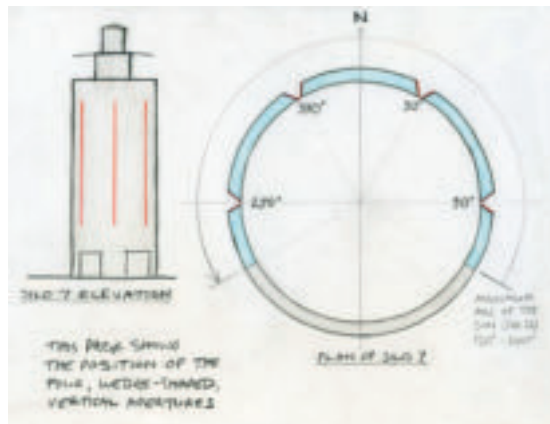# Anthony McCall and the Mediation of Immediacy

Noam M. Elcott

Skizze für / Study for *Light House*, 2010

PAST CONES AND FUTURE COLUMNS

We enter the Hamburger Bahnhof *in medias res*. The recent solid light films of Anthony McCall—sheaves of light projected onto the floor or across darkling expanses—loop cyclically without beginning or end. At the Hamburger Bahnhof, we also enter McCall's oeuvre mid-stride. McCall inaugurated his series of solid light films with *Line Describing a Cone* (1973); produced no new work in the 1980s or 1990s; returned to the solid light films with *Doubling Back* (2003); and, in the last half-decade, has embarked on a number of significant public artworks for cities across the globe.

Three public works are in the final stages of arduous approval processes. *Traveler* is an LED light installation on the stilt-like armature that supports a Rafael Viñoly building on the University of California San Francisco campus. *Light House* imbues *Room with Altered Window* (1973) with a singular sense of place by slicing four slots into an abandoned silo in Auckland, New Zealand, such that one or two blades of light penetrate the cylindrical darkness according to the sun's local and seasonal trajectory. Finally, *Column*, a three-mile high column of spinning air and vapor, is slated to rise over Birkenhead, across the River Mersey from Liverpool, as one of twelve Cultural Olympiad commissions made in conjunction with the 2012 London Olympics.

Even a cursory comparison of *Column* and McCall's first solid light film, *Line Describing a Cone*, reveals the complex new stakes in his work. In a 1974 statement for the Knokke Experimental Film Festival, McCall described *Line Describing a Cone*:

> The viewer watches the film by standing with his or her back toward what would normally be the screen, and looking along the beam toward the projector itself. The film begins as a coherent line of light, like a laser beam, and develops through the 30-minute duration into a complete, hollow cone of light.[1]

In misty rooms, McCall's geometric light films became animated sculptures that canceled core aspects of the then-hegemonic cinematic experience: temporal and spatial virtuality ("It is the first film to exist solely in real, three-dimensional, space. […] It refers to nothing beyond this real time"); spectatorial immobility ("[the viewer] can, indeed needs, to move around relative to the slowly emerging light form"); strict frontality ("The viewer watches the film by standing with his or her back toward what would normally be the screen"); and narrative ("*Line Describing a Cone* deals with one of the irreducible, necessary conditions of film: projected light. It deals with this phenomenon directly, independently of any other consideration").[2]
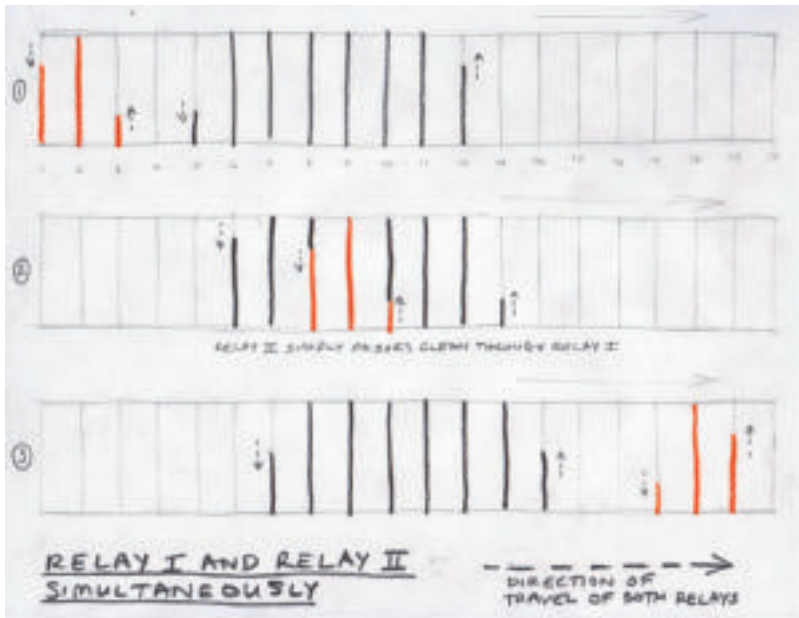
(o./t.) *Traveler*, 2010
Zeichnung, welche die fort-
schreitende Struktur der Licht-
installation beschreibt / Drawing
describing the progressive
traveling structure of the light
installation

(u./b.) Stem Cell Research Center,
San Francisco von / by Rafael
Viñoly, Fotografie der Unter-
konstruktion / Photograph of the
supporting understructure

In the innumerable sketches and drawings McCall has made for *Column*, we can glean a structural inversion of *Line Describing a Cone*. Stated synoptically, *Line Describing a Cone* is to *Column* as indoor is to outdoor; artificial is to natural; Expanded Cinema is to Land Art; light through mist is to mist through light; control is to contingency; hermetically sealed is to open-ended; strictly cinematic is to literally dispersed. Whereas *Line Describing a Cone* alluded to nothing beyond itself, *Column* is overdetermined. Biblical pillars of smoke and fire; Impressionist renderings of light and atmosphere; Brancusi's *Endless Column* (especially as filmed by Paul Sharits), or, most potently, the Cathedral of Light erected by Albert Speer, assisted by anti-artillery light cannons, to commemorate events including the 1936 Berlin Olympics.[3]

But a retrospective of McCall's recent work cannot be framed by the future—*Traveler*, *Light House*, and even *Column* remain stunning drawings in graphite wash and oil pastel, pedestrian slide presentations for governmental regulatory committees, and illuminating words issued in recent interviews. They are not yet full-fledged works of art. Just as the Hamburger Bahnhof exhibition cannot be framed by the future, neither can it be framed by the past. Prior to *Doubling Back* (2003), McCall last produced a solid light film in 1975. For more than 20 years, he designed catalogues and other art-world appurtenances but produced no new artworks or films. In the meantime, the worlds of art, media, and technology have evolved and McCall has responded with tons of new solid light films, far surpassing his production from the 1970s. We can ignore neither McCall's early work nor his elaborate designs for future public pieces, but we must ascertain the formal and sociopolitical languages that animate McCall's recent output, often in opposition to his first period of artistic fecundity.

The militancy of 1970s film theory and practice entertained no ambiguities. Back then, McCall emphatically canceled the space, time, immobility, frontality, and narrative that dominated commercial cinema. But despite—or perhaps because of—the intensity of these cancelations, McCall preserved the institution of cinema as the dominant backdrop against which his works were most legible. We can define precisely the site where McCall's films operated: not-cinema.[4] Turning one's back on a cinema screen was more subversive and

40

intuitively momentous than turning toward a light sculpture. The simultaneous preservation and cancelation of the institution of cinema exemplified, in perfect Hegelian fashion, not only the sublation of film, but also the crepuscular flight of Minerva's owl. Theatrical film was already crumbling when McCall and other practitioners of Expanded Cinema initiated their assaults. McCall's works were rarely screened in actual cinemas. Instead, the "chairless cinemas"[5] that housed the solid light films were the same lofts that served as homes, studios, and exhibition spaces for the avant-garde. The dust they accumulated and cigarette smoke they harbored were the conditions for the solid light films' visibility. Although McCall seldom exhibited in traditional movie theaters, he relied on the resonances with them for his works to be legible as cinematic. The decline and dispersion of the institution of cinema explains, at least in part, the cessation of McCall's solid light film production in the late 1970s. By the end of the decade, cinematic spaces had migrated to television screens, video recorders, and a host of other devices that permanently downsized and marginalized McCall's prime target: theatrical film. In 1980, after reflecting on the "flight-in-darkness and narcosis of the passengers," Paul Virilio could confidently polemicize that "the question today therefore is no longer to know if cinema can do without a place but if places can do without cinema."[6] It took McCall, and most of the art world, more than 20 years to begin to answer this question.

TELE-VISUAL IMMANENCE

In the absence of chronological or monographic frames, let us turn to the site, institution, and art that frame the current exhibition. Long ago, the Hamburger Bahnhof ceased its function as a node of train travel. But its central hall of iron and glass testifies to its origins. To exhibit McCall's work, the museum has darkened its fenestrated central hall and transformed its nineteenth-century architecture into a twentieth-century cinema or a twenty-first-century black box. No longer a train station bound to Hamburg, the Hamburger Bahnhof has emerged as a nodal point in the international commerce of light and art, a situation proudly announced in the blue and green neon light installations

Albert Speer, *Lichtdom* (Cathedral of Light), 8. September 1936, Fotografie / Photograph

Curve, 1973
Skizze für stufenförmige
Kerzeninstallation / Study for
stepped candle installation,
Tusche auf Papier / Ink on paper,
36,8 × 58,4 cm

designed by the American Minimalist Dan Flavin for the museum's main façade loggia and the transitions to the wings. The Flavin frame is more than fortuitous. It marks the Hamburger Bahnhof's embrace of an internationalized media art circuit. McCall has reciprocated this embrace not only with works designed for cinematized museums generally, but also with site-specific performances that address the very conditions exhibited at the Hamburger Bahnhof. Although envisioned for the Guggenheim Museum in New York, these site-specific performances have equal purchase on the Hamburger Bahnhof and its Flavin-inflected architecture of light.

In advance of Marina Abramović's 2007 sixtieth-birthday gala at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, McCall adapted his unperformed *Candle Installation* (1973) as a site-specific performance piece provisionally titled *Life Line*. With the help of a performer, a row of ten-odd candles was to travel slowly up the precariously low guard rail of Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral ramp, with the rearmost candle regularly moved to the head position. The unnamed, or rather, many-named piece (*Life Line*, *Traveling Double Life Line*, *Passing Through*, etc.) grew out of McCall's *Landscapes for Fire* and anticipated the modified march structure of *Traveler* (previously named *On the Move*). In *Traveler*, LED lights replace candles, Viñoly's curves stand in for Wright's spiral, a permanent installation supplants a performance piece, and the exposure of public art succeeds the intimacy of a gift. Abramović was feted at the Guggenheim with much fanfare but without performances. *Life Line* was never realized.

McCall, however, did not abandon the piece. Further revisions and substitutions led to a suite of nine oil pastel drawings on paper that choreograph *On the Move (Coil)* (2006). The new performance piece features fluorescent tubes heaped into snarls at the top and bottom of the Guggenheim ramp. McCall provides concise instructions in an extended caption: "Study for a double sculpture of red and white fluorescent tubes, each group advancing slowly in opposing directions, one tube at a time, along the floor of the Frank Lloyd Wright ramp." McCall's performers disappear amid their props; here, tangles of fluorescent tubes. Over the course of hours—no definite time frame was established—the two piles of tubes switch places such that the drawings present themselves as a series of inversions: drawings 1 and 9, 2 and 8, 3 and 7, and 4 and 6 are vertically flipped versions of each other. The fifth and central drawing is a swarm of red and white tubes midway up (and down) the ramp. The distribution of the nine images across a neat, three-by-three grid

Dan Flavin, *untitled*, 1996
Fluoreszierendes Licht in Blau
und Grün / Blue and green fluo-
rescent light
Installation im / at Hamburger
Bahnhof
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Nationalgalerie

On the Move (Coil), 2006
Dritte einer Serie von neun Zeich-
nungen / The third of a set of
nine drawings
Ölpastell auf Papier / Oil pastel on
paper, jeweils / each 88,9 × 66 cm

contrasts with the choreographed clutter formed as the piles of fluorescent
tubes creep along the spiral.

The fluorescent tubes in *On the Move (Coil)* not only speak to the Flavin in-
stallations at the Hamburger Bahnhof. They are an homage to Flavin's flicker-
ing installations for the Guggenheim: *untitled (to Ward Jackson, an old friend
and colleague who, during the Fall of 1957 when I finally returned to
New York from Washington and joined him to work together in this muse-
um, kindly communicated)* (1971) and *untitled (to Tracy, to celebrate the
love of a lifetime)* (1992), works that suffused Wright's spiral, atrium, and gal-
leries with pink, green, blue, yellow, red, and ultraviolet fluorescent light.
As George Baker argues, whereas Flavin's fluorescent tubes occupy a position
between painting and sculpture and exploit light to dematerialize the object,
McCall insists on the materiality of light and collapses sculpture with film.[7]
These structural reversals elucidate much in McCall's oeuvre. But the artist
situates Flavin's work quite differently. Like Robert Smithson—who contends
that Flavin "turns gallery space into gallery time"[8]—McCall isolates a temporal
dimension in Flavin's flickering sculptures. At the time he composed *On the
Move (Coil)*, McCall observed why Flavin's work seems so familiar. "Flavin's
work is a kind of radically slowed-down, abstract television."[9]

Phenomenologically, Flavin's fluorescent tubes and television's cathode ray
tubes point in opposite directions. True to its name, television divides atten-
tion between our proximate environment and distant images. As Samuel
Weber has observed, "If television is both here *and* there *at the same time*,
then, according to traditional notions of space, time, and body, it can be
neither fully there nor entirely here."[10] The glow from Flavin's sculptures,
on the contrary, enforces immanence, adheres to its environment, knows only
the here and now. To analogize Flavin's sculpture to "radically slowed-down,
abstract television" is to confuse the distance of media with the immanence
of Minimalism. It is a confusion that speaks to our current condition.

What is true in *On The Move (Coil)* and at the Hamburger Bahnhof holds
no less powerfully as the general condition of our media-saturated lives. As
Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin compellingly argue:

> Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of
> mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying
> them. […] [O]ur two seemingly contradictory logics not only coexist in
> digital media today but are mutually dependent. Immediacy depends on
> hypermediacy.[11]

McCall makes this dependence visible by maximizing the tension between
immediacy and mediation; and by insisting on spaces, times and bodies that
are "neither fully there nor entirely here." In these respects, McCall's works
differ radically from Minimalist works such as the Richard Serra sculptures
to which they are often compared. As Hal Foster argues, Minimalist works
break with the transcendental space of most Modernist art; they are neither
anthropomorphic nor siteless, but stand among objects.[12] The opposite obtains
for McCall's solid light films. They breathe and throb like body parts, actively
deracinate their sites, and stand alone in the darkness. In fusing Minimalist
sculpture and cinematic media, McCall places immanence and mediation
in maximum and constant tension. Most recently, he achieves this uncomfort-
able amalgamation through the technique of the cinematic wipe.
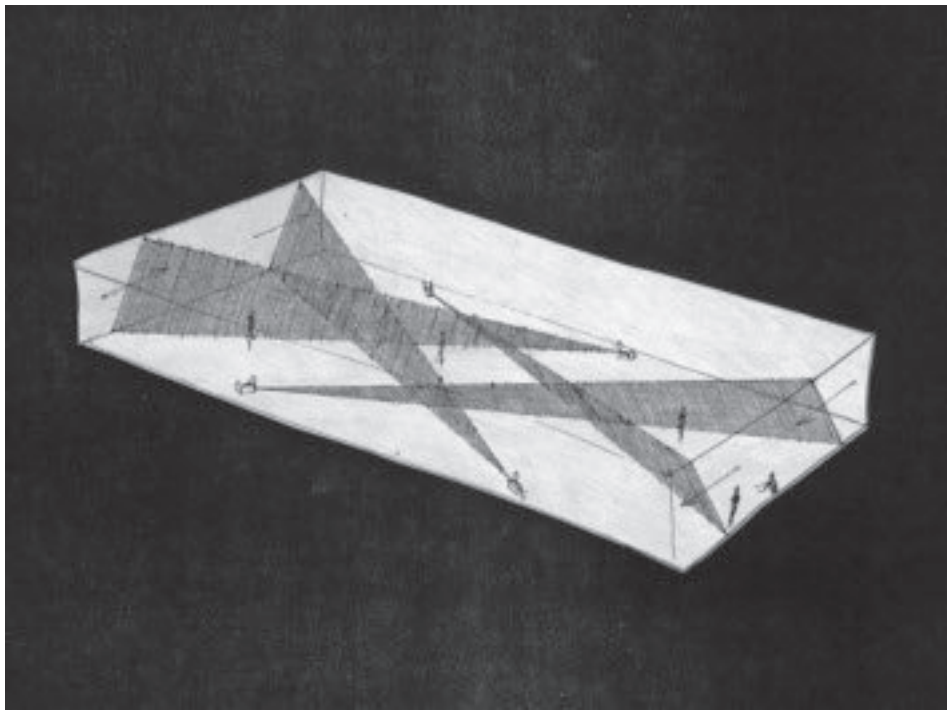
(o.l./t.l.) *Long Film for Four Projectors*, 1974
Aufbauskizze / Installation draw-ing, 1977
Fotokopie und Bleistift auf Papier / Photocopy and pencil on paper, 20,3 × 26,7 cm

(o.r./t.r.) *Long Film for Four Projectors*, 1974
Projektionsschema / Projection schema, 1974/2004
Bleistift auf Papier / Pencil on paper, 38,1 × 28,6 cm

(u./b.) *Long Film for Four Projectors*, 1974
Frame aus Rolle B / Frame from Reel B

FROM CUT TO WIPE

At the height of his 1970s production, McCall turned to the cinematic cut as the organizing principle behind works like *Long Film for Four Projectors*. McCall premiered *Long Film* at the London Film-Makers' Co-op in April 1975. A co-op member manned each of the four projectors, which projected blades of light across a space filled with frankincense and charcoal smoke. The gauntlet of light blades assumed the form of an attenuated musical sharp. Branden Joseph describes the cumulative effect:

> The environment created by *Long Film* is thus neither the continuous, 'behavioral space' of minimal and post-minimal sculpture, nor the transcen-dent space of spectacle or narrative film, neither holistic nor unilaterally cellularized, the spectator's environment—conceptually and physically sub-stantiated by its suffusion with smoke and the presence of others in the room—is converted into a space that one could, however, call 'cinematized,' its very continuity now a product of the synthetic discomposure of an externalized cinematic cut.[13]

The cinematic cut was externalized on multiple counts. Graphically, the cut was figured in the blade of light. Its material base was a white, diagonal line whose horizontal sweep necessitated painstaking frame-by-frame anima-tion. Materially, the cut was manifest in the reel changes. McCall scored each reel like a dodecaphonic tone row to be projected normally, reversed, back-wards, or reversed and backwards. The orientation of the reel determined the movement of the light blade. Like Andy Warhol, who often treated each 100-foot, 16mm reel as a single shot, McCall externalized the cinematic cut by continuously rethreading the reels. Finally, the immaterial blades of light cut up the space—like a dematerialized sculpture by Richard Serra—and imposed themselves on the bodies therein. *Long Film* thus transposed the cinematic time-space of narrative editing into an environment no less immersive or cinematized, but now constituted materially in space rather than virtually on screen.

In the 1970s, McCall militantly insisted on materiality, real time and space, and corporeality. Today's mediatized environments do not entertain the same battery of critical strategies that dominated in the 1970s. In particular, "real space" and "real time" no longer constitute quotidian experience to the same degree as they once did and, thus, cannot be mobilized against media in the name of life.[14] The mutual imbrication of cinematic "virtuality" and sculptural "reality" is evident in a pair of drawings that recur in McCall's notebooks and works on paper over the last decade: one is labeled *Five Minutes of Pure Cinema* (after an eponymous 1926 film by Henri Chomette), a second is labeled *Five Minutes of Pure Sculpture*. Each drawing depicts a solid light film projected downward from a height of 30 feet or more; its contours and footprint more complex than any work from the 1970s. In every iteration of this graphic pair, the two drawings—*Five Minutes of Pure Cinema* and *Five Minutes of Pure Sculpture*—are identical. The difference is nomination. Indeed, the same period that saw Chomette create a film entitled *Five Minutes of Pure Cinema* also saw Bauhaus master László Moholy-Nagy praise kinetic and light sculptures for their "virtual volumes."[15] The gap between pure cinema and pure sculpture was tenuous in the 1920s; it is even less certain today. The externalized cut speaks powerfully to a 1970s structural-materialist militancy. For more recent work, however, McCall has sought out a related but ultimately divergent technique—the wipe.

Nearly all the works exhibited at Hamburger Bahnhof are composed on the basis of the cinematic wipe. Both the vertical and horizontal versions of *Meeting You Halfway* (2009), for instance, are structured around it. The work comprises two facing partial ellipses that expand and contract like lungs heaving at irregular intervals and speeds. The two ellipses are separated and joined by a floating wipe—an invisible boundary that travels slowly within the frame, variously revealing and concealing either form. The wipe is the conceptual and material inversion of the blade of light in *Long Film*. Where the blade is strikingly visible, the wipe is invisible; if the blade cuts through space swiftly, the wipe floats unhurriedly. And, as we will see, where the blade lends light weight and solidity, the wipe further virtualizes the light sculptures.

Five Minutes of Pure Sculpture
Skizze aus Notizbuch 6 /
Study from Notebook 6, 2004
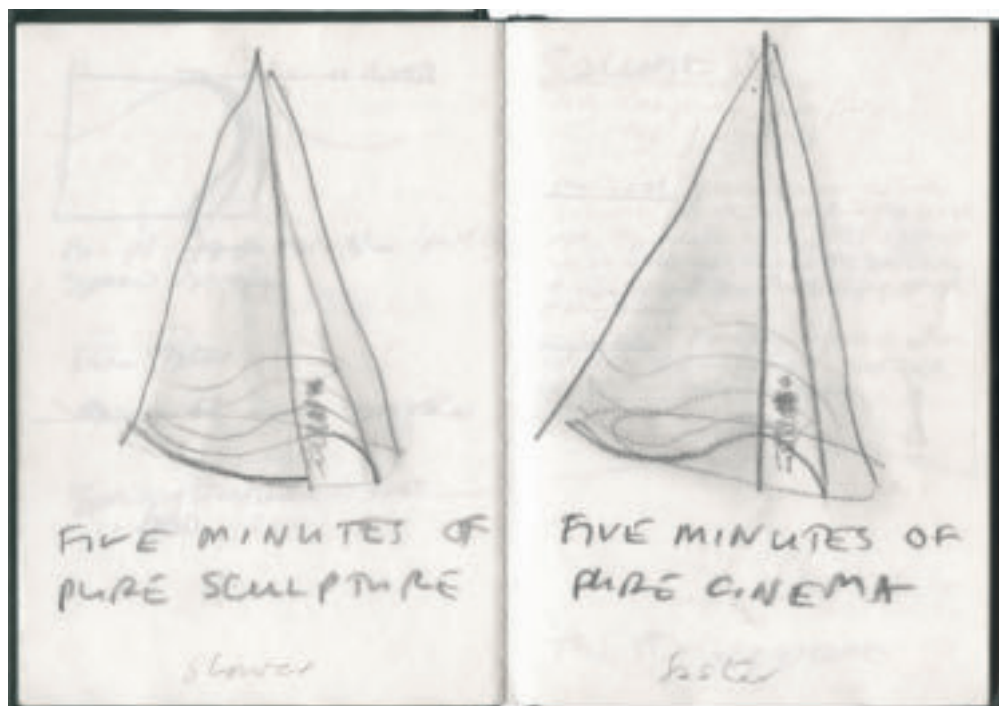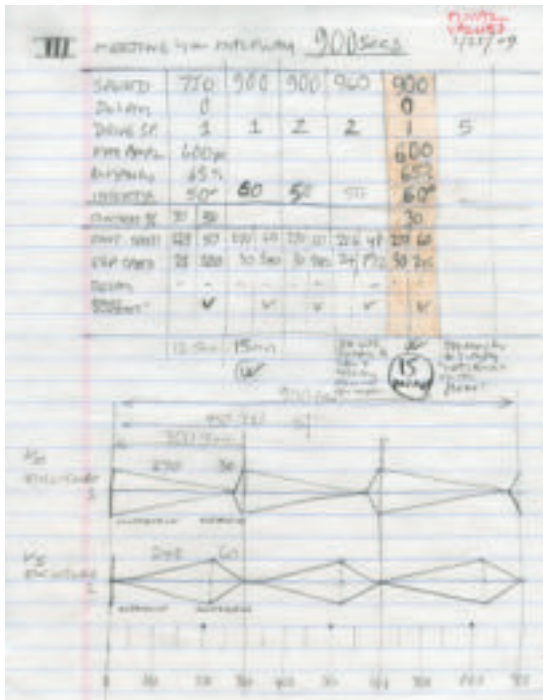
(o./t.) *Meeting You Halfway*,
2009
Produktionsnotizen / Production
notes, 2009

(u./b.) *Meeting You Halfway*,
2009
Footprint in der 360. Sekunde /
Footprint at 360 seconds

What is the wipe? The wipe is a filmic device used to transition between two scenes. More common film transitions include dissolves (where the end of one shot is superimposed on the beginning of the next one), fades (frequently to or from black), and, most common of all, cuts (in which one shot follows directly on the last). Wipes visibly replace one shot piecemeal with another. In a traveling wipe, for instance, a new shot might enter the frame from the top left and "push" the old shot out at the bottom right. Wipes can also assume the form of a circle ("iris wipe"), clock hands ("clock wipe"), or, with optical printers or video editing, virtually any other shape. They tend to be measured in fractions of a second. Whereas the cinematic cut generally involves a physical splice—the suture of two, previously cut filmstrips—the wipe has traditionally relied on post-production equipment (early wipes were executed in-camera, with the help of various appendages in front of the lens). Wipes are optical, virtual, and immaterial. They are also outmoded.

McCall titled his first artist book *Wipes Fades Dissolves* (1972) after the three most common transitions in a film laboratory's catalogue of effects. But wipes were already considered passé in the 1970s. The history of wipes follows a trajectory familiar in the history of film. The wipe has pre-cinematic precedents in lantern slide transitions. At the turn of the century, wipes were introduced as attractions or special effects by film pioneers like G.A. Smith. Relatively quickly, they were integrated into narrative film syntax as a transition between disparate scenes. Wipes reached the height of their popularity around mid-century. Unlike other syntactical units that comprised "invisible" editing, however, wipes drew attention to themselves and the constructed nature of narrative film. With few exceptions, most notably Akira Kurosawa, popular directors relied much less on wipes than on other film transitions. George Lucas's extensive and campy exploitation of wipes in *Star Wars* (1977) announced his allegiance to pulp fiction and B movies. Semiprofessional wedding and birthday videos have made elaborate wipes even less palatable since. Digital video editing, finally, has moved wipes from the lab to the Web, where they can be procured at nominal cost.

McCall has remarked, "For me the wipe is a way of opening up sculptural space using a cinematic device."[16] And with rare exceptions—one evanescent moment in every 15-minute cycle of *Meeting You Halfway*—the wipe ensures that the partial ellipses remain open, complex forms. Most viewers and reviewers fail to note the wipe's centrality, and for good reason. *Meeting You Halfway* (2009), a horizontal solid light piece, presents less like a transition between scenes than a single, sculptural form comprised of diaphanous veils. As the facing ellipses expand and contract, they produce endlessly variable channels, openings, and overlaps, whose quality and shape depend on where viewers stand and the directions they face. A palpable wonderment pervades the undulating veils of light and the immaterial yet luminous thresholds. Unlike *Line Describing a Cone*, which, in the final minutes at least, delineates a clear inside and outside, *Meeting You Halfway* nests and overlaps forms in a dance more erotic than geometric. The piece's formal and phenomenological stress lies precisely at its apertures and overlaps, which are the direct products of the wipe.

The floating wipe in *Meeting You Halfway* refuses to leave the frame. The floating wipe suspends the action in a state of perpetual transition and endless deferral and constructs a world devoid of origin and destination, *archē* and *telos*. The titles of McCall's works imply bodies—erect, supine, embracing. But the formal interactions often belie a cool distance. If viewers mentally replace

"meeting" with "missing" in *Meeting You Halfway*—where the open ellipses kiss for only a fraction of a second every fifteen minutes—they are less pessimists than media realists. Mediated intimacy is now the law of our lives.

McCall's solid light films resemble the constituent component of photography, the writing of light. But the wipe allows McCall to reverse, point by point, the space-time category of photography, which Roland Barthes famously defined (in opposition to film) as "spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority."[17] Photography leaves a piece of the past directly in our hands. The wipe brings McCall's work closer to a space-time category native to more recent telecommunications, a category we might describe as "temporal immediacy and spatial incontiguity." McCall borrows the wipe in order to juxtapose two simultaneous but separate actions within a common field. Formerly, this field was the screen. With the transposition of the wipe from the virtuality of cinematic space-time to the reality of sculptural space-time, McCall has turned the gallery into a laboratory and playground for the temporal immediacy and spatial incontiguity we face constantly in daily life under conditions far less amenable to experimentation and play.

McCall initially explored the wipe as a direct extension of cinematic editing: "I was searching for a way to maintain two opposing sculptural forms within the same three-dimensional space, to create the sculptural equivalent of 'parallel action.'"[18] Parallel action or crosscutting is the classic cinematic solution to the problem of representing simultaneous events in disparate locations (think of a heroine tied to railroad tracks crosscut with the hero riding to the rescue). McCall first experimented with the wipe to fuse, we might even say "mash-up" or "remix," two distinct pieces. *Exchange*, a piece McCall began drafting in 2004 but which he has yet to complete, is composed of two earlier works—*Breath III* (2005) and *Turning Round* (2004)—separated by a wipe (McCall experimented with an iris wipe before settling on a traveling wipe). McCall's wipe serves less to unify temporally actions disjointed in space than to spatially sunder actions that unfold simultaneously. Such is McCall's elaboration of the wipe as the sculptural equivalent of parallel action.

From one of many variants in the series—*Exchange (You and I)*—grew the first solid light film developed around the wipe: *You and I* (2005), a two-projector, 60-minute vertical piece that, in turn, spawned *Between You and I* (2006), the two-projector, two-part, 32-minute, vertical solid light film exhibited at Hamburger Bahnhof. Two bundles of light are projected onto the floor from the dark expanses above. Upon inspection, the beams reveal themselves as lines and waves and ellipses, which intermingle across two proximate but noncontiguous volumes. When a cycle of *Between You and I* commences, one of two elemental forms—an ellipse or a wave (to which a line was eventually added)—is projected in its integrity by either of the projectors, raised 32 feet in the air and separated by roughly 20 feet. Because of the projectors' throws, a five-foot gap separates two rectangular projection fields, each of which measures roughly 15 feet across. The ellipse and wave-cross are visible on the ground; above them rise a luminous sheath and a torqued pyramid of light. Immediately, each of the three elements is set in motion. The ellipse expands and contracts, the wave undulates, and the line rotates. Geometric permanence gives way to perpetual flux. But that is only the beginning.

Between You and I is a double exchange. For 16 minutes, the ellipse and wave-cross change places; in the second part they return to their original positions.

The crux of the piece, however, is not in the forms, motion, or exchange but rather in the *manner* of exchange. McCall initially experimented with centripetal and centrifugal iris wipes before choosing traveling wipes—invisible vertical lines that move laterally and displace a portion of one rectangular field into the corresponding section of the other. As the wipe begins to penetrate the far side of the ellipse (when viewed from behind its short end), the crown of the ellipse appears at the far side of the field that otherwise houses the wave-cross. Simultaneously, the far side of the wave-cross vanishes from its projection field only to reappear at the far end of the nearer one. Because these transformations unfold in three dimensions, enclosures open and apertures are enclosed as walls of light amble slowly through the dark space. Should a viewer arrive in minute six and depart five minutes later, he would likely gather little in terms of wipes. But someone patient enough to see both parts of the cycle unfold cannot miss their real-time displacements. Unlike traditional cinematic wipes, which temporally link disparate actions in separate spaces (on a single projection surface), *Between You and I* presents the two forms simultaneously only to separate and amalgamate them across two projection areas. The ellipse and wave-cross are amalgamated into coves and passages and diaphanes, innumerable because they are effervescent. But the wipe is ultimately the site of separation. Rarely do the lines of the ellipse and the wave-cross meet, and then fleetingly. More often, the wipe creates a gap or series of gaps. In the final analysis, it is a cinematic device to open up sculptural space. The wipe demarcates the line where the two forms occasionally meet and regularly just miss. The primary forms in *Between You and I* are doomed to pass through each other endlessly without ever interacting. Or rather, their interaction takes place only at the point of separation, the wipe. The incorrect grammar in *Between You and I* is telling: each form remains squarely within the nominative; active subjects who refuse to subordinate themselves in relationship or, at the very least, are unable to cross an invisible divide.

SITELESS

McCall's solid light films often impress upon the viewer the sensation of divine light. Although *Between You and I* evinces inclinations toward sites of worship (it was first exhibited in 2006 at the Peer Gallery in the decommissioned Round Chapel in London and was subsequently shown in the Chapel of St. Cornelius on Governors Island, New York), McCall has steadfastly disavowed any religious connotations. For McCall, the emphasis lies forcefully on bodily interaction with abstract forms, an elaborate *pas de deux* nearly every viewer understands immediately and viscerally. The physical intimacy—visitors invariably caress the luminous membranes and linger in the undulating corridors—is heightened by the space's anonymous darkness but tempered by the light forms' immateriality and impalpable presence. And yet, like other black box installations, the films largely divorce spectators from their surroundings. By the time their eyes have adjusted to the darkness, the visitors have long been transported to an elsewhere that only immersive media can secure. Whereas Minimalist works often opened onto institutional critique, McCall's requisite darkness literally obscures the institutions in which his work is exhibited. *Between You and I*, in fact, appears little different when exhibited in decommissioned chapels (Round Chapel, St. Cornelius), a shuttered factory (Hangar Bicocca), a defunct railway station (Hamburger Bahnhof), or traditional black box galleries (IAC: Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne, the

Pierre Huyghe, *Light Conical
Intersect*, 1996
Anti-event (Paris)
Digitalprint-Poster / Digital print
poster, 80 × 120 cm

Singapore Biennial, or other galleries). No matter the site, the interior must conform to a cinematic mandate—windows are draped in black, interiors are cloaked in darkness, the outside world is renounced to better facilitate our immersion into a new world of light, sound and movement. Rather than amplify its religious surroundings or call attention to institutional politics, *Between You and I* appears aggressively site-agnostic.

Miwon Kwon enumerates a tripartite genealogy of site-specific art: the phenomenological/experiential (e.g. Robert Barry and Richard Serra), the social/institutional (e.g. Hans Haacke and Mierle Laderman Ukeles), and the discursive (e.g. Andrea Fraser and Mark Dion).[19] Alongside these three categories, McCall's work introduces a fourth: the mediated. Mediated site-specificity is best illustrated by Robert Smithson's fanciful folly whereby a cinema is built into a cave to screen exclusively the film of the cave's construction. The immediacy of the cave is opposed to the distance created by cinema.[20] Inspired by McCall, Gordon Matta-Clark, Pierre Huyghe, and others have developed this dynamic in a series of related works. As Philippe-Alain Michaud explains, Huyghe's *Light Conical Intersect* (1996) collapses Matta-Clark's *Conical Intersect* film (1975) and its inspiration, McCall's *Line Describing a Cone*, by projecting on an exterior wall in the neighborhood of Matta-Clark's intervention[21] an image from the film where the light penetrates the conical cavity made in the façade: "in a perfect visual coincidence, the architectural system is resolved into light, thus returning to its origin."[22] These trends are now converging on the largest stages of art and film, such as Tacita Dean's recent installation at the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, *FILM* (2011), a work whose central image is of the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. What these works have in common is an attempt to establish a "'sight-specific' site-specificity," to borrow Gregor Stemmrich's felicitous phrase.[23] McCall has found at least one new form of mediated site-specificity by capitalizing on cinematic darkness and turning from sight to sound.[24]

Sound has always played an important role in McCall's performances and it figured centrally in *Leaving*, one of the first works he developed upon his

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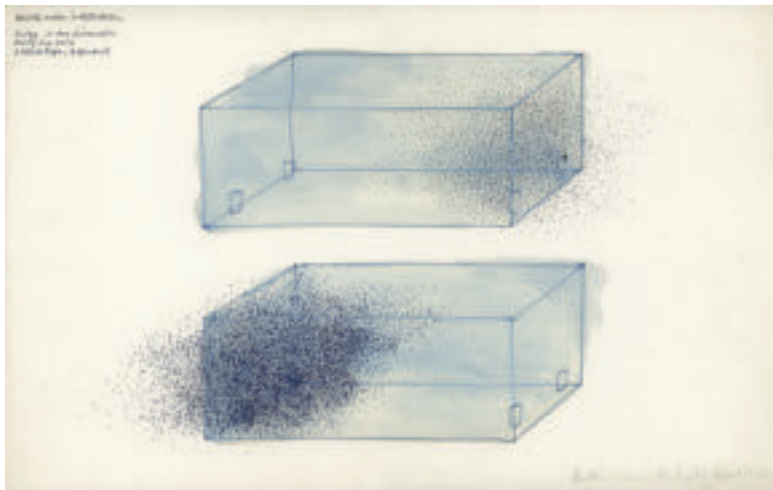
(l.) *White Noise Installation, Surge, in One Direction, Along One Axis*, 1973
Tusche und Bleistift auf Papier / Ink and pencil on paper, 36,8 × 58,4 cm
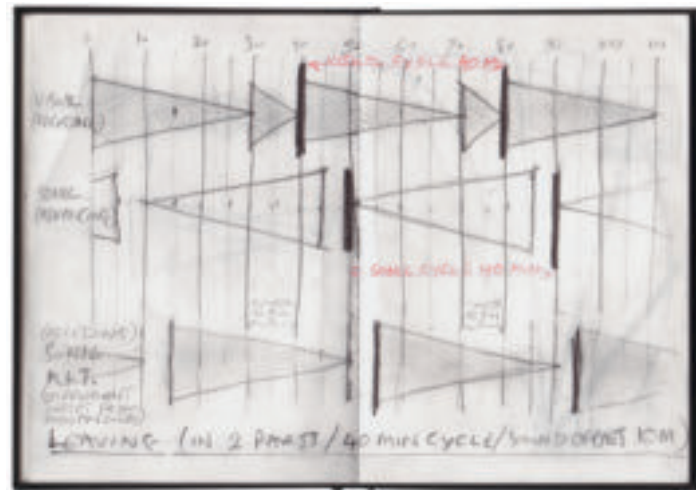
(r.) *Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)*, 2009
Skizze aus Notizbuch 31 / Study from Notebook 31, 2008

return to art in the early 2000s. Formally, *Leaving* picks up directly where *Line Describing a Cone* and the *Fire Performances* (1972-1975) left off, as if McCall wanted to begin his most productive artistic decade anew and in a manner that would open possibilities he had previously discontinued. The process was not easy. Seven years after he first sketched *Leaving*, McCall had yet to realize the piece. But, as he explained, its vital connection to the earlier solid light films remained intact:

> The film I'm working on right now, which is called *Leaving*, has a narrative structure very similar to *Line Describing a Cone*, but in reverse, so you begin with everything and end with nothing. But unlike *Line Describing a Cone*, there is a structure of exchange whereby the gradual loss of the visual object is balanced by the gradual addition of a three-dimensional sonic field based on foghorns.[25]

From its earliest incarnation, *Leaving* comprised a complete cone of light from which an undulating and ever-waxing wedge was removed. In his notebooks, McCall repeatedly describes the action as "an elaborate clock wipe."[26]

Similar to a wipe, where a diminution of one scene is met with the introduction of another, the waning of the light cone was balanced with a variety of augmentations. Most significant was the use of sound. In the many iterations of *Leaving*, foghorns remained, nearly to the end, the primary compensatory vehicle. McCall first used foghorns in his *Landscapes for Fire* (1972-1973)—large-scale, outdoor, performances scored for a grid of small fires that undergo a series of permutations over several hours—to extend the work's audiovisual environment beyond the grid. (Although McCall would eventually abandon the foghorns, the extension in space remained a conceptual lynchpin of *Leaving*'s audio element.) At one point, McCall envisioned a companion piece, *Arriving*, which would restore the cone of light at the expense of the resounding foghorns. The visual component of *Arriving* was incorporated into the final piece, *Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)* (2009), a two-projector, two-part, 32-minute, horizontal solid light film. As the undulating wedge eats away at one heaving elliptical cone, a second breathing cone fattens up on the trimmings of the first. In each 16-minute part, one cone is extinguished while the second grows from a luminous line into an elliptical sheath of light. We witness a complete elliptical cone displaced across the two projectors. To be in the presence of an undivided cone is to have witnessed the extinction

of its companion. Once again, the wipe is the agent of temporal immediacy and spatial incontiguity. But more explicitly than almost any other solid light film, this wipe is overlaid with loss, stillness, nothingness, and death.

Twice during the complete cycle—at the midpoint of each part—the waxing and waning halt for a single minute, accompanied by silence. 30 seconds of silence precede and follow the cessation of movement, as if to herald and blazon the abeyance, or, more likely, to ease us in and out of the pneumatic arrest. The earliest sketches for *Leaving* describe a silence, but McCall hesitated to ratify the accompanying sound. McCall initially entertained Peter's song from Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*. But when he resumed work on the piece in 2005, he returned to the foghorns that first accompanied his *Landscapes for Fire*. Beginning in 2006, he worked closely with composer David Grubbs to shape a three-dimensional sonic environment. Five speakers were to ring the gallery, bellow the sounds of advancing and retreating foghorns, and extend the gallery's darkness well beyond its four walls. In McCall's words:

> In *Leaving*, the act of exchange between something you can see and something you can't, and the use of the foghorns within a mist-filled space—the suggestion of ocean or river, if you like, as well as the suggestion of vast space in every direction—sets up various kinds of poetic resonances within the black box.[27]

Ultimately, the foghorns proved too poetic and musical for McCall. He returned, still assisted by Grubbs, to his initial acoustic conception. The fourth of a seven-part unpublished statement on sound reads, "Part of creating a more singular (specific) sense of place." He added parenthetically: "'presence' (as in outside the window, in the distance.)"[28] If foghorns were out of place in the English countryside where McCall realized his *Landscapes for Fire*, they were an indigenous element in his New York City soundscape. His morning commute from his Chelsea home, down the West Side Highway, to his Tribeca office was suffused with the nearly white noise of automobile and barge traffic. As he articulates in his notebooks: "Fog horn + siren embedded <u>within</u> the pre-existing sonic cityscape of New York. […] Perhaps experienced <u>as if</u> they were 'already there.'"[29] This 2007 note on *Leaving* anticipates perfectly the sonic environment realized in *Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)*. From one wall, perpendicular to the projectors' throws, we hear the hush of city traffic, irregularly punctuated by sirens. From the opposite wall emanates the rhythmic crashing of waves against the shore, interrupted sporadically by the deep call of the foghorn. Once the projected image leaves the screen, there is no reason to confine the sound to the screen's insistent frontality. Unlike cinematic surround sound, which largely issues from the screen so as not to disrupt the immersive fiction, *Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)* constructs a true sonic environment.

The work premiered at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York in December 2009. One could easily mistake the traffic and waves, sirens and foghorns, for the real acoustic landscape in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. We might describe the phenomenon as a *trompe-oreilles*, a deception not of the eye but of the ear.[30] Indeed, if the soundtrack were updated with German sirens, the *trompe-oreilles* would prove no less effective at the Hamburger Bahnhof, bordered on two sides by the bustling Invalidenstraße and the Berlin-Spandauer Schifffahrtskanal. The sonic environment produced in *Leaving (with Two-Minute*

Silence) thus assumes powerful and contradictory roles. The resonances of trafficked rivers and streets effect a virtual space that extends the gallery walls, but the sounds also create "a more singular (specific) sense of place," precisely as McCall imagined.

In *Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)*, the tension between actuality and virtuality is pushed to the breaking point when one recognizes the uncannily similar spatial coordinates in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929). Like McCall's *Sigmund Freud's Dora* (1979)[31]—where a "conversation" between Dora and Freud is crosscut between Dora in front of a bookshelf and Freud in front of the Statue of Liberty—the Surrealist classic vandalizes the syntactic conventions of cinematic space-time. The action in *Un chien andalou* unfolds in an apartment several floors above a busy street, but whose main door opens onto a beach. *Un chien andalou* was famously accompanied by an alternation of two Argentine tangos and the *Liebestod* from Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. But were the apartment's spatial absurdities translated into aural form, the result would be a rectangular space flanked by the sounds of street traffic and ocean waves. *Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)* captures the sonic specificity of the West Side Highway but also the radical spatial incontiguity afforded by cinema. In *Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)*, McCall places actuality and virtuality in maximum tension.

EN PASSANT

Dynamic tensions rather than polemical oppositions. In the 1970s, McCall marched beneath the banner of real time and real space against the mystifications of the cinematic apparatus. His forthcoming public commissions expand on the legacy Land Art, sited in specific cities, locations, and institutions. But for McCall, the line between immanence and site-specificity travels directly through technologies and systems of mediation. Neither the immanence of site-specificity nor the specter of mediation offers McCall an Archimedean point from which to criticize our mediated immediacy. McCall fancies no outside of media. In this regard, McCall is far less polemical than he was some four decades ago, when he introduced the technical and formal foundations for the solid light films. Less polemical and more creative. McCall's recent works do not demystify cinema (or any other media system) once and for all. Rather, time and again they make visible and audible our mediated immediacy as a dance of geometric permutations, skins of light, bodies of flesh, and murmurs in the dark that are united through separation and capture intimacy only at a distance.

1   Republished in Anthony McCall, "Two Statements," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 250.
2   Ibid., 250-251. In 2003, when McCall republished the statement in *October*, he did not soften the stance so much as introduce room for productive confusion. No longer did the film exist *solely* in real three-dimensional space. No longer was it necessary to contrast his solid light film with films that "allude to a past time." With 30 years' hindsight, *Line Describing a Cone* at least hinted at the possibility of other times and places. Mediation crept into the work's primal immediacy. See McCall, "*Line Describing a Cone* and Related Films," *October*, no. 103 (2003).

3 Few cities have a relationship to the art of light comparable to Berlin's. From its Weimar festival of urban lights outfitted by industry and avant-garde (*Berlin im Licht*, 1928) and its unholy cathedrals of light choreographed by Albert Speer in the 1930s through countless post-World War II experiments in illumination, Berlin has remained a city bewitched by light. For an overview of luminous Berlin from the nineteenth century to the present, see Franziska Nentwig, *Berlin im Licht* (Berlin: Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, 2008).

4 Cf. Eric de Bruyn, "The Expanded Field of Cinema, or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square," in *X-Screen. Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*, ed. Matthias Michalka (Cologne: Walther König, 2003), 161-169.

5 Deke Dusinberre, "St. George in the Forest: The English Avant-Garde," *Afterimage* 6 (1976): 10. McCall proscribed chairs or furniture in the space. McCall, "Two Statements," 251.

6 Paul Virilio, *Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 1991), 64.

7 See George Baker, "Film Beyond its Limits," in *Anthony McCall: Film Installations* (Warwick: Mead Gallery, 2004), 7.

8 Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," (1966) in Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 11.

9 E-mail communication with the author, May 5, 2006.

10 Samuel Weber, "Television: Set and Screen," in *Mass Mediauras*, ed. Alan Cholodenko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 120. Emphasis in original.

11 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999), 5, 6.

12 Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 36-37. See also Hal Foster, "Light-Play," in *Anthony McCall: Breath (The Vertical Works)* (Milan: Hangar Bicocca, 2009).

13 Joseph, "Sparring with the Spectacle," in: *Anthony McCall: The Light Films and Related Works* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005) 124.

14 See Alison Butler, "A Deictic Turn: Space and Location in Contemporary Gallery Film and Video Installation," *Screen* 54, no. 4 (2010): 312.

15 László Moholy-Nagy, *von material zu architektur* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1929; reprint, 2001), 155. The text was reprinted and translated into English in several editions under the better-known title *The New Vision* (1932, 1938, 1947).

16 McCall in Graham Ellard and Stephen Johnstone, "Anthony McCall," *Bomb*, no. 97 (2006): 69.

17 Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image - Music - Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 44.

18 McCall in Ellard and Johnstone, "Anthony McCall," 70.

19 See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2002), 11-31.

20 As Smithson noted: "One thing all films have in common is the power to take perception elsewhere." See Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia" (1971), in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 138-142.

21 Matta-Clark had cut a cone into two 17th century buildings slated for demolition located in the immediate vicinity of the construction site for the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

22 Philippe-Alain Michaud, "Line Light: The Geometric Cinema of Anthony McCall," *October* 137 (2011): 15 fn.16.

23 Gregor Stemmrich, "White Cube, Black Box and Grey Areas: Venues and Values," in *Art and the Moving Image*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate, 2008), 441-443. Among Stemmrich's examples is Gordon Matta-Clark's film *City Slivers* (1976), a formal exploration of New York's urban architecture, which Matta-Clark projected on the façade of the Municipal Building in Lower Manhattan. High Line Art and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) recently collaborated to project *City Slivers* onto a building façade near the High Line, a public park built on a historic elevated rail line in Chelsea, New York.

24 A productive comparison can be made with the work of Janet Cardiff. See Andrew V. Uroskie, "Siting Cinema," in *Art and the Moving Image*, ed. Tanya Leighton (London: Tate Publishing, 2008).

25 McCall in Tyler Coburn, "Interview," in *Anthony McCall: Breath*, 86.

26 See, for example, Notebook 20 (September 6, 2006 – November 6, 2006).

27 McCall in Coburn, "Interview," 87.

28 Large Notebook 1. Dated July 12, 2002.

29 Notebook 24 (May 18, 2007 – June 3, 2007).

30 The French term *trompe-oreilles* refers to nearly incomprehensible French phrases that sound foreign. I have appropriated it by way of *trompe-l'oeil*, the hyperrealist illusion employed in much Western art to create the impression of three dimensions using only two.

31 *Sigmund Freud's Dora* was produced with Claire Pajaczkowska, Andrew Tyndall, and Jane Weinstock.