Williams, Gilda. "Anthony McCall, Serpentine Gallery," *ArtForum,* April 2008.

ARTFORUM

Anthony McCall
SERPENTINE GALLERY

In the 1970s, when Anthony McCall's Solid Light sculptures were first projected in galleries and loft spaces, cigarette smoke and dust particles filled the air promiscuously, allowing his room-size sculptural projections to function. Before the days of smoking bans and filter systems, works such as *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973—a projected white dot in a completely darkened space that slowly grows, over thirty minutes, into a circular line on the facing wall, eventually filling the blackness with a conical "volume" in space—did not depend on a hazer of the kind that is nowadays used to produce the (nontoxic) mist indispensable to making McCall's artworks visible.

The tolerance for insalubrious gallery air is not all that has changed since McCall first exhibited these works, before his twenty-year absence from art in the '80s and '90s and his return to artmaking in the present decade. Back then the discussion of McCall's work hinged on formal aspects: the overlap of film and sculpture; the invention of a film work in which every viewing position offered its own uniquely valid perspective; and the absolute insistence on the here and now of a moving image with no outside referent. Originally contextualized by the structuralist cinema of artists such as Michael Snow and Andy Warhol, today the work loses some of its former conceptual purity to be read instead as a kind of magical experience producing dreamlike, suspended states of heightened subjectivity. Seeing this work some thirty-five years after it was first exhibited, we tend to reread it in terms of present-day debates on audience participation in art, and in this context it is rendered surprisingly fresh, even radical. McCall choreographs a spectacularly original setup in which to generate connections among art, audience, environment, and form, as the viewers of *You and I, Horizontal III*, 2007, silently position themselves in almost dancelike patterns in the dark—within, or behind, or receiving the blinding blue-white light, carefully maneuvering around the shadowy human forms nearby. After a decade of politicized art often signaled by, for example, scrappy, claustrophobic, information-heavy installations, narrative-led accounts of personal or political histories, or socially loaded interactive events, the experience of an almost empty gallery and the content-free simplicity of a single projector and a mere thin white line beamed on the wall can leave us speechless by its demonstration of an antithetical idea of democratic, participatory art.

At the entrance to the exhibition was the film *Landscape for Fire*, 1972, based on an outdoor performance, *Landscape for Fire II*, in which the artist lit a sequential grid of small fires. With its grainy photography, unrehearsed performances, and muddy-earthwork feel, this work contrasts heavily with the control and polish of the Solid Light works. Alongside graph-paper diagrams and drawings that help relate McCall's work to, say, concrete poetry or Gordon Matta-Clark's architectural slices, *Landscape for Fire* returns us nostalgically to its original art-historical context and all the untidy experimentation of the '60s and '70s. This work is harder to reread—or misread?—in terms of the twenty-first-century context that so effortlessly and enjoyably subsumes the compelling darkness of Solid Light, which seems timeless thanks to our instant ability to update its meaning.

—Gilda Williams

Anthony McCall, *You and I, Horizontal III*, **2007**, 32-minute cycle in two parts; computer, QuickTime movie file, two video projectors, and two haze machines. Installation view.