

*Paper prepared for the
Euroacademia Global Forum of Critical Studies
Asking Big Questions Again*

Prague, 13 – 15 December 2012

This paper is a draft

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BETWEEN YOU AND I

THE AESTHETIC OF THE REAL

A contribution to a holistic art reception

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“What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And me to you?”¹ All his life, Gregory Bateson was on a quest to find the “pattern” that everything connects. I really cannot say at this point if he found a final answer to this question. In any event, it would have been *his* answer. The question leads me immediately to that mysterious figure of thought that can only ever be its beginning: myself. In order to be able to enter into a sphere in which I can come up with a response, I must first of all have answered for myself: Who am I? Who has not asked himself this very question at some point in his life? And if there are answers to it, such as ‘I’m Tina’, ‘I’m an art scholar’ – *who* is it saying that? What would happen or remain if especially the last part of the sentence drops out? The great, scary, unknown, indescribable I AM.

And things turned out as they mostly do in life: Unforeseen.

I. In the light

In the depths of a space I could not clearly pinpoint I saw a bright spot of light, which opened horizontally into the darkness in the form of a larger-than-life white cone with a slightly diffuse membrane. The light made its way through the darkness like a growing moon: As part of its cyclic process, a single beam of light grew to its full form. There were other people with me in the room whose bodies appeared to rise up from the midst of the light’s bright contour, as if they themselves were standing directly in the ‘sculpture’, not around it. I could only see their torsos. The bottom halves of their bodies were beneath the cone of light, which did not quite reach as far as the ground, swallowed up the darkness. Ghostly in its own way. And as I was making my way to the light I suddenly became part of it. At once there were three of us in a space, though I cannot say which one it actually was – the architectural space or the space created by the cavity of light cone. In any case I was standing with both feet in it, however, depending on from which angle I looked at it, outside it again. I looked into the light and it was if I were looking directly into the source that created me. “That’s what it must feel like when you die,” the man next to me said. Hmm, interesting I thought – birth and death being so close to one another, and how everyone sees the same thing, but in a different way – and wanted to probe the matter deeper. Just then an arm shot out from the right through the skin of light and abruptly brought me back to the present moment.

This was just one of numerous encounters with light and darkness, with my own shadows, with myself and others, when in October 2004 in the *Maison Rouge* in Paris I came across the *Solid Light* films of the artist Anthony McCall for the first time. Less than a month previously at the Berlin Art Forum, the Cologne gallerist Thomas Zander had taken a nondescript, thin, small-format black and white catalog from beneath a pile of large colored art books and handed it to me. “Ever seen this?”, he asked. No, I hadn’t. And thereafter I asked myself the question why, being an art scholar, I had never heard of it until then. The catalog cover has a photograph that just about captures what I myself experienced only a few weeks later. I was kind of thunderstruck and deeply moved at the same time. For me there is something unique about these works, something that previously I had never experienced, neither in art nor in my own life; something I could only sense but was not able put in words. I remember standing in one of those white cones of light and *just feeling*. Finally! Needing to think nothing, needing to understand nothing, but nonetheless understanding: I am. No more and no less. Without asking myself the question who I am. I simply was.

Anthony McCall works with film, though in doing so he reduces the medium to its primary means of expression: light. The beam of light appears to be an immaterial sculpture between projector and projection. The filmic event is not about the projection of the beam of light, but the projection itself. Simultaneously, the eye of the viewer can follow the course of the line, respectively of multiple projections, the lines on the wall (in the case of horizontal works) or on the ground (in the case of vertical works). As such a temporality occurs, continued as an infinite-loop installation, in which every moment is revealed at the same time. The usual division in a cinema between projection wall and auditorium is suspended. The film space, in other words the exhibition space, becomes perception space. As a viewer I am no longer silent and rigid. I receive the light and myself in the light through my body. I can notice, observe, experience the acts of the light, and my own, and at that moment, with a little luck, understand something of the link,

which in everyday life is for the most part inconspicuous or forgotten, between light, space, time, and perception. “In this respect”, as Hartmut Böhme has written, “all light artists are teachers and their works exercises in perception.”²

2. What should I learn and, most important, how?

Feelings, conceptions, ideas, which have the I as well as its reflections and mirroring per se as their starting point, to be honest, I had great fear of contact. What should I make of it? None of it had anything to do with my universe, in which in a tense on-going state I wanted ‘to understand’. In order to understand, so was my opinion, you have to have knowledge. Know more and more. Experience? I didn’t even know the meaning of the word. At least it was nothing I had learned to talk about. So that means it doesn’t exist, right? Present but invisible. Locked away. Imagined away, in the true sense of the word. At the same time I was someone driven by the search for/the question of truth. But there was only one reason for all this ‘wanting to understand’: the fact that there was an empty space in me; one that wanted to be filled. A sadness of which I didn’t know whence it came. But I had learned no other way of supposedly making contact with myself than through my intellect. To me it seemed to be the only thing that ultimately guaranteed survival. I bore in mind what others before me had thought or said, and what was recognized in terms of art history and culture. Not only did a bit of Deleuze or Foucault in the right place at the right time sound good, it also made me confident and unassailable. As long as everything worked, in other words as long as I worked this way.

So here I was moving in light. With the shape, in the shape, had myself materialized into a shape myself. Having initially then thought about the matter I was confused, unsettled, not to say helpless. I understood something, but it had nothing to do with what under normal circumstances my analytical mind, having processed it consistently and in detail, delivered ready for implementation. In this case my mind, otherwise such a reliable, familiar companion, was unable to help. It was as if my navigation system had broken down. And that in the realm of the unknown. This indeed makes you scared. On the one hand, there was this unforeseen expansion into territory that was previously inaccessible to me. And on the other, a questioning of what had until now been, of what I was, thought, believed I was: The bitter realization that in the search for truth, for myself, for what really is, I had always been on the wrong track. An alert mind is no substitute for experience. And knowledge gained from experience that has not been transformed into insight is inevitably knowledge from the past.

The mind, our personal evaluation yardstick, with which we all, each in our own way, function, which tells us what must be and what not, what is right, and what not. Without it, there I was, suddenly alone. Naked. That’s how it felt. There was no one to tell me what there was to be done right now, what I had to perceive. Indeed, who was I in the first place? I was no longer capable of ‘having an outward focus’, which had always helped me absolutely guarantee me avoiding myself. There was something going on between the light and me, which made evasion no longer possible. The safest way of establishing and nurturing a ‘different’ identity is to look for the answers to our questions outside ourselves. The fact that previously this was the very basis of my entire method not only of exploring art, but myself as well, engulfed me with almighty speed. In the ensuing calm this was a moment of relentless shame. Scarcely bearable. I with myself. What now?

3. Seeing oneself through the eyes of another

I originally intended writing a dissertation on the topic of “The Experimental Film in Contemporary Art Discourse” and had already arranged the best support. Since Paris I had been in close contact with the artist and my supervisor in Berlin. Back then it was my museum work that distracted me from further confrontation with the topic for a certain period of time. It meant everything to me and was very fulfilling, as it related to the expansion into the space that had until then been inaccessible to me (the Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK) in Frankfurt/Main was, besides, the first museum in Germany, with at the time Udo Kittelmann as its director, to acquire a work by McCall for its collection). Then my father died, suddenly. Not only is it in this manner always a shock, which can only be grasped backwards, it was actually as if that part of me had literally died whose identity I was trying to describe in the previous section. I was not only my father’s daughter, but a father-daughter. There is no way of escaping your family. No matter what I tried, I could simply no longer function. I was just swimming with the existential endeavors not to be swept away.

A year later I got the offer and started as a research associate at the recently founded Chair of Contemporary Art at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Therewith I took myself to the very place that manifested precisely what I wanted to transform or expand in me: My rational self, which was measured by the level of the production of theoretical and materialistic thoughts. Today I can only shake my head at my naiveté at the time. It is probably futile to say that as such I ran straight into my own knife. I almost felt a touch exposed to the Kafkaesque prophecy that he who does not search (or possibly searches in the wrong place), will be found. In my case my sensitive, bodily I, the constitutive subject, literally had got ‘in between’, and on top of that a spark of spiritual experience as well. For none of which there was any room in scholarly theory. Not only did I sense myself, and this had something to do with my physical presence in the light’s sphere. My body was speaking here. The body very much speaks the truth. It is the only way

there is we are able to experience things. In the fusion of light I myself became my clear, sensual, object of thought. And furthermore I was able to perceive myself in my perception. Like in meditation, when I concentrate on the space between my thoughts, the interspace; where I become a silent observer (sakshi), who, from a neutral space perceives himself as a perceiving subject; where I shed any form of identification with the thoughts; where a being exists that is incorrigible, because *it is* like *I am* – however well it can be objectively verified.

It felt as if in that very moment a wheel, which for years had been turning at high speed on its own axis, with me as a wheel hub, as tension force between spokes, as if this wheel were being transformed into a state of timelessness. Calmness, tranquility, which for an instant clearly enabled me to leave the wheel and observe it from the outside as it rotated swiftly, and at once, me perceiving myself in the middle of it. Thus I was, or in me, were two things: Timelessness and temporality. Yet to be honest, I was previously aware of neither one nor the other state. Or rather, the awareness of the state I was experiencing so naturally, on automatic pilot, learned, adopted, perfected, I was only able to see this state this way for the first time because there was nothing else to see or feel other than me in that emptied room of white light. It was “expansion into spiritual space”, which Joseph Beuys once predicted, “inasmuch as the moment of expandable motion exists as an experience in space and time”.³

The light was a mirror and, circulating continuously, repeatedly confronted me with myself, because it was ‘blank’, white and permeable. It confronted me with a side of myself that was likewise blank, bright, boundless; and at the same time with another side of me that was me too, and which in its movements, in contrast, was extremely active and formative, as my shadow told me. Though I was completely sober, I felt totally high. *I was two in one.*

Heinz von Foerster tells the story of Viktor E. Frankl and a married couple, a man and woman, who were in different concentration camps during the War with no idea whether the other was still alive, and who met again four years later in Vienna. After a month, however, the woman died of an illness she had picked up in the camp. The husband was a broken man until friends convinced him to look up Frankl in his surgery. The latter asked him: “Imagine God gave me the power to create a woman just like your wife and you could not tell the difference between the two. She speaks the same way, has the same memories, the same ideas, the same feelings. Assuming God gave me the power to create a woman like this for you, would you want me to?” The man sat there for four, perhaps five minutes, then said “No!”, stood up, shook Frankl’s hand, said “Thanks very much”, left and got on with his life again. Asked what had happened, Frankl replied: We see ourselves through the eyes of the other. When his wife died he was blind. After I had spoken to him he could see that he was blind. That way he could see again.”⁴

I couldn’t again, I could see.

4. Undressing

Nonetheless I no longer had any idea of what I could and should refer to. I fell into what appeared like a hole of potentiated groundlessness. My experience seemed to be the declared enemy of both science and the world of art and talking about it, or so I felt, disqualified me and forced me into the field of the esoteric, whatever that might be, from which both kept their distance. From that day on I was living in two worlds. In yoga (meaning “union”, “oneness”, from the Sanskrit root *yui*: to bind together) and in art. Each time I entered one I longed for the other, and vice versa. Yet if I showed myself in one of the worlds with my ‘other’ side, it did not feel accepted in me. I don’t know if I no longer had an identity at all, or one that was split. At any rate I felt a bit like the panther in Rainer Maria Rilke’s eponymous poem. It was like a dance, but this time “of power around a center, in which a mighty will stands paralyzed”.⁵ You don’t necessarily have to have been born in a ‘wrong’ body, love the same sex, have a particular skin color, an artificial limb perhaps, or no hair, to feel ‘different’ in a society, in which the mass counts. I was unable to compose myself and as such of course nobody else, including those closest to me, could understand me any more. I no longer had any categorical answer to the question ‘what are you doing?’, which incidentally was frequently hurled at me in the ‘shapelessness’ inherent in it with ‘what are you?’. Somehow everything seemed twisted, as if not Moses was questioning the thorn bush but the other way round. I felt I ought to provide an answer for something for which I was at a loss for words. Which really did make me speechless. As far as I was concerned this was no longer about the question itself. I had experienced something and had since been trying to find an answer for myself to ‘how did what occurred’ in the *Solid Light* films actually happen? What was the “pattern” it was all based on? In an era of unlimited acceleration, in which lots of people apparently clone themselves, in order to appear in three different places on one day, there seems to be no time for this sort of investigations.

The moment when I stood in the cones of light and realized that I need not perceive what art history says about it was one of the most decisive and consequential in my life. I can perceive the art on my own terms and embrace it. Not that I would not have adopted a scholarly approach or had any intentions of evading it, quite the opposite. In 2002 the University of Munich (LMU) even awarded me the Heinrich Wölfflin Prize for outstanding scholarly research for my Master’s thesis on Cindy Sherman’s fashion photographs. Reading the manuscript today, I am immediately overcome by a certain ponderousness. I am increasingly tired by rational exemplification of this nature. In my view of the world

today, as the unity of all being, it does not result in any logic or any real findings. For this reason there was only one path that could be taken: I terminated my four-year contract and left the institutional world behind me, the framework I had intended would shape me. I felt stuck in the structure of the university system as taught and discussed today, less timeless and shapeless, rather, as already said, breathless. To be able to develop, an active mind and soul does not need knowledge, light, and good luck. It needs space; the freedom to expand in the space of infinite possibilities. The rest follows. This is the universal law of resonance.

As a natural consequence the decision meant not slipping from one 'external' form to the next; once experienced I first needed to make it somehow comprehensible for me. For that it was too fundamental and at the same time bigger than me. So if we are talking of identities: I no longer had one, at least not in the everyday sense. As regards progress I had been the one that cut off the linear route to the top. As a holder of office I had failed, and as such, understandably enough, was no longer of particular interest to most of my former companions. I was not only alone. Seldom was I so lonely as during this somewhat different research trip. Yet that too seemed to be part of the experience. Enduring, letting go, accepting. Still in September 2009 I wrote in my notes: "Vietnam, Thailand, India or Brazil after all? Chile perhaps? But certainly first and foremost warm, light, free, away from here. I ask myself why it feels so different for me being there from being here? What is here? Germany? Berlin? Me? Is seven a lot and 42 really the answer to all questions? It's raining outside. I just called my mother. I'm torn this way and that again. Between here and there. Ask myself the meaning. What does it all mean? My jeans are too tight. Am I glad that Justine wrote from New York? I really don't know. Why don't I know. Do I want to meet him or not? I have to end this state. This state of 'non-being'. I don't know how but you can't live like this."

At the time in the cone of light I felt naked. So to get back there, which is what I wanted, I had to get naked. Get undressed. My jeans had become too tight. Though it wasn't so easy to take off my 'id', by which I mean my ego-self, perhaps there was a possibility to unveil something else? One can only experience realization, not learn it. Which is why I opted for this way. I had needed 30 years to understand it. Now I had to be lenient with myself if on several occasions I attempted 'to learn' the experience. Nothing but control. 'Wanting to understand' there we have it again. Basically the opposite of what I really wanted: To be, not possess. I had already experienced it after all. Why was it so fleeting? A place that genuinely wanted to be discovered; remembered time and again; experienced.

5. The part and the whole

"However paradoxical it may seem, the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have."⁶ In the realm of art, this rather general assertion made by Hans-Georg Gadamer as part of his philosophical hermeneutics is all the more applicable to the phenomenon of aesthetic experience. The fundamental question that I have been asking myself ever since my first encounter with the *Solid Light* films: How do I write about something that you have to experience in itself in order to have experienced it?

When it comes to academic approaches to art, the subjective constitutes both a true heavyweight and at the same time something of a black hole. And nonetheless there is, in the meeting with contemporary art in particular, almost nothing else that could be more crucial. Art history can be retraced on the basis of fashions, ideological or technical developments. It can be interpreted as a kind of response to social scenarios or simply as a mirror that reflects them. But that which is so imperative for art remains excluded from all discourses: The self that shapes and then recognizes itself in relation to something else. In the final instance, duality can no longer be maintained in its present-day form when speaking of art. The element of subjectivity flows into the objectifying discourse. This is inevitable. Consequently there is no need to enforce duality with the usual (rhetorical) vigor. Subjective perception may on the one hand contain a plethora of shades and tones, which may be reserved for the individual. On the other, and this is certain, it is precisely the very fact that we are all individual souls that unites us; the fact that we have this body and our senses, which allow us to perceive ourselves and make our own decisions. Otherwise discourse on art would be entirely pointless. We only have forgotten how to speak about it, have we not?

"It seemed to me that I was looking at the form and pattern of a thought that had been placed for the first time in finite space. Here space itself truly spoke, dreamed, gave birth to temporal forms. Expectancy, doubt, concentration, all were *visible things*. With my own eye I could see silences that had assumed bodily shapes,"⁷ commented Paul Valéry in 1897 in reference to an excerpt from the first draft of "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" ("A throw of the dice will never abolish chance"), which his friend Stéphane Mallarmé had read aloud to him. For Mallarmé poetry was the act of writing poetry itself. If you open up a copy of "Un coup de dés", you will see that the double pages meld into one, the flow of reading extending continuously across both pages. The length of the "blank" characters between the words seems to be entirely arbitrary; the size and form of the characters are in constant flux without a recognizable pattern. How I would love to have spoken to Valéry about his momentum of experience, at which he reveals himself and by that very act also makes it easier for me to talk about it myself. Or to put it another way, who really does speak openly about one's own perception and feeling, lives consciously and even gives the whole thing words as Valéry has

here? – Expectancy, doubt, concentration; form, pattern, space, time, extension, pause, body, silence. Valéry and I, we would have had much to tell each other.

I would without hesitation say that McCall's *Solid Light* Films are in fact haptic, and when experienced even playful variations of epistemological truths. The beams of light are not only anthropomorphic in their own way (especially in their vertical dimension), they literally generate an anthropomorphic state – the human form. And not only in the formative sense but in a genuine, constitutive sense. To experience yourself as what you are: As part of a whole. And as such taking on a certain, still varying "form". One principle of creation that is equally as insightful was described by Erwin Schrödinger in his "Turner" lectures at Cambridge University in 1956: "The world is given to me only once, not one existing and one perceived. Subject and object are only one. The barrier between them cannot be said to have broken down as a result of recent experience in physical sciences, for this barrier does not exist."⁸

I find it both astounding and exhilarating at the same time: Since the beginning of the last century, the deeper the natural scientist has probed into the sub-atomic field, the more forcefully we have pushed our way into a realm just as had been intuitively anticipated in Vedic philosophy as many as 5000 years ago. It seems that by taking the route set out by the natural sciences our Western tradition is doomed to simply stumble into such realms by accident while others knew to zero in on the notion of creation guided by their spiritual intuition. Yoga is the oldest science of mind known to man; unfortunately this aspect and its underlying philosophy has for the most part fallen into obscurity here in the West since it is predominantly practiced as a physical exercise. Just like art, Yoga is an experiential model; it is ultimately an opportunity to discover that which we describe as the subjective, ergo that which happens inside us. The point at which we stop trying to find the answers to our questions in the external world – that is yoga. That magic moment when knowledge and 'a wanting to understand' stop and 'understanding' begins.

The medium of light plays an essential role here. Only light allows for permeability and expansion in space. I enter in my physical state, become one with the light and at the same time generate a field of resonance: shadow. In the light I become "homo ludens", the playing man who makes wonderful shapes, who creates. Yet this is not limited to recognition, to perception alone, it is rather the way things correlate. This certainly can have something playful to it, something that extends far beyond pure decision making. Nothing exists without its counterpart. The experience of light AND shadow, light AND dark, fullness AND emptiness connects in one and the same moment with the awareness that I am all of this.

Ultimately, the complexity of McCall's work results from fact that in its attachment to temporality per se it does not address the theme of a substantive, inalterable existence, but rather reflects a certain dynamic that forms the basis for our overall physical existence. In constant circulation, they convey a transitory moment between the plane of light and the cone, two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality, film and sculpture and as a result they also convey space in itself. But, and this is a decisive point, although one shape might merge into the other, one state might give birth another, this does not mean that the antecedent expires during this process of transition. On the contrary, a relational framework is formed between the individual elements. Its formal significance lies in the outright violation of the shape. Thus the content's significance consists in the fact that such a violation renders this "in-between" sphere both visible and tangible. It is the light's palpable presence that outlines a sort of continuum here: The plane is both plane AND cone; light is both light AND matter, time is both time AND space, film is both film AND sculpture. Where internal and external realm exist, there is also an in-between. An interspace that maintains a distance between the internal and external and simultaneously shepherds the alternating relationships between one side and the other; that sounds out the tendencies and phenomena of existence. Such an interspace is the point of origin for new realities, better said those that are constantly being renewed. In yoga this is called akasha: a space of dynamic silence.

It is precisely this transformation of matter into pure feeling as encountered in the works that is triggered, conveyed, continued and enhanced when you experience the works in an exhibition setting. Pinning down exactly what the works are is difficult enough as it is. When captured in the two-dimensional image they come across as being static. In reality however they are in constant motion and once they have been permeated, I as the beholder am in motion too. An enhanced experience that can only be articulated in the exhibition context. Serving as a medium in itself or as a parallel universe alongside the art work and/or together with it, the exhibition culminates in the encounter. It is a rather special setting, one that facilitates experiences that far surpass everyday sensory experiences and those that we commonly define as perceivable in space and time. Encounter can manifest itself in a wealth of ways. In the space created by the light I felt this merging, this dissolution of duality. It was a moment of absolute presence of mind. A very personal moment.

The greatest problem we humans have is that we always think we know everything. When in fact we know nothing. The only chance we have is to "act always so as to increase the number of choices".⁹ Swans are, as we all know, white and in Europe we had stood by this assertion for many centuries; that is until black swans were discovered in Australia. So black swans do exist and they are a lot more common than one may think. This provides just one example of something that exists despite our attempts to deny its existence or rationalize it away. What is meant here is a awareness that there is not only one valid reality; that this what is ahead of me is not necessarily less valid or false

just because I can see it than what I cannot see right now because it is behind my back. Taking this one step further, it is not merely a matter of perception, it is not merely a matter of recognition, it is not merely a matter of a differentiation between light and shadow, between light and dark, between black and white; it is also a matter of adopting standpoints, of giving the things we do some kind of direction. The point here is not only to trigger recognition per se but to consider the entirety in the face of the many individual things. Based upon the notion of shaping those possibilities open to us in such a way that we can live as we wish; in the world we wish to live in.

6. In the realm of possibility

Black/white, beginning/end, inhaling/exhaling – whichever way you look at it, everything is tied up in an ongoing, perpetual cycle and this paradox is etched into everything – not least into existence itself. A seemingly or genuinely irresolvable contradiction? Only for those who deny it in the first place. In “Philosophical Fragments” Søren Kierkegaard writes that “the thinker without paradox is like the lover without passion; a mediocre fellow.”¹⁰ The paradox is therefore the “passion of thought”. On the one hand, this idea that is a question of passion has brought light to my soul during some dark moments. But how often has this passion of thought quite literally driven me to despair. However, in Kierkegaard’s case this paradox is not a form of truth but a literary practice that is not based upon an established and what is understood to be empirical truth. Interesting, isn’t it? This is why each and every time I attempt to capture McCall’s works in words I simply come up against the limits of materialistic principles and the barriers of the rational, scientific pattern. Perhaps we could simply turn this literary practice into a more general practice – at least in those instances where it would be appropriate, in the reception of art for example, when it is in particular about aesthetic experience, which isn’t necessarily comprehensible in a rational way and is yet valid?

McCall’s works are intrinsically paradoxical because they bring together different planes by distinguishing them from one another. Each change of plane (and here this functions in the same way as a hierarchical system) requires a “manager” who connects these planes by distinguishing between them. And this is where we come into play in the role of observer. What is more: We also become the observed so to speak because we reflect the light and thus become visible. This is precisely where the whole nexus of my academic research and indeed one of the greatest challenges of my “passion of thought” lies: Objectivity as a basic principle for a scientific discourse commands a strict separation of the observer and the observed. Following this, the observer’s characteristics shouldn’t encroach upon those of the observed. In the role of observer however we integrate with these films. We ourselves become the subject. We are observed by the light, so to say. There is no difference between the observer and the observed.

When asked about art, Gregory Bateson quoted an answer given by a dancer when asked about the “meaning” of her dance: “If I could tell you what it meant then there would be no reason to dance.”¹¹ It is the same with aesthetic experience. In order to be able to write or talk about it at all, it is important that we as the beholder/observer place ourselves in a setting where we can experience it first hand. Even if that sometimes means starting by forgetting everything we have ever learned. We are not given life by some external power, even though we would like to believe this to be true. We create our own world ourselves, complete with all of its restrictions. But with all of its possibilities too. In “The Man Without Qualities” Robert Musil argues that if a sense of reality exists then a sense of possibilities also must exist. A human’s imagination, which is unable to adhere to any command, connects one with the other. On this note, Aristotle comes to mind and “the nature of poetics”, according to which art’s mission consists in offering up, presenting these possibilities as they are registered in reality. In real life, it is the duty of the “poet” to reveal and unveil reality. So in a collective sense are we all poets in the end? Perhaps. No, most certainly, especially if one considers that creative force that lies within each and every one of us, that we should only allow ourselves approximate gradually, in small steps: “Here is the turning point, hic Rhodus, hic salta; following Hegel this has to be translated as ‘Here is the rose, dance thou here’. To start dancing; who can differentiate between the dancer and the dance; it is the impossible unity and union of all things.”¹²

If you were to read the “Brücke” manifesto now, little more than a century later (the name alone, meaning “bridge”, bespeaks ambiguity and the idea of a connecting path) it reaffirms a call directed at us all, at those who “create” and those who “enjoy”, for ultimately this is once again nothing more than another cycle that appears to be moving in opposite directions and yet in fact flows into one another. It refers to anyone who “recites that which drove him to create both directly and truthfully.”¹³ And this includes all of us. As soon as a work of art makes its way out into the world, it develops an existence there that is entirely independent of its creator, a life of its own. However, this independent existence has a lot to do with us, with our thoughts, feelings, interpretations which all have their validity. Every art piece is always an invitation for imagination. It creates a field of energy in which a connection can be established and communication can take place. We should tell each other what we are feeling, thinking, perceiving. The artist provides impulses but he is not the bearer of an absolute, exclusive truth. He is the bearer of *his* truth, which is expressed in the art work. A world is then created when we link this with our own truths, which are as numerous and multifarious as the ensuing encounters with the art work. This is how worlds are created. “Making World” (“Fare Mondi”) was the title Daniel Birnbaum, in his capacity as Artistic Director of the 2009 Venice Biennale, gave to his contribution. As those who “enjoy” we are called upon to leave behind our passive attitude, namely that of

consumerism, not least in order to *re*-discover our own potential, our own creativity. Any good art work is known to be wiser than its creator at the end of it all. And this in turn depends on those who behold, perceive and receive it. What does the artist think? This is a question that has now come to incense Gerhard Richter to such an extent that he doesn't even want to think of answering it. And why should he serve our greedy, ponderous beings?

When I was once talking with an author friend of mine, she told me that she had at one point received a letter from a reader in response to one of her poems; the reader had written an entire page thanking her for how much the poem had touched her; that the subject had never been made so clear to her as in these few lines; that she had only just been able to understand, etc. The letter was a source of great joy for my friend. She even went to the trouble of writing back, feeling that she herself had reason to give thanks. The origin or the idea behind the poem had entirely different associations for the author than those the reader took from the lines. The reader's interpretation had never even crossed her mind when she was writing. So she was not even aware of the new perspectives or interpretations that were waiting to be discovered. All at once she could see, like the man in Frankl's tale. All thoughts, feelings and actions are on the one hand linked to a certain autonomy, a certain subjectivity. At the same time however it is precisely this that implies a reference, a rational framework, and only within this framework are we in a position to open ourselves up to an awareness of the truth. "I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting,"¹⁴ so said Martin Buber.

7. Now was this truth?

Your own, subjective reality becomes more objective at that moment when you come to understand and indeed establish your connection to everything else that exists. After all, we define real per se as the opposite of not real. Sometimes we place reality on equal footing with truth and non-reality with falsehood or illusion. That is the meaning of the word, as we use it. An important aspect of what is real is that it is reliable, that it isn't created by one individual alone, that it applies to everyone – this is the underlying principle or underlying nature of the universe. And that we mean it in this way. Critical mind intervenes in that it asks whether something like reality exists at all. The insight is to be found in our recognition of reality as freedom, as emptiness, as nothing: "Each individual person perceives the same object in a different way, according to their own state of mind and projections. Everything is empty from its own side and appears according to how you see it."¹⁵ A void that despite the expectations resulting from our western conditioning implies an abundance; an abundance that opens something up, that provides access to something, that provides the origin for something new. Then we will understand that a "connected" person will always construct a story (narrative); and we will grasp that this offers us an opportunity to (re-)negotiate our rational existence; and that this reality can only ever be a relational one that in turn assimilates with other forms of reality.

As a result, this ultimate, absolute reality actually transforms into a realm of multiple realities. Hence creating a positive reality, that is a reality that *generates* a realm of reality, becoming a kind of artistic challenge of our own. It is not a state separated from relational reality. A non-dualistic existence makes space for a whole variety of realities. We are in constant search of an anchor, in terms of the totality of our logically unambiguous, merely relational reality. This sense of totality is one thing we already hold within that appears to be engraved in human existence. It is the practice that helps us to open ourselves up to this realm of emptiness, of freedom, of relational reality and to continuously remind ourselves of it. In order to achieve this we first have to rediscover our ability listen intently. The gift of meditative practice is the ability to listen, to be receptive enough to perceive the tiniest sounds which emanate from inside every one of us. Here lies the genesis of creation.

I don't believe in coincidences. Not any more. But I do believe in unpredictability as a moment that provides insights. Rather than coincidence, at this point I would like to call it zeitgeist that during these very weeks (18 November 2012 through 20 January 2013) an exhibition entitled "ONE ON ONE" can be experienced in the Kunstwerken, KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin. Here I take the liberty of citing the press release. "Alone in the space with the art, one-on-one with a work that was made for the single individual, in a direct and inescapable exchange – intimate and confrontational."¹⁶

It almost seems as though today we have entered an epoch in which we are nearly pushed to confront ourselves, our very being. Avoiding becomes more and more impossible. When we experience fear and resistance, then is this only because we would rather feel brightness, light, abundance? As opposed to the other, the dark, the shadow, the void, as we tend to understand these terms. In this encounter with ourselves we come up against our own insecurities and vulnerabilities. Such an experience implicates great intimacy and not least honesty. I stand exposed before the "other" and primarily before myself. You suddenly find yourself deserted by the shield afforded by our own identities. But identities are also rather precarious companions. Should just one single parameter shift, they collapse or disappear altogether, such that the entire image that you had created of yourself and presented to the outside world, vanishes into thin air. For the truth is, as Andreas Maier puts it: "I, this one single letter, is central to the word nothing."¹⁷ It's about making the shift from identification with who we believe we are towards an investigation of the great potential and wealth that we truly are and that arises out of the acknowledgement of the void within us.

McCall says that he never intended to create the feeling that would ultimately become palpable to us in the form of the *Solid Light* films. He was in fact in search of the ultimate film, film in its purest form: "I was always searching for the ultimate film, one that would be nothing but itself."¹⁸ The result is pure simplicity of form, in the sense of complete reduction, in which resides the greatest, conjectural complexity. "Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles and bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line."¹⁹ These were the words of Benoît Mandelbrot, clarifying his knowledge of the existence of fragmented forms, which he called fractals. The fractal came to enrich dry, mathematical equations with the magical shapes of snowflakes and ice flowers. Contemplating the shapes of winter, in fact of the all nature, Mandelbrot recognized that each individual part no matter how small is representative of the whole. When for a single moment there is nothing else to see or recognize, the spark of the divine is reflected in the mirror of this simplicity. This is where he allows us to catch a glimpse.

8. The AND

Seven years have now passed since my first encounter with McCall's *Solid Light* films. Based on anthroposophy, we as humans are renewed every seven years with the renewal of our cells on a bodily but also on a spiritual level. That magic number seven. In numerology, seven is understood as the sum or unit of three and four, of mind and soul, on the one hand, and body, on the other, ergo that which is human. In writing this text I am ultimately honoring a promise I made to myself, you could call it a kind of *self*-fulfilling prophecy: to trace the path of immediate experience as a meaningful moment and to then tread this path in the process of writing itself. This is not a question of an opulent magnum opus of many hundreds of pages, for not only I have understood that reduction by no means excludes complexity, indeed, the latter even reveals itself herein. I also reminded myself that the word dissertation comes from the Latin "dissertatio", which can be translated as "examination" or "involvement". In its origin form, the "dissertatio" was simply a type of position paper intended to supplement and prepare the core component of the doctorate qualification, the "disputatio". At this point I firstly ask myself whether one can truly measure examination and involvement, also in the academic world, by the quantity of written pages and secondly whether at times it might even be sensible (as long as it serves the purpose rather than betraying the intent) to make more frequent efforts to draw closer to the original idea behind the "dissertatio" when it comes to present-day debates on knowledge transfer? Whether I will ever have the opportunity for a "disputatio"? I don't know. In the preceding pages, I have presented everything on my quest that I was able to find out – by allowing the subjective as a means to approach the objective. If I were to receive such an opportunity, then I would wish to defend *The Aesthetic of the Real* in the place where it arises: in the museum. That place where realities become possible, possibilities become real and where, as this personal story has shown, they (can) begin.

For me, the departure from the academic world remains a clear step without which I would not even have been able to 'think' the path I am on today; without which I would not have been able to liberate or (better said) redeem what drives me from within. I look upon *The Aesthetic of the Real* as a network in which all elements are and are allowed to be connected to one another: The subjective and the universal, the individual within the collective, the work of art, writing or talking about it and in doing so taking shape yourself, the possible in the real. As in poetry. Articulated in discourse and in an understanding that exists in conjunction with a dialogue, which is in principle unending. This is what I hope to see in teachings on science of art, which is responsive to a rapidly changing consciousness, and thus only accommodates arts and its meetings as the intuitive place of origin that they are. For me personally all of this happened in the form of a continual, silent dialogue with the work of Anthony McCall and in connection with an experience that is deeply burrowed into my soul, body and memory.

The encounter with the *Solid Light* films, that is with art in this case, taught me one thing – and here I am not talking about some scholarly phenomenon relating to art but rather a universal principle: We are not outside of art or for that matter the world, we are in it, with it. And we only have one real responsibility, namely that towards ourselves. He who seeks shall find, but he who always finds will rob himself of one of the most wonderful opportunities in life and ultimately of our only true endeavor – that of creation. Only he who is active has the chance to find something and make a change. The only thing that is worth anything in this world is an active soul. Indeed, it is about changing the world; but it is also true that something exists that is eternally unchanging. As in society, in art too many battles have been fought over the great and the fundamental. It is not longer a matter of right or wrong, no longer a matter of either/or, it is about AND. "Neither element nor unity, so what is AND?" – Gilles Deleuze asked himself this question when he first came into contact with the films of Jean-Luc Godard and concluded: "The AND is neither one nor the other, it is always caught somewhere between the two, it is the boundary, there is always a boundary, a vanishing line or a streamline, we just cannot see them, because they are the most nondescript thing of all. And yet these things, these becomings play out on this vanishing line, this is where the revolutions are looming."²⁰

We as subjects *are* the boundary of the world.

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Biography

Tina Guthknecht studied European and Eastern philosophy, science of mind as well as Hatha Yoga and has a master's degree in art history.

While living and working in Paris, Rome and London she immersed herself in the arts of all ages, from baroque churches to old masters, photography and time-based installations, and developed an interest in language and passion in writing.

Her life of soul-searching weaved its way through a wide range of traditions, cultures, and vocations, including volunteering with the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta to managing international private art collections.

Tina has been teaching Jivamukti Yoga since 2010 in Berlin and splits her time writing and teaching between Berlin, Munich and Antwerp.

Her endeavor in life is to deliver what she truly believes in her heart: The meaning of creative power, freedom in mind as well as the courage and the playful quality to build bridges, even more where there haven't been any before.