s conceptual state of affairs. There is no narrative to hold onto, one is not told what to feel or how to think of the world. In this sense, the experience is very different from any art with an intentional narrative, whether Renaissance artworks or contemporary art. This is a ‘de-objectified’ experience, as there is no object to cling onto. In this non-teleological space, the complexity of one’s being emerges without constraints. By its non-directional nature, one is not forced to think, feel or exist in any way that might be indicated as ‘right’, ‘true’ or ‘important’ by any hegemony. In other words, this is a realm outside the social order, beyond the representation-based world-view that operates according to a given value-system in which everything is categorized as dualistic by nature. Instead, in this world, associations, both pleasant and uncanny, arrive like dream-images, in a disorderly manner, floating as associations without value-judgment or hierarchy. One is invited by this opening of potential spaces beyond the imposed hegemony to experience being outside the grip of the socially conditioned ego.

The reason why such space can open is because artworks like *This variation* do not impose any meaning, or, as Jacques Rancière (2011) argues ‘they do not anticipate their own meaning’. In previous chapters, I referred to an aspect of such art experiences with the term ‘absence’. As opposed to enforcing a particular presence onto us, these artworks open up space. In the following paragraphs this ability of *This variation* is explored.

Given that in the floating, dynamic experience of *This variation* there is nothing to hold onto, the ego cannot identify possible representative elements in which it can call the mind for help; one is sentenced to go deeper and deeper in oneself. There are certainly identifiable bits such as the songs that refer to money and capitalism, but they swim into one’s state of consciousness just as daily reality is built into one’s dreams. This evocation of the unthought-known is possible because the artwork does not invade the beholder with its presence. As suggested in Chapter Three, presence and being present is often the reason for seeking the art experience. In many cases, artworks do fulfill this expectation, namely that once the viewer engages with them they drift into a particular state of consciousness,
anticipated by the artwork that is ‘other than’ their current conceptual state of affairs. Through empathy one engages with artworks and experiences beauty, calmness, divinity or horror, disgust, sadness and so on. No matter whether most (pre)modern art is grasped from a representationalist or agency-type of art historical approach, most works carry a particular presence, a tangible being that one can either enframe into analysis and/or relate to and embrace as a complex phenomenon. However, some contemporary artworks operate differently, namely in a way that they do not anticipate their own meaning. Instead, by not-telling, by inviting the viewer beyond representation they open up a space for questions, for a flow of associations in a disorderly manner and – most importantly – for personal engagement. In the case of This variation the artwork becomes something other than a criticism of capitalism and a revolt against the objectification of art. In This variation there is not even a detectable surface narrative beyond which the viewer could be invited, or that the viewer is called to overcome (as is the case with the much discussed Wedemeyer film, Muster). In this work, there is merely ‘nothing’. As opposed to presence, there are lack, drifts, shifts and constant motion. Here, the ego desperately looks for things to hold onto, nonetheless it is left empty-handed. This constant confrontation of ‘trying, but not being able to’ hold onto anything creates the desperation and it is this empty space, in other words, the lack of fixed points that draws the beholder into the unthought-known.

What remains to return to is the significance of this experience; why it is important to fall apart and confront that we would otherwise not want to see. Furthermore, if we accept that art really is unique in this sense, namely it can open up space that is a gateway to a different attitude towards the world, how should art be treated in times that call for urgent change?

Having discussed This variation as personal experience, it is time to return to the initial dilemma of the book, namely the potential of contemporary art to generate change in the course of events that currently define our world. Time is ticking and there is urgency for action. Yet, it might be precisely in these pressing times that there is a need to adopt a different mentality, as stated by some of the philosophers I referred to earlier in the book. It appears that the kind of ‘doing’ that humankind has used for finding solutions for situations of urgency is not going to work anymore. Why can we no longer believe in the
great achievements of science and technology? Why should we be skeptical towards the invention of new methods, models and technological devices for saving the planet or at least slowing down the devastating processes that obviously manifest in disasters? Although my argument for these questions has been presented already, in order to see the entire picture I feel there is a need for a final recap.

Firstly, it seems like the outcomes that the problem-solution, cause-effect type of attitude would generate are stuck within the framework of the much discussed hegemony. It is this very attitude, dictated by hegemony that has gotten us into these troubles. How can one expect to find a solution within the very framework that is responsible for the current state of things? Secondly, if a lifestyle that slowed down the course of events were enforced upon the world population, the tension that would arise from such radical change would result in the outbreak of massive aggression and violence. Put simply, even if all governments acknowledged that humankind is destroying the planet and there is a need for radical action now, not tomorrow, but now, they could not afford to ban the use of motorized transportation, order the closing down of all factories, prohibit eating beef and ordering citizens to grow vegetables on their rooftops. What needs to change is the individual and therefore, consequently, the collective attitude towards the ‘things-of-the-world’. There is a need to slip out of the grip of the dualistic ego that thinks of its life in its body as the most important, wants the most and best for itself in as short a time as possible. It is essential to overcome the utilitarian, self-centered approach that looks at gain and profit for the individual as the key to well-being, no matter what price there is to pay. It is time to master a new behavior. We do not really have any other choice, as we can only think of a solution for the current ills of the world if we change, individually and collectively, our attitude towards life itself. This change is not going to be implemented by us deciding on it and saying that ‘from next week I will have a different approach to the world and towards life’.

This change in us, individuals personally, can arise if we can look at ourselves and the world outside the confines of hegemony. It is only possible if we, human beings, realize that we live in a constructed reality that we have built and have the possibility, the energy and the right to change. A new paradigm can emerge if we realize that the structures we take for granted are no more than constructions of power that, even if we experience them as set in stone, are actually illusionary. They exist because it is our consciousness, and
consequentially intentions and acts, that keep them alive. As soon as one experiences the things-of-the-world beyond these structures, as soon as one discovers that these frameworks are completely fictive and man-made, and are the product of the always craving ego, there is a way to change.

Consequentially, engagement with practices that are beyond hegemony should be encouraged. The reason why some contemporary artworks are unique in this sense lies their ability to bring the beholder completely, not simply on a cognitive level, beyond hegemony, in general, and beyond the power structure of their own ego, in particular. When it comes to writing about art, if artworks such as the ones cited are able to draw one into such potential space, it is this ability and space that should be theorized. In the case of the transitional space of contemporary art, as we have seen, the representationalist interpretive framework, which has become most common for thinking about art falls short and leaves both beholder and theorist empty-handed. In the case of the contemporary artworks I was working with, it is obvious that the art experience is simply in a different realm from interpretive, analytical theory. In any case, art should not be looked upon as a dead object waiting to be dissected on an operating table; in other words it should not be treated as representation within which meaning can be found, reducing the artwork to the status of a messenger. Although the representationalist attitude has its own relevance and importance, if we want to do justice to the kind of art that is able to draw us into this transitional space, art history should leave interpretive theory and look at art as a respected agent, capable of inviting the beholder into their own personal ground zero in order to revisit how they are in the world. Instead of finding out what it means, this ability of art to invite the beholder beyond the structured ego-boundaries and ‘feel the things-of-the-world on its own skin’ should be – and hopefully was in this research - theorized.

I would like to emphasize again that although interpretive theory is important as it generates knowledge, the mastering of factual knowledge of the past (or present) might not be of primary importance, as in order to address the urgent matters of the 21st century, it is more important to experience a way of being in the world that is outside hegemony. Therefore, the emphasis should be on personal experience rather than on general knowledge. This is what I have been aiming to do throughout this book, through my own, personal language, through ‘this art history’, my ‘art speak’, articulate the importance of my
personal experience. What has been experienced has now been theorized in an other-than-represenationalist framework. The kind of theory I have been expounding might sound different from general art history; at times it is very personal, it does not come to conclusions, it does not have findings, it is often subjective, emotional and poetic. It is experience put into theory in the form of what Mieke Bal calls ‘approximate translation’. Nonetheless, I suggest that this kind of art writing does justice to the artworks explored.

How does this other-than-representational attitude towards art impact the status of art in society? If we accept that some artworks fulfill this most important position in today’s world, their status should also be reconsidered. As suggested in Chapter One, art is usually not included when important decisions are made about the future of the planet. Relying on what has been explored, I argue that art should be involved at least at a preparatory level in decision-making, precisely because of its ability to draw the beholder into a transitional space. I am aware that the utilitarian arguments for the ‘use’ and ‘benefit’ of art for the wellbeing of society have become weak, apologetic and outdated. This I can understand; furthermore, as I see it, these arguments keep the arts within hegemony. However, if one looks at art as a force that can open up space for the unknown in one’s entire being, in a world that does not have other choice but to reinvent itself in the form of not yet seen alternatives, it would be thoughtless and ignorant to exclude such artistic practices as being simply a luxury pastime, irrelevant or unimportant.

At the end of this book I have come to the conclusion that contemporary art experiences are worth considering as key agents for shaping our attitude towards the future of the world. Practices, such as the work of Tinei, Wedemeyer and most obviously Sehgal, are means through which the firmly set ego-boundaries can crumble and the beholder can actually exist in a space where the rules of the hegemonic game no longer apply. Spending time, just merely existing beyond the conceptual state of affairs we take for granted when mapping and ordering the things-of-the-world, by touching ‘ground zero’ with one’s body, heart and mind, with one’s entire being, is something that contemporary art might help us with. In this art engagement, we might be able to experience how to ‘imagine otherwise’.