

## Experience in a New Key

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# Sculpture and the Sense of Place

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**Abstract:** This article proposes a direction—inspired by a reading of Heidegger’s reflections on sculpture—in which thinking enriched by artistic experience can unfold an alternative mode of being-in-the-world. Heidegger points out that, in contrast to a scientific understanding of space as an empty container, the special character of space in sculpture is characterized by a clearing-away (*Räumen*), which presupposes and points to an open, receptive attitude toward experience that is necessary for dwelling to take place. From Heidegger this article proceeds to reflect on artworks by Eduardo Chillida and Janet Echelman. These offer concrete examples of how a thinking of sculpture can apply to different notions of place. While Chillida’s sculptures present a sense of place as rooted and embedded in the landscape, Echelman’s artworks explore an expanded notion of place through a multisensory sense of immersion. Applying Heidegger’s meditations on *Räumen*, it turns out that the differences between these artworks are of greatest significance in illustrating the breadth of the experiential space that they share: an openness to dwelling and a receptivity toward being-in-the-world. In this way, Heidegger’s reflections on sculpture are unfolded in a contemporary context and the potential of sculpture for a thinking of experience is established.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology; Experience; Art; sense of place; Heidegger; sculpture; space; place; aesthetics

*I have sometimes tried to express this by means of lines and stresses cut into plaster and lead reliefs. But these relief drawings had no third dimension and so lacked precisely that empty space which is the visible and almost concrete resonance of sculpture.—Eduardo Chillida<sup>1</sup>*

Like no other art form, sculpture reveals spatiality. Because of its three-dimensional character, sculpture occupies the space around it and presents a relation between body and space. This is why we are drawn to sculpture. It calls attention to the spatiality of the work of art and to the manifestation of materiality itself. This article focuses on the idea that sculpture has the potential to reveal “a special character of space” that brings with it a new understanding of our own relationship with the world. As we shall see, sculpture opens up a way of experiencing the world by exposing the elemental relations between material and space that allows us to relate to the world in a new way. My aim is to show how the clearing-away (*Räumen*) of sculpture presupposes and points to an open, receptive attitude to space. To make this argument, I distinguish between two separate attitudes or modes of being-in-the-world. One pertains to a scientific or technological sense of space. The other is a receptive attitude related to a sense of space that calls attention to place and the ecstatic character of being. The inherent difficulty involved in the possibility of such a shift in attitude is the fact that from the vantage point of being-in-the-world in a technological age, any other approach seems to require an exit from being itself.

According to Heidegger, however, art—and specifically sculpture—carries within it a call to overcome this illusion. This study calls attention to the way in which, in Heidegger’s later thinking, sculpture opens up a receptive mode for dwelling with space as an alternative way of conceiving of being-in-the-world,

<sup>1</sup> Volboudt, *Chillida*, 14.

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which bears implications for the way we experience the world. This reflection about experience will include an examination of the works of artists Eduardo Chillida and Janet Echelman as a way of exploring and assessing the arguments about sculpture presented here. That is, the inclusion of concrete works of art will serve to illuminate alternative thinking about experience and to reveal the potential of sculpture to deepen a sense of our relation to the world.

In the discussion of Heidegger vis-à-vis Echelman's contemporary modern art, I make the suggestion that Heidegger's thinking about sculpture can be fruitfully supplemented with an aesthetics of atmosphere as presented by Böhme. The concept of atmosphere is advantageous, I argue, in that it captures the atmospheric qualities that seem to be a central design element in Echelman's works but that is not fully apprehended in Heidegger's sense of place. Still, any such refinements presuppose Heidegger's reflections on sculpture and an emphasis on the thinking of experience.

## 1 The Emergency Path

Heidegger was increasingly drawn to the study of sculpture over the course of his authorship. He found in sculpture a form of art that enabled him to reexamine the role of art in our lives through a rethinking of the relationship between bodies and space. Some aspects of this thinking are anticipated in his earlier work, but he only gradually comes to realize the importance later ascribed to sculpture. Heidegger's last published text, *Art and Space*, is a short essay on sculpture which accompanies the works of Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida at an exhibition at the Erker Gallery in St. Gallen in 1968. Heidegger therein examines the interplay of art and space. The essay starts with a discussion of different notions of space and asserts that "art and scientific technology regard and work upon space toward diverse ends and in diverse ways".<sup>2</sup> Heidegger sets up a distinction between what he sees as scientific space as opposed to "genuine space" and the idea that space may have some "special character". According to Heidegger, our conventional, modern notion of space founded in Galilean and Newtonian physics amounts to "one objective cosmic space" of which all other renderings of space are mere aspects. It is a notion of space characterized by quantifiable sameness and indifference and by what Heidegger labels "homogeneous expanse". While this holds true for Newtonian physics and the Cartesian plane of *spatio* and *extensio*, Heidegger seems to regard this feature to be an overarching symptom of the desire to control and dominate. For Heidegger, it marks a condition epitomized by the privileging of technology and calculative thinking and it is this hegemony of theoretical thinking in an age of technology that Heidegger criticizes in his later thinking. In this understanding, technology is a leveling drive toward replaceability and a commodification of things into resources and it poses the threat of reducing things into sheer stock or standing reserve, as poignantly pointed out in the essay on technology. It is up against these demands of technology that Heidegger forms his reflections on sculpture and space. Accordingly, the distinction between two opposing modes of being-in-the-world and notions of space is informed by attention toward the singular and unique as a basis for exploring a thinking of experience.

Contrary to the scientific notion of space, Heidegger ascertains a notion of "genuine space, namely what uncovers [Being's] authentic character".<sup>3</sup> It turns out that the question of space (*Raum*) has not been addressed in the right way. The character of space is historically specific and any attempt to list its historical varieties amounts to nothing more than mere derivatives of the aforementioned, thus missing the question of the special character of space. Heidegger wants to think space differently and he does so by bringing the question of space to sculpture:

Still, how can we find the special character of space? There is an emergency path which, to be sure, is a narrow and precarious one. Let us try to listen to language. Whereof does it speak in the word 'space'? Clearing-away (*Räumen*) is uttered therein. This means: to clear out (*roden*), to free from wilderness. Clearing-away brings forth the free, the openness for man's settlements and dwellings. When thought in its own special character, clearing-away is the release of places toward

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, *Art and Space*, 121.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 122.

which the fate of dwelling man turns in the preservation of home, in the brokenness of homelessness or in the complete indifference to the two. Clearing-away is release of the places (*Orten*) at which a god appears, the places from which the gods have disappeared, the places at which the appearance of the godly tarries long. In each case, clearing-away brings forth locality preparing for dwelling. Secular spaces are always the privation of often very remote sacred spaces. Clearing-away is release of places.<sup>4</sup>

Heidegger here presents the key notion *Räumen*, i.e., clearing-away. It is central to his understanding of sculpture and spatiality as it paves the way for receptivity and thus authentic dwelling. What Heidegger alludes to here, I would argue, is the way in which sculpture creates a space as we encounter it. This is why we are drawn to sculpture. The surrounding space becomes part of the work of art. It does so in the sense that the sculpture and the space surrounding it spill over into each other, as the space becomes a relational part of the sculpture itself. This relational aspect is tied to Heidegger's interpretation of the boundary to which I shall return. It is this relation between the sculpture and the interconnected space surrounding it that creates a new sense of space, an aspect in Heidegger's later thinking sometimes referred to by the Greek term *poiesis*. One could also argue that "the special character of space" presented here points to the status of "the between". Spatiality itself comes to the fore in the relation of space and materiality in sculpture. In this way, sculpture is the manifestation of spatiality. The relational character of material and space points to ecstatic being in that sculpture "brings forth the free, the openness for man's settling and dwelling" and reveals "the release of places toward which the fate of dwelling man turns". Sculpture stands out in its relation to the world.

According to Heidegger, *Räumen* is also a making-room for something to appear or settle. It is a form of receptivity and opening up in order for dwelling to take place. Heidegger thus links the existential dimension of dwelling to the special character of space detected in sculpture. It is worth noting how the notion of clearing-away is introduced in the essay. It brings context to Heidegger's thinking toward the special or, better said, poetic character of space that is exposed in sculpture. Heidegger refers to language. It is with the vocabulary of the forest that Heidegger speaks of the "clearing" taking place in sculpture. Clearing-away is a translation of the German *Räumen*, which alludes to the forest metaphors most clearly presented in *Holzwege*. The German word *Räumen* has a topological connotation that is lost in the English "clearing-away". *Räumen* is related to *Raum*, space, as in the original title of the essay, *Die Kunst und der Raum* (art and space). The metaphoric language of the forest and wilderness echoes Heidegger's related neology of the *Lichtung*,<sup>5</sup> translated into English as the clearing. By creating this vocabulary of wood-paths and wilderness, Heidegger indirectly points to the notion of truth<sup>6</sup> as a backdrop to the reflections on sculpture and the special character of space.

## 2 Receptivity

Heidegger goes on to connect the clearing-away of *Räumen* with *Einräumen* as a making-room for something. This is a key feature for sculpture and for a new thinking of experience as it paves the way for an alternative way of experiencing the world. Bringing together the two, Heidegger rhetorically asks:

How does clearing-away (*Räumen*) happen? Is it not making-room (*Einräumen*), and this again in a twofold manner as granting and arranging? First, making-room admits something. It lets openness hold sway which, among other things, grants the appearance of things present to which human dwelling sees itself consigned. On the other hand, making-room prepares for things the possibility to belong to their relevant whither and, out of this, to each other.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger develops the notion of the clearing in "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking". The clearing refers to a forest opening which in German is *Lichtung*.

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger understands truth as unconcealment in line with the Greek sense of truth as *aletheia*. To this end, the German *Lichtung* (clearing) reflects the same phenomenological thinking of concealment/unconcealment.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *Art and Space*, 122-123.

The making-room is an open attitude, creating the possibility for the openness necessary for dwelling to take place. It is the exact hermeneutic move required for a new thinking of experience. This reads well with Heidegger's understanding of the overarching distinction between the notion of space employed by science and in technology as opposed to a different way of being-in-the-world presented with this new understanding of space. Heidegger counters what he regards as the hegemony of modern science and technology with a being-in-the-world characterized by dwelling and conditioned by a requisite gesture of receptivity. Only by making-room for the opposite, i.e., that which is new and that which opposes the universality of modern science and technology, may one be receptive to a sense of dwelling and belonging "in the midst of things".<sup>8</sup> Heidegger warns of the dominance and pervasiveness of the former and one senses the alarm and claustrophobia on the rise in his terminology of the emergency path (*Notsteg*). But while Heidegger's use of language in this passage seems overly dramatic, his reflections on *Einräumen* as a gesture of making-room or admitting is central to the potential of sculpture. It marks an important theme in Heidegger's later thinking, namely the idea of receptivity as a preliminary hermeneutical condition for understanding and, ultimately, for the possibility for genuine experience. Heidegger often refers to the dialectics of "hearing and calling" with the same hermeneutic point in mind: In order to "hear", we need to "listen", and only when qualifying our hearing by applying the genuinely open, attentive attitude of listening, can we truly hear the calling. Receptivity refers to a preliminary openness, a gesture of making-room in order to be able to receive. It is a precondition for any genuine, authentic experience.

It is now clear that the double movement of clearing-away and making-room revealed in sculpture offers exactly what is needed: an alternative to the hegemony and control of the technological attitude. As opposed to the occupying appropriation of space as resource or an empty container, sculpture points toward an alternative attitude. It is not, however, an exit. Instead, what is offered is an alternative mode of being-in-the-world, an experience in a new key. As pointed out, this new sense of experience does not come easily and the elusive "character of clearing-away is all too easily overlooked".<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, this receptivity speaks to the potential of sculpture inasmuch as it resists the indifference and "homogenous expanse" of calculative thinking in the age of technology.

### 3 The Comb of the Wind

Heidegger's essay on sculpture, *Art and Space*, marks the collaboration with the Basque sculptor, Eduardo Chillida to whom he dedicated the essay. The two shared a mutual understanding and many of the ideas from Heidegger's thinking of sculpture came together in the work of Chillida. To further examine this relationship, I turn to one of Chillida most prominent works of art, *Peine del Viento XV*.

The iconic artwork, *Peine del Viento XV*, is a sculptural group of three structures of concrete steel carved into the natural rocks rising on the coastal line near the Basque city of San Sebastian. Situated on the northern coast of Spain, the sculpture faces the winds of the Cantabrian Ocean, referenced in the title of the work, *The Comb of the Wind*.

In Chillida's *Peine del Viento XV*, we are reminded of the elemental character of sculpture. The man-made steel structure is embedded in the rocks facing the sea. The structure opens up and reaches out as it rises from the ground of the solid rock into the air, suspended in mid-air and hovering above the water. The reaching arms of steel combs through the air in the howling winds of the Atlantic Ocean. At the same time, the structure creates a space as it encircles what surrounds it, including the wind passing through it. In this way, Chillida's artwork articulates the thinking of Heidegger. We are drawn to sculpture because it occupies the space surrounding it. The sculpture articulates the special character of space by opening up and making room.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, *Art and Space*, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 122.



**Figure 1:** *Peine del Viento XV* © Zabalaga Leku. San Sebastián, VEGAP, 2019 The estate of Eduardo Chillida and Hauser & Wirth

Reaching out into the winds of the Atlantic Ocean, *Peine del Viento XV* is embedded in its surroundings as the man-made sculpture explores the relation of human and landscape in the fierce coastal setting. The created space calls attention to this relation as we are reminded of “the fate of dwelling man”. In this relation, a sense of dwelling takes place that cannot be accounted for by a notion of space as an empty container or plane of indifference. Rather, what is at stake here is a rich sense of space as poetic space insofar as the *Räumen* and *Einräumen* clears out and makes room in a receptive, open attitude towards being via the sculpture. In this sense, the special character of space in sculpture reveals the character of place. *Peine del Viento XV* is rooted in a place which makes it untransferable as a mere site or position.<sup>10</sup> What Chillida’s artwork is so good at establishing is exactly this rooted sense of dwelling as being in place. Somewhere between the material character of steel and rock on the one side, and the immaterial, or rather, invisible element of air and wind, a space is created in the clearing-away and making-room of the sculpture. Sculpture makes room for the space surrounding it and is, conversely, in place, embedded in the surroundings of the coast and landscape. What the sculpture reveals is not the mere shape or contours of a structure; rather, it calls attention to spatiality itself and to the elemental character of belonging to the place. It is this sense of rootedness and being in place that Chillida’s sculptures articulate as they open up for a sense of dwelling.

## 4 Heidegger’s Sense of Place

Central to Heidegger’s reflections on sculpture is the notion of space. As it turns out, the special character of space is in fact related to a notion of place. The sense of clearing-away in sculpture as a making-room in order for receptive dwelling to take place is made possible by the release of places, *Orten*, in plural. Places are themselves interrelated as regions and drawn to each other as “the gathering of things in their belonging together”.<sup>11</sup> Following Jeff Malpas’ reading of Heidegger, it makes sense to understand this interconnectedness of places as the unity of space. The interrelatedness of places comes together in the

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger’s notion of the *Gestell* as put forth in *The Question Concerning Technology* as the technological is sometimes translated into English as “Positionality”, rather than “Enframing”, to make this exact point (Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 7).

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Art and Space*, 123.



notions of locality (*Ortschaft*) and region (*Gegend*). The notion of space in sculpture must therefore be seen in conjunction with the notion of place. According to Malpas, “space that contains places within it can be understood as having something of the being of a place itself”.<sup>12</sup>

In *Art and Space*, Heidegger sets up a distinction between the perspective of space as place in opposition to a scientific notion of space. He does this by determining the intrinsic qualities ascribed to place as *Ort*: “place is not located in a pre-given space, after the manner of physical-technological space”.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, the special character of space found in sculpture is a place-like character and, as such, it presents a potential:

Sculpture would be the embodiment of places. Places, in preserving and opening a region, hold something free gathered around them which grants the tarrying of things under consideration and a dwelling for man in the midst of things.<sup>14</sup>

As it turns out, sculpture creates a place for dwelling in the revealing of places. Places “grant the tarrying of things” and condition the very possibility of dwelling. Heidegger connects the notions of place and dwelling to sculpture in that “clearing-away brings forth locality preparing for dwelling”.<sup>15</sup> This is the potential of sculpture. It prompts our relation to the world by opening a place to dwell.

## 5 The Boundary and the Void

In the later added “Addendum” to *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger gives an account of the notion of the boundary (*Grenze*) that becomes central to his thinking of sculpture. According to Heidegger, the Germany word for boundary, *Grenze*, is connected to the Greek term *peras*. Consequently, the notion of the boundary is to be understood in its Greek sense:

The boundary in the Greek sense does not block off; rather, being itself brought forth, it first brings to its radiance what is present. Boundary sets free into the unconcealed; by the contours in the Greek light the mountain stands in its towering and repose.<sup>16</sup>

What is presented here is an understanding of the boundary not as a demarcation or delimitation, but as something that “sets free into the unconcealed”. Instead of blocking off, the boundary “brings to its radiance what is present”. The boundary is dynamic. It sets free into un-concealment and is characterized by its radiance (*Scheinen*). As such, the boundary indicates an overflowing or richness in the radiance of the phenomenon. The boundary is not concerned with containing or inclosing. Instead, it marks a beginning rather than an end. It is not the point at which something terminates, but rather it is where something is set free into the open.

It is this alternative understanding of boundary in the Greek sense that is developed in Heidegger’s thinking of sculpture. In the opening paragraphs of *Art and Space* – where he sets up the distinction between the special character of space in sculpture versus the scientific notion of space as neutral, empty indifference – Heidegger denounces a conventional understanding of boundary as “demarcation as setting up an inclosing and excluding border” (*Abgrenzen als Ein- und Ausgrenzen*). Leaving behind this notion of border in favor of the Greek sense of boundary, Heidegger’s thinking of sculpture, I argue, can be understood through the Greek sense of boundary, with its emphasis on radiance and disclosure.

This reading of the boundary in the Greek sense has consequences for an understanding of space. For Heidegger, the overflowing nature of the boundary in sculpture means that the idea of empty space or void must be abandoned precisely because of the permeating radiance of boundary. This marks a shift

<sup>12</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, 262.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Art and Space*, 123.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 83.

in Heidegger's own reflections on sculpture in which he previously saw the relation to space in terms of tension and conflict rather than relational and permeating.<sup>17</sup>

In Andrew Mitchell's reading of Heidegger, the overflowing nature of the boundary (in the Greek sense) leads to a thinking of relationality and collaboration, which reveals the space of the sculpture as a place of encounter. Arguing against a separation of the lived body from an empty space surrounding the sculpture, Mitchell follows through on the rethinking on the limit to expose "a material space of radiance". It is in this way, he suggests, that we may understand the special character of space in sculpture. Subsequently, space itself is revealed as a "middle ground and medium" and so the space of sculpture becomes a "between" where dwelling can take place as "relational and tied to surrounding people, places and things".<sup>18</sup> Heidegger's reflections on the boundary as relational, permeating and setting free may indeed be said to constitute a "middle ground". In my view, this is exactly what goes on in the encounter with sculpture. The material space of radiance reflects the way in which sculpture occupies the space surrounding it and the way it affects us. This relational thinking of the boundary in the Greek sense points to an opening up—a setting free—a new way of thinking experience as we are drawn to sculpture and its special sense of space.

## 6 Placing Heidegger

I would like to address two aspects of Heidegger's thinking about sculpture that deserve attention. First, while the call for the importance of genuine, poetic space and a new attitude towards being-in-the-world in light of the shortcomings of contemporary modern life is clearly pertinent, Heidegger's introduction of an emergency path—the *Notsteg*—seems to indicate that one would be able to "leave" or set aside the transcendental condition of the technological age. As I hinted earlier, the problem is that we are precisely unable to simply reject or "leave" the world as it appears in its current metaphysical guise. Opting out is not an option. We cannot close the door on the history of Being which is why any thinking of art as an alternative mode of experiencing the world must take care to point this out. In *Art and Space*, however, Heidegger does not provide such moderation and, as a result, the paragraph in question appears somewhat unclear. Put in Heidegger's own language, there can be no "outside" the house of Being, so to speak. Instead, we have to try to come to terms with the world as it is and not fall victim of escapism. That said, this aspect does not deem a thinking of sculpture impotent or misplaced; quite the contrary, the situation only makes reflecting on experience all the more pressing.

The second point I would like to raise is of potentially greater concern because it is about Heidegger's own sense of place. While his criticism of our technological age is still both important and relevant today, it would seem that Heidegger's sense of place may be less suited to standing the test of time. Lingering in the background of Heidegger's thinking is a provincialism strangely at odds with the world he criticizes. Not only is the topology of thinking well-rooted in the forest and countryside of Heidegger's own lifeworld, it is also heavily dependent on the pre-Socratic thinking of Ancient Greece. Heidegger reaches back in time as a means to guide our Western thinking, which he thinks has gone astray. All these things raise the question of Heidegger's own timeliness and whether his sense of place is still relevant to us today. The nostalgia and romanticism one might detect in Heidegger's notion of place does not disqualify his thinking in general, but in terms of a thinking of sculpture, it does raise an important question. Does Heidegger's sense of place call for a reappropriation of place in the form of the hermeneutical task of reinterpreting tradition in today's world, as emphasized by Gadamer?<sup>19</sup> This is indeed an open question. However, and as we shall see, it may well be the case that Heidegger's thinking does have the breadth and dynamicity to remain relevant as we turn to the contemporary world of modern art.

<sup>17</sup> In his 1964 speech to German sculptor Bernhard Heiliger, Heidegger gives an account of the relation between sculpture and space as agonistic and conflicting. The description of the „strife“ between Earth and World in *The Origin of the Work of Art* – not including the account of the boundary in the later added *Zusatz* – may also be seen in this light of confrontation.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> In *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer reminds us of the philosophical task of interpretation and reappropriation that all generations are left with as a result of our historicity and the hermeneutical structure of understanding.

## 7 Experience in a New Key

In what follows, I will discuss two works of American sculptor Janet Echelman. Pushing the boundaries of sculpture, Echelman's work brings the potential of sculpture into a contemporary setting, which also means questioning our understanding of place. As it turns out, Echelman's work challenges us by expanding the sense of place from something grounded or rooted to something entirely different. Part of the appeal of Echelman's work has to do with the atmospheric and multisensory qualities of her artworks as she opens up new avenues for encountering sculpture. The installation of *1.8 Renwick* in the Bettie Rubenstein Grand Salon for the opening of the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, serves to illustrate the complexity of this altered sense of place and experience.



Figure 2: *1.8 Renwick*, Washington DC, 2015. Photo by Bruce Petschek © Janet Echelman

*1.8 Renwick* consists of a hand-knotted net structure hanging under the ceiling of the gallery. It is accompanied by projected light and a carpet displaying a topological map of the ocean beneath the sculpture. The inclusion of the carpet is an exception to Echelman's artworks that are almost always installed outside, with no additional artifacts besides the sculpture itself. In this case, however, the carpet serves to enhance the presented narrative. *1.8 Renwick* references the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan that hit the entire region. The rotation of earth was speeded up by 1.8 microseconds per day because if these events and the title of her work is a reference to the length of time the day that was shortened as a result.

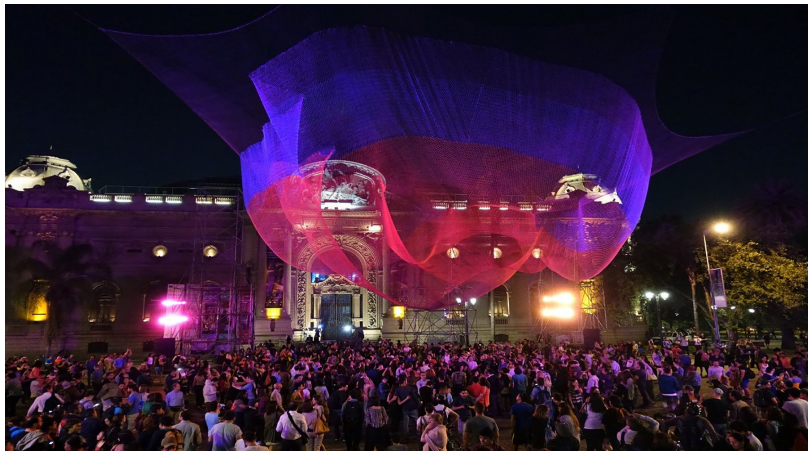
What we meet here is an expansive notion of place. Just as the day itself has changed, so has also the sense of place as it appears in *1.8 Renwick*. Echelman's sculpture is designed for a multisensory experience that defies conventional thinking of place. To examine this aspect, I call attention to Heidegger's speech, *Remarks on Art – Sculpture – Space*,<sup>20</sup> to the sculptor Bernhard Heiliger, in which he reflects on the role of the body in relation to sculpture. Invoking Husserl's distinction of *Körper* and *Leib*, Heidegger describes the body as a lived body, *Leib*, as opposed to the physical body, *Körper*. Accordingly, we encounter the world, and with it, sculpture, through embodied experience. This is why we are drawn to sculpture and the special character of space it presents. *1.8 Renwick* is designed for this multisensory form of experience through an expansive notion of place. It offers a concrete, heterogeneous rendering of space while calling attention to the ambiguity of the boundary as a lived, bodily experience. As it turns out, Heidegger's sense of place does in fact include a notion of embodiment. It is the lived body that engages with the work of Echelman and it is this notion of embodiment that enables us to take in the sense of place that is articulated. The indeterminacy of the boundary is in full spatial display in *1.8 Renwick*, but the multisensory sense of spatiality and the immersive character of the work are themselves established through a clearing-away and making-room that

<sup>20</sup> The speech was presented by Heidegger on the occasion of the sculptor Bernhard Heiliger's exhibit at the Erker Gallery in 1964 during the Documenta III.



enable the receptive, open attitude of the special character of space in sculpture. Echelman's work explores the unmoored, the ephemeral, the blurred. Her work challenges Heidegger's account of sculpture because—unlike Chillida's work—it does not articulate a sense of being rooted in place. In that respect, the very concept of place seems to have undergone a change as one encounters the floating, indeterminate sculptures and the expansive, multisensory character of her artwork. Echelman's *1.8 Renwick* calls for a rich sense of place beyond the elemental sculptures of Chillida. During the opening of *1.8 Renwick*, museum guests encountering the sculpture laid down on the ground or sat on the floor, seemingly absorbed while trying to take in the artwork. The work makes a powerful impact with an expansive notion of place, exposing the clearing-away of *Räumen*. In this way, the work reveals its character as *Gegend*, region, in the gathering and belonging of things which, according to Heidegger, “grants the tarrying of things” and thus conditions dwelling.

Unlike *1.8 Renwick*, Echelman's other sculptures are most often designed as site-specific, outdoor installations, some permanent, some temporary. They are netted structures, knotted together with a woven texture to explore volumetric form without solid mass. They often elude the conventional notion of sculpture by defying of the norms and constraints of gravity, form and space. Seemingly floating in mid-air, suspended between building blocks or hovering public squares, the ephemeral sculptures call into question the notion of spatiality and the experience of space. Because of the way they are constructed, the sculptures move softly in the wind and, like *1.8 Renwick*, are illuminated by projected colored light at night to explore the terms of solidity and form. In this sense, Echelman's work also articulates the elemental character of the wind while drawing attention to the indeterminacy of the boundary between space and sculpture. Her 2016 installation, *1.26*, at Santiago's Museo Nacional de Belles Artes in Chile, represents all of these features typical for Echelman's work.



**Figure 3:** *1.26*, Santiago, 2016. Photo by Mark Davis © Janet Echelman

*1.26* presents the indeterminacy of the boundary—a clearing-away and a making-room—calling attention to the special character of space in the work. At the same time, the tension and wonder of the seemingly solid, yet netted sculpture suspended in mid-air come together in a heterogeneous unity in the work of art. As was the case with *1.8 Renwick*, Echelman's *1.26* also represents a physical event, namely the 2010 earthquake and tsunami that hit Chile and, again, the title is a reference to the shortened length of the day. In this way, Echelman's sculptures give form to that which is no longer there. In Heidegger's thinking, the boundary as something positive that sets free and opens up leads to the rejection of the idea of the void and of space as an empty container. For Echelman, the boundary also gives rise to something positive in the concrete spatial rendering of artistic expression. As we immerse ourselves in the expansive notion of place, the sculptures open up a shared experience and a reminder of the interdependency and interconnectedness of our lives—from the lived, embodied perspective to the global scale of the cataclysmic physical event. All of this, I would add, point to a deepened sense of place and relationality as the artwork illuminates our own being in place through the special character of space in sculpture.

## 8 Atmospheres of Sculpture

Leaving the earthbound structures of Chillida behind, Echelman invites us to float, exploring the atmospheric qualities of sculpture. The concept of atmosphere developed in Gernot Böhme's new aesthetics appears to supplement Heidegger's reflections on sculpture, it seems to me, while exploring the hybrid qualities in sculpture.

In his new aesthetics, Böhme adopts and develops the concept of atmosphere in an attempt to render the affective, spatial qualities that go beyond the domains of subjectivity and objectivity. It is a hybrid notion, articulating the phenomenon of spatial or environmental attunement. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger had already introduced a similar idea, *Stimmung*, translated in English as "moods", and it is fair to say that Böhme's concept of atmosphere owes a great deal to Heidegger's thinking. Both concepts imply a shared sense of environment and both are tied to human states. Still, Heidegger's concept of mood is developed in the context of fundamental ontology and, as such, weaved into a *Dasein*-centered thinking of space<sup>21</sup> and tied to existential attunement (*Befindlichkeit*).<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the concept of atmosphere specifically targets the spatial and was developed for the context of space and materiality, so to speak. For this reason, the concept of atmosphere is especially suitable when discussing place in contemporary modern art, all the more so since the atmospheric seems to be a central design element in Echelman's works. It is precisely this method of integrating concrete works of art into the analysis and partial revision of theoretical conceptual investigations that emphasizes the importance and potential of the reference to the atmospheric perception of space and place.

Böhme describes atmospheres as quasi-objective. In the essay, *Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics*, he asserts that while atmospheres are "produced", they are nonetheless central to perception: "What is first and foremost perceived is neither sensations nor shapes or objects or their constellations ... but atmospheres".<sup>23</sup> The pre-reflective concept of atmosphere is a complex hybrid of materiality, spatiality, affect, affordance and place. As such, it offers an appropriately broad concept for circling the forces at play in Echelman's sculptures as a supplement to Heidegger's thinking of sculpture.

Compared to the works of Echelman, Chillida's art explores a more conventional notion of space and dwelling through elemental, earthbound works embedded in the landscape. However, this does not mean the concept of atmosphere does not apply. On the contrary, the pre-reflective, atmospheric qualities seem a strong influence when encountering Chillida's *Peine del Viento XV* as the arms of steel combs through the air in the howling winds of the Atlantic Ocean.

Echelman's works are transformative by design—changing, floating, moving. While Chillida insisted on working in solid, hard materials, Echelman finds a new expression to sculpture in a soft, ephemeral guise. But despite the differences, what has become clear through the application of Heidegger's thinking of sculpture is that the works of Echelman and Chillida share many of the same essential characteristics qua sculptures. What seemed to be a fundamental difference eventually turns out to be a common feature, namely the notion of *Räumen* that opens up and clears away to make room for a receptive dwelling and an open attitude toward being-in-the-world. As it turns out, Heidegger's reflections on sculpture are still intensely relevant for uncovering the full potential of artworks like Echelman's and Chillida's and exploring a new attitude toward being-in-the-world.

## 9 Concluding Perspective

This article set out to explore the potential of sculpture as an alternative mode of being-in-the-world through a reading of Heidegger's reflections on sculpture. While establishing the distinction between a scientific notion of space and the special character of space in sculpture, I identified the key features of clearing-

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger*, 6-9. And: Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 134.

<sup>23</sup> Böhme, "Atmosphere", 125.

away and making-room as essential to the poetic potential of sculpture. It turned out, the clearing-away of sculpture presupposes and points to an open, receptive attitude that is necessary for authentic dwelling to take place. The open, receptive attitude established an alternative, new way of conceiving being-in-the-world that carried with it implications for the way we experience the world.

The inclusion of the artworks of Eduardo Chillida and Janet Echelman offered concrete examples of how sculpture can suggest different notions of place. While Chillida's sculptures present a sense of place rooted and embedded in the landscape, Echelman's artworks explore an expansive notion of place through a multisensory sense of immersion. Heidegger's thinking of boundary and the responsive, lived body pointed to the deeply relational aspects of sculpture exemplified in the works of Echelman. As I reflected on these sculptures through Heidegger's meditations on *Räumen*, the gap between the works of Chillida and Echelman turned out to mask a deeply common experience when encountering sculpture. The apparent gap—between being rooted or unmoored—was only an illusion. It turned out that the differences between these artworks were of greatest significance in illustrating the breadth of experiential space that they shared: an openness that invites one to dwell there and a receptivity toward being-in-the-world. In this way, Heidegger's reflections on sculpture were unfolded in a contemporary context and the potential of sculpture for reflecting on experience was established. As it turns out, art illuminates our being-in-place. The special character of space in sculpture prompts our relation to the world and opens up a place to dwell.

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