

Immateriality

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There is nothing to be known about anything except an initially large, and forever expandable, web of relations to other things. Everything that can serve as a term of relation can be dissolved into another set of relations and so on forever. There are, so to speak, relations all the way down, all the way up, and all the way out in every direction: you never reach something which is not just one more nexus of relations.

Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 1999¹

¹ Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London, Penguin Books, 1999.

Abstract

Immateriality – intention as Art

We now have widely recognized art practices that need no longer be product (result) based. One could think of these art forms as conscious intention, deliberate interrelations, or perhaps deeper communication. Their expanded levels of awareness is their point and they might be described as "Intention as 4th dimension" or simply "Immateriality." They are extending our personal experiences and collective consciousness –literally creating new dimensions to operate in.

Despite their previous 'non-existence', these new reality dimensions are rapidly gaining popular existence, not least through participation in virtual cyber worlds and via artists deliberately creating in such newly recognized fields as "Social Sculpture" etc. Originally these consciousness expansions took the form of mental enhancement and mind training techniques fostered by New Age Rebellion meeting Eastern Spirituality, and by combining recreational mind-altering drugs with art and music.

Immateriality is now being recognized as valid and important because through its appreciation and application we are widening our self-awareness both individually and collectively; and by becoming more aware, we are enriching reality, take greater responsibility and realize more and more the creative beings we are. As Joseph Beuys said: "Each and everyone here is an artist." Being Beuys, he was already further along the track - was already proclaiming these new fields of experience as politicized realms from where to consciously radiate out into different environments.

Art as such has never been just about imagery, or even abstract ideas, but more subtly about greater self-awareness alongside a newly linked super-awareness á la Teilhard de Chardin's 'third step' in human consciousness evolution known as *Noosphere*.

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Prolog

Today's abstract imagery is not esoteric as it once was. On the contrary, employed prolifically in all forms of marketing, corporate styling, and on most public surfaces, abstract imagery has become almost vulgar.

It seems a shame that abstraction appears to have become the preferred default option for all kinds of aesthetic enhancements of consumer goods and public spaces reducing it to being just another convenient tool for ubiquitous corporate use. I feel that the once revered 'pure abstract image' becoming mere wallpaper only serves to further confirm the insidious co-opting forces of our so-called 'free-market' corporate reality. It has become clear by now that the all-pervasive, dominating corporate attitudes which might appear at first begin, even inevitable are by their nature political and ultimately repressive.

Abstract art's journey from spiritual edge to 'corporate imagery' might well be seen as the final victory of the 'free market'-orthodoxy so intrinsically bound up with our total consumer culture currently raging globally.

Today's all-encompassing 'moneyed' worldview seems based on old forms of economic Rationalisms that have proved themselves to be highly effective in co-opting and folding back into themselves all critical and alternative voices through simply '*incorporating*' (co-opting) them into the greater capitalist project of reducing absolutely everything to some rational "dollar value" (including life and death).

However, things appear to be shifting once more as some discourses are returning toward *participation* and *re-connecting*. This move appears headed by ever-broadening environmental movements and ever widening global anti-corporate protests, as well as public artists and especially young artistic collectives practicing outside the shallow and hermetic sphere of the contemporary 'art market' comprising mostly commercial, institutionalized, and academic art.

It is my contention that there are starting to be signs of a renewed appreciation of certain expanded ideas promoted by the fresh usage of the unlikely term 'immateriality.' Immateriality here includes an understanding that all phenomena, including art for example, are dependent on one's perception and therefore, even more daringly, that real phenomena and illusions are cognitively equivalent.

This expanded perspective turns reality into an ever more flexible and workable medium. In short the concept of immateriality acknowledges the intangible nature of all and sundry thereby opening up ever more subtle dimensions for us to operate in more and more consciously.

IMMATERIALITY

Introduction

Today's immateriality is a philosophical and artistic concept (re)-introduced into modern artistic discourse by Yves Klein who was a French conceptual artist working in the 1950s and 60s in Europe. One of his best-known works is '*Leap into the Void*',² a famous black and white photographic image where Klein looks as if he is leaping off a building in an attempt to soar. Klein was one of the first public artists to have an exhibition entitled '*The Void*',³ which took place in a windowless, white Paris gallery space completely emptied of everything and admitting only a single viewer at a time. He revealed his own notions of immateriality in a short description in the catalogue that accompanied '*The Void*' show of 1958 at Galerie Iris Clert, Paris:

“This invisible pictorial state within the gallery space should be so present and endowed with autonomous life that it might literally be what has hitherto been regarded as the best overall definition of painting: *radiance*.”⁴

² “Le Saut dans le vide” [The Leap into the Void], 5, rue Gentil-Bernard, Fontenay-aux-Roses, October 1960, Artistic action by Yves Klein, Title of the work by Yves Klein in his newspaper “Sunday 27 November 1960”, “A man in space! The painter of space throws himself into the void!” 1960.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galerie_Iris_Clert and John Perreault, *Artopia* entry Nov. 9, 2005, ‘Yves Klein’s Blues’ http://www.artsjournal.com/artopia/2005/11/yves_kleins_blues.html accessed 05.04.2008

⁴ Solnit, Rebecca: *Yves Klein and the Blue of Distance*, New England Review (Middlebury College, VT) (26:2) [2005:2]p.176-182, 266.

Yves Klein was convinced that through projected intention alone an invisible state attains life and luminosity⁵. He strongly believed in evolution and predicted that consciously intended ‘radiances’ would ultimately be widely perceivable and therefore communicable. Some of his critics thought Klein tried to eliminate all art productions that would result in physical representations preferring instead to go directly ‘beyond form’ as much as possible, that is to say: to the luminosity of the void itself. Yet, Yves Klein tried to show in his many different works that the so-called ‘void’ is far from being empty or void and that it ultimately comprises ‘everything findable in this world’,⁶ and that it actually shines (radiates).

Klein was in fact just one of a long line of great thinkers and artists to point out that on a more subtle level intention (leading to certain convictions + consequent decisions and thereby actions) is one of the main sources and often the point of origin for our creativity and many of our creative acts.⁷ In fact, he believed intention and creativity to be virtually synonymous. Klein often used the example that as a young boy he had wished to sign the sky and that later he actually did this in his huge ‘*sky signing*’ works (using airplanes).⁸

⁵ Perreault, John *Artopia* entry Nov. 9, 2005, ‘*Yves Klein’s Blues*’
http://www.artsjournal.com/artopia/2005/11/yves_kleins_blues.html

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Klein, Yves *Yves Klein 1928-1962: Selected Writings*, Ubu Classics, London, originally published Tate Gallery, Translation Barbara Wright, 1974. “In 1946, when I was still an adolescent, I went and signed my name on the other side of the sky during a fantastic ‘realistico-imaginary’ voyage.”

Throughout his work, Yves Klein consistently tried to transcend or annihilate the level of the symbolic since for him *representation* was “always about that which is actually absent”. For Klein most representations were thus mere symbols.⁹ In short, Klein himself was striving for a new level of awareness through a new kind of “art of immediacy” that he intuited concerns always this present moment. In his tripartite conception of reality he viewed the combination of ‘presence’, ‘luminosity’, and ‘void’ as comprising the here and now. In other words, actuality, with its apparent luminosity (perceived phenomena) reflected for Klein the underlying/overarching mysteriously potent ‘immateriality’ (or void) itself.¹⁰

It is often claimed, that the greater context of Klein’s work included his own spirituality since he made a public display of his own devotions to Rosicrucianism and to something obscure and maybe satirically intended: ‘The Order of the Archers of Saint Sebastian.’¹¹ Strangely, Klein never directly acknowledged the deep inspirations he must have drawn from Buddhist philosophies during the many years he earned his income as a professional martial arts teacher. However in his *Chelsea Hotel Manifesto*¹² (see Attachment) Klein tellingly wrote, “Having rejected nothingness, I have discovered the void”, closing his great manifesto with the imperative command, “*Long Live the Immaterial!*”¹³

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Solnit, Rebecca: *Yves Klein and the Blue of Distance*, in *New England Review*, Middlebury College, VT., vol. 26, 2005. p176-182

¹¹ John Perreault, *Artopia* entry Nov. 9, 2005, ‘*Yves Klein’s Blues*’

http://www.artsjournal.com/artopia/2005/11/yves_kleins_blues.html accessed 05.04.2008

¹² Yves Klein, “Chelsea Hotel Manifesto,” originally written in English with the collaboration of Neil Levine and John Archambault, in *DEP*, p. 298.

¹³ Ibid p.7: “Around 1947-48 I created a ‘monotone’ symphony whose theme is what I want my life to be. This symphony lasts for forty minutes and consists of one single, continuous,

IMMATERILITY as Word

Today's concept of immateriality refers to something more than its linguistically implied relationship to materiality, meaning the term's expanded notions go well beyond conventional ideas of any implicit negative materialism.

In other words, the contemporary concept of immateriality does not just refer to some kind of denial or dismissal of physical matter, materiality, or actual reality experiences per se. Quite the contrary, it simultaneously acknowledges "the light of things" (luminosity) as William Wordsworth (1770–1850) so succinctly put it.¹⁴ Far from being anti-material or anti-reality, the current label of immateriality consciously aims to be anti-consumerist and anti-corporatist instead.

Simply put, the concept of immateriality is intended to expand our individual and collective understanding of phenomena and of reality not least by raising our appreciation of the myriad different views held by humans as well as non-human others. In this way, current conceptions of immateriality actually represent an expansion and a fundamental reviewing of the way we chose to regard appearances. In brief, contemporary understandings of immateriality are a fundamental rethinking of our long held and still persistent homocentric reality perception currently caught in the grip of consumerist/corporate thinking.

To repeat, immateriality aims to go beyond the conventional dualism of materiality versus spirit, or even 'void,' pointing to beyond.

long-drawn-out 'sound'; it has neither beginning nor end, which creates a dizzy feeling, a sense of aspiration, of a sensibility outside and beyond time."

¹⁴ Wordsworth, William. *The Complete Poetical Works*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1888.

In other words, the belief in matter or phenomena (including mind and self) as fixed entities existing from their own side is challenged while at the same time any implied linguistic links (such as to materialism) are mere attempts to highlight current issues. Ultimately what immateriality points at and tries to draw our attention to are the more subtle underlying conditions necessary for matter and materiality to function as they do (or at least appear to).

It is my contention that we have already started to appreciate immateriality as an expanded and thereby more inclusive and overarching conceptual vision. It is this expanded understanding that make it possible to read certain abstract fine art for example as a reflection and a celebration of such an expanded view.

IMMATERIALITY and God

"—no property of matter may be ascribed to him [God]. He [!]} has no extension in space, no weight, no mass, no bulk, no parts, no form, no taste, no smell. He is invisible (Bible, *Timothy 1:17; 6:16*) and, being one in essence and without parts, is indivisible...."¹⁵.

There are age-old literary discussions in Western religions, philosophies, and the sciences on the observation of an absence of any final substantiality of anything (including God(s)). The most well known example to be cited here might be David Hume's (1711 - 1776)¹⁶ famous proposition of the 'soul's' unintelligible substance.¹⁷

"To pronounce, then, the final decision upon the whole; the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible: All our perceptions are not susceptible of a local union, either with what is extended or unextended: there being some of them of the one kind, and some of the other: And as the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation.

There is matter, motion, and there are the causes of thought and

¹⁵ Reymond, Robert L. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1998.

¹⁶ Today, philosophers recognize Hume as a precursor of contemporary cognitive science, as well as one of the most thoroughgoing exponents of philosophical naturalism.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume/> accessed 14.07.2006

¹⁷ Hume, David *A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-1740)*- Sect.V. *Of the Immateriality of the Soul* Adam Black, William Tate and Charles Tait, London, 1826.

the relationships between them. There is only a constant conjunction and not a single locus of perception. Effectively the soul as a thing in itself has long disappeared in religious science.”¹⁸

Jumping from the cosmic to the more mundane we have to admit that the above mentioned immateriality realizations have already found practical application in many aspects of contemporary life. One can now make money in a purely ‘knowledge-based’ economy operating entirely in electronic cyber space¹⁹. For example, as early as 1962 Marshall McLuhan²⁰ commented:

“Thanks to the prodigious biological event represented by the discovery of electromagnetic waves, each individual finds themselves henceforth (actively and passively) simultaneously present, over land and sea, in every corner of the earth.”

This simultaneous quality, he believed “would provide our lives again with a tribal base.” However, this time around our tribe would come together globally. As Jennifer Cobb Kreisberg²¹ sees it: “we are now standing at the beginning of Teilhard de Chardin’s²² ‘third phase of evolution’ - the moment when the world

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <http://www.apdip.net/publications/iespprimers/epimer-infoage.pdf> accessed 29. 03.2008

²⁰ McLuhan, Marshall *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, University of Toronto Press, 1962.

²¹ Cobb Kreisberg, Jennifer *A Globe, Clothing Itself with a Brain*, Wired Magazine, Issue 3.06., 1995, Conde Nast Publication, San Francisco, 1995.

²² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), French philosopher and Jesuit priest, conceived of such ideas as the Omega point and the Noosphere. His works have been considered an important

is covered with the incandescent glow of consciousness, a dimension Teilhard de Chardin described as the ‘**Noosphere**’²³ -an evolutionary stage he believed ‘as evolution becoming conscious of itself’.²⁴

The world wide net appears to be one of the primary manifestations exemplifying the emergence of Chardain’s ‘third phase.’ As theorist Felix Stalder²⁵ proposes: "with cyberspace, we are now, in effect, hard-wiring our collective consciousness."²⁶

influence on the church's modern stance on evolution. His law of Complexity/Consciousness states that there is an inherent compulsion in matter to arrange itself in more complex groupings, exhibiting higher levels of consciousness. www.websters-dictionary-online.org/definition/english/Pi/Pierre_Teilhard_de_Chardin.html accessed 23.04.2006

²³ As human-beings converge around the earth, unifying themselves in ever more complex forms of arrangement, consciousness will rise. <http://noosphere.princeton.edu/> accessed 12.06.2008

²⁴ Ibid In Teilhard’s theory the universe is constantly developing towards higher levels of material complexity and consciousness. For Teilhard, the universe can only move in the direction of more complexity and consciousness if it is being drawn by a supreme point of complexity and consciousness. Thus Teilhard postulates the "Omega Point" as the supreme point of complexity and consciousness, which is not only as the term of the evolutionary process, but the actual cause for the universe to move in the direction of complexity and consciousness. In other words, Omega Point exists as supremely complex and conscious, independent of the evolving universe. I.e. Omega Point is transcendent.

²⁵ <http://felix.openflows.com/html/left.html> accessed 21.05.08

²⁶ Ibid.

IMMATERIALITY re-emerged

The term immateriality is currently re-emerging in many fields of human endeavor and as such it is becoming the focus for discussions within post-Newtonian physics, as well as in ‘the new economies’, and naturally it has long been contemplated widely in contemporary art and philosophy.²⁷

Many of the more recent editions of mainstream dictionaries now point out that the term immateriality is no longer even at the most commonly used level about things not existing. In other words it is popularly acknowledged that so called immaterial things do obviously exist and we now acknowledge that there have always been such immaterial things as ideas, god(s), the soul, the mind, even conceptual notions as: ‘the real world’, or ‘a green economy’ etc. Thus, immaterial things are becoming ever more ‘real’ and thereby workable.

Instant global communication is now being regarded as normal as we start feeling at home on multiple levels in virtual cyber worlds.²⁸ Interactions within these realities have measurable consequences in spite of their so-called immaterial nature. For example ‘assets’ get sold in cyberspace for large sums of real dollars since the purchasers foresee earning money through imposing ‘taxes’ on site visitors or by generating advertising income revenue from them.²⁹ It seems the boundary between the real and the merely virtual is becoming ever more difficult to discern.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ www.secondlife.com accessed 19.04.2008

²⁹ ‘Online gamer Jon Jacobs recently spent \$100,000 in real-world money to buy a virtual space station. Is he nuts?’ by [Daniel Terdiman](#), Staff Writer, CNET News.com, published: November 29, 2005, 4:00 AM PST.

Realistically speaking, the phenomena *art* has always been completely invisible, inaudible, untouchable, and timeless. In other words art itself is always and in every way immaterial. Yet, art perfectly reflects and it shines or radiates (as all things that appear do). Furthermore, art itself is somewhat special in that it seems to naturally trigger responses that are beyond the merely physiological even though it is perfectly clear that art has never really existed as an object, or even resided inside any object, -not even inside our own sense organs. And, paradoxically least of all did art ever exist as an exterior event.

The French artist Marcel Duchamp claimed that art is always situated in the very gap, in the in-between.³⁰ Yet, art obviously exists, -especially if we let it.

In other words, when we look at physical things generally considered to be works of art we can clearly observe that they perfectly exist and function as actual containers for our ideas of art. We are, it seems, becoming more and more capable of discerning the difference between signs or symbols and that to which they are actually pointing or are standing in for (i.e. art works for art itself).

We now know that to see any thing as art is to know it as art. And this simply remains the greatest mystery.

³⁰ *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Edition Oxford University Press, New York, 1973.

Everyone is an artist

According to Duchamp, one of the expanded notions of immateriality is that art itself is located somewhere in the gap between perceiver and perception. To repeat, works of art are simply the containers or the 'stand-ins' for art itself. Art itself is something that happens internally through an arcing or bridging of the afore-mentioned gap. Thus art itself represents a specific dialogue between perception and perceiver, which is the same as saying between art and artist. Ergo perceiver equals artist because any art perceived actually represents a kind of unification (or equalization) of the perceiver and the artist. This clearly and logically results in: **Perceiver = Artist** (or "**Everyone is an Artist**" according to Joseph Beuys' most famous pronouncement [=his greatest work of art he claimed].)

Duchamp and Beuys clearly showed that the artist's intentions brought together with a perceiving audience are the key components in any process of art creation. Both Duchamp and Beuys acknowledged that the perceiver has always been integral and vital to the creation of any so-called work of art. Furthermore they also understood that the audience is not only vital for the production of art but also for its actual maintenance. In fact the so-called 'art reception' of contemporary audiences has been turned into clever self-promotion, even self-justification, by the 'art mafia'³¹ of public art administrators and curators since it is argued that the large numbers of viewers visiting public galleries and museums make art -come alive and persist.

³¹ For *art mafia* see: <http://blog.absolutearts.com/blogs/archives/00000196.html> accessed 01.02.2008

Dematerialization

The term ‘dematerialization’ was first popularized in the field of art when Lucy Lippard and John Chandler used it in their seminal text published in 1968, entitled ‘*The Dematerialization of Art*’.³² They proposed doing away with the art object itself by instead creating ‘ultra-conceptual’ art that would exclusively focus on the process of creation *per se*. They raised the question as to whether physical art objects would ultimately become entirely obsolete. Future art, they thought, might simply be ideas based and any incidental or resultant art objects would at best be appreciated as some kind of outer reflection of certain inner intentions and processes. For Lippard and Chandler art finally boiled down to being essentially a committed dialogue and interaction between artist and audience.

There was a clear shift towards intention and inner processes, personal decisions, ideas, mind projections, etc. resulting in new manifestations (including physical ones). However these kinds of ‘material’ manifestations might now also include a new attitude for example, or a more astute and raised level of awareness, as well as physical artifacts imbued with special purpose and powers, e.g. some ready-mades, or Joseph Beuys’ ‘fat and felt matters’.³³

³² Lippard, Lucy and Chandler, John *The Dematerialization of Art* (1968), in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999, p 46-50.

³³ Thomasson, Amie L. *Artifacts and Human Concepts*, in *Creations of the Mind: Essays on Artifacts and their Representation*, Laurence, Stephen and Margolis, Eric, ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007. “The role of human intentions in the creation of artifacts seems rather different from their role in creating social and institutional facts and objects. Unlike social and institutional objects, the existence of artifacts doesn’t seem to presuppose any *collective* intentions of any kind—it makes perfect sense to suppose that a solitary human could create a knife, though not a government or money. Thus artifacts don’t seem to be essentially *social*

Lippard and Chandler conceded that communication between artist and audience might still have to be facilitated symbolically using certain substances “imbued with special meaning”. In this regard the well-known blackboard works of Joseph Beuys beautifully exemplify his publicly stated aspirations for ‘direct conference’. One could well regard them as his materialized intentions since they appear to have been created through an interaction between Beuys and a particular audience at a specific time and place, and importantly with a specific aim in mind.

These mythologized blackboards are clearly empowered³⁴ to act as triggers to evoke further communication with other audiences throughout each new encounter. Personally experiencing an exhibition of these blackboards in the exhibition *Richtkrafte (Directive forces)*³⁵ seemed to me a clear demonstration of the power of the conscious intentions with which Beuys must have imbued these works.³⁶ Wolfgang Zumdick wrote in a catalogue essay for the National Gallery of Victoria’s exhibition of *Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner: imagination-inspiration-intuition* in 2007:

objects at all. On the other hand, it seems to be part of the very idea of an artifact that it must be the *product* of human intentions...”

³⁴ Thomasson, Amie L. *Artifacts and Human Concepts*, Creations of the Mind: Essays on Artifacts and their Representation, ed. Stephen Laurence and Eric Margolis, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. ‘... artifacts are the products of human intentions. ... Artifacts, in the strict sense, are not any products, but the *intended* products of human activities....Pollution and scrap metal are produced by human activities, but these are not so-called artifacts properly.’

³⁵ *Richtkräfte (Directive forces)*, an installation of 100 blackboards created during public discussions by Joseph Beuys, held at the Institute for Contemporary Art, London in 1974.

³⁶ *Joseph Beuys & Rudolf Steiner. Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition*. 26 October 2007 to 17 February 2008, NGV exhibition, Melbourne, Australia.

“With Joseph Beuys we see a conscious dramatization and ritual that appeals not so much to the audience’s attentive listening as to its active imagination and involvement. While for Rudolf Steiner blackboards were merely teaching aids, for Beuys they became tools and, as Shelly Sacks³⁷ puts it, ‘instruments of consciousness’. Beuys often spoke of an oscillation in the teacher/student relationship. For him, everyone was both teacher and student.

Beuys regarded the material developed in cooperation with the participants as the prerequisite for new discussions. Like the talks and discussions at *documenta5* in 1972 when the blackboards were created over several weeks. The result was akin to the construction of a kind of thought platform on which ever newer and higher levels of thinking and structuring could be attained.”³⁸

“When Joseph Beuys declared that “*Everyone is an artist*”³⁹, he did not mean that everyone should be a material painter or a sculptor, but that each of us is a conscious being contributing to the creation of the collective reality in every moment anew. It is precisely our knowledge of this expanded, active and creative consciousness that Joseph Beuys regarded as his field of ‘social sculpture.’ What he meant by the idea of ‘social sculpture’ was a more modulated view of reality, namely reality being a net of relations as it were, -one big workable ‘Social Sculpture’

³⁷ <http://www.social-sculpture.org/people/core-network1/shelley-sacks.htm> accessed 15.06.2008

³⁸ Dr. Wolfgang Zumdick in his essay *In us, or nowhere, is eternity*, in NGV catalogue for the exhibition of *Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner: imagination, inspiration, intuition*, Melbourne, 2007

³⁹ Beuys most famous maxim which he repeated in different contexts.

project. Joseph Beuys claimed that ‘every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions and structures of the thinking that shapes and conditions our lives.’⁴⁰

There are philosophical antecedents to Beuys’ insights. David Hume⁴¹ for example in his ‘*A Treatise of Human Nature*’ from 1739 famously remarked on the importance of process and the significance of what may be surmised as the essentially ‘fluid nature’ of the causal conjunction of motion and matter: namely intention and it’s resultant decisions affecting relationships in all directions.

Likewise, **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**⁴², a genius who lived during the seminally important German Romantic⁴³ period of the eighteenth century, believed that all beings and phenomena are closely interlinked and that all and everything influences and affects everything else -simultaneously.⁴⁴

This position was in stark contrast to the already ubiquitous Kantian Rationalism we still use today to interpret reality sequentially and in a strictly linear fashion using temporal as well as spacial compartmentalizing, first proposed and formalized by René Descartes (1596-1650) some 400 years ago.⁴⁵ Our still dualistic Cartesian world-view has created a habit that makes us rationalize and fragment everything into ever smaller ‘workable bits’ laid out along a time line.

⁴⁰ Sarah Lowndes, *Social Sculpture Art, Performance and Music in Glasgow*, StopStop Publications, Glasgow, 2004, ref. Adriani, Götz, Winfried Konnertz, and Karin Thomas: Joseph Beuys: Life and Works. Trans. Lech, Patricia, Barron’s Educational Series, Woodbury, 1979.

⁴¹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume/> accessed 12.02.2008

⁴² <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9108453/Johann-Wolfgang-von-Goethe> accessed 13.02.2008

⁴³ <http://www.iep.utm.edu/g/germidea.htm> accessed 14.02.2008

⁴⁴ Matussek, Peter *Goethe zur Einführung*, 2. Aufl. Junius, Hamburg, 2002.

⁴⁵ <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=1781> accessed 16.03.2008)

Goethe long ago lamented that this methodology of binary opposition starting with the separation schema of dividing body and mind, spirit and matter has the unfortunate side effect of creating permanent conflict everywhere. Goethe feared that such a view of reality would finally become stuck for a very long time in irreconcilable conflicts, due to the ingrained dualistic perceptual habits it fosters together with their self-perpetuating rational reality.⁴⁶ Goethe boldly declared that we actually did not have to fragment the world into ever-smaller bits in order to try and control it. He suggested that there are other ways, other ‘Weltanschauungen’,⁴⁷ as he described ‘philosophical views’ more precisely in German. He proposed that we might try a more holistic approach of using the concept of ‘the great unity’ or ‘great perfection’ rather than always rationalizing (fragmenting) ‘the many’ into ever-smaller fragments.⁴⁸

Appreciation of Goethe’s ideas formed the basis of a lot of the progressive thinking in the nineteenth century such as: organic rather than geometrical (Adam Smith), evolving rather than created (Darwin), intuition and sensibility rather than order imposing (music). According to Goethe his way of viewing reality culminated in a certain ‘quality of life’ wherein subject and object are dissolved (synthesized) in a poise of great equanimity.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Borchmeyer, Dieter *Goethe. Der Zeitbürger*, München / Wien. 1999.

⁴⁷ *Weltanschauungen* is a concept fundamental to German philosophy and epistemology and refers to a world wide perception. Additionally, it refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it. The German word is also translated as world outlook. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?va=weltanschauung> accessed 02.03.2005

⁴⁸ Hoffmeister, Gerhart *Goethe und die europäische Romantik*, Heyne, München 1984.

⁴⁹ Armstrong, John *LOVE, LIFE, GOETHE, How to be happy in an imperfect world*, Allen Lane, London, 2006.

Consequently Goethe never embraced any of the popular teleological or deterministic views of growth within organisms or systems. Instead, he believed the world to grow through continual, external, and internal change and in all directions and dimensions simultaneously.⁵⁰ He also did not embrace any of the mechanistic views completely subsuming contemporary science during his own lifetime. Goethe simply denied rationality's superiority by never believing in its widely accepted role as sole interpreter and determinator of reality. He believed, instead, that each of us should live in 'conscious union,' -in constant conference and communion with everyone and everything as much as possible. Goethe dreamt of us using, consciously and actively, our inherent "wondrous capacities" as well as our "capacities of wonder" to connect with everyone and everything.⁵¹ Goethe tried all his life to inspire us to consciously (re-)connect as much as possible with "all that is right here and now before us, - every moment anew".⁵²

Goethe believed that our many "wondrous capacities" also serve as proof that human beings "already know" as he put it. This assertion is borne out by the logic that if we can actually know something we therefore must already know it (and therefore might actually know everything). In short, our "already knowing," and his further idea of everything being complete and perfect might better explain how anything and everything is possible. Wow!

⁵⁰ Friedenthal, Richard *Goethe*, Piper-Verlag, München, 1963.

⁵¹ Armstrong, John *LOVE, LIFE, GOETHE How to be happy in an imperfect world* Allen Lane, London, 2006.

⁵² *Ibid.*

IMMATERIALITY as metaphor for Art

To return to Yves Klein, who more recently re-introduced the terminology of immateriality to the modern art world while all along creating substantial items such as his famous ‘Klein Blue’ objects, his black and white photograph of *Leap into the void*, and an empty gallery show. Klein’s conviction by his own admission had always been that any artwork functions merely as metaphor for the immaterial.⁵³ More recently in a review of the *Yves Klein Retrospective* in Paris in 2007, the art critic Samson Spanier⁵⁴ wrote:

‘Void’ or ‘immateriality’ are words that might describe a lack of existence. Yet, any work Klein made does exist, whether as a painting, a receipt, a sentence written on paper, or as a ‘performance’ of his body. Klein, in common with all of us, cannot apprehend the void. His work is nevertheless brilliant: a set of metaphors for the void.⁵⁵

In a step that prefigured the sale of virtual cyber properties, Klein sold ‘*Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Zones*’⁵⁶ for a specified weight of gold. The transaction itself changed the very nature of the ‘zones’ as they shifted from

⁵³ Stich, Sidra. *Yves Klein*. Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1994.

⁵⁴ London based Samson Spanier is assistant editor of the art magazine *Appollo*.

⁵⁵ Spanier, Samson ‘Blue-sky thinking: The paintings of Maurice Denis Yves Klein emerges as much more than a painter in a wide-ranging exhibition in Paris and Vienna’, review in *Apollo*, October 2007, London.

⁵⁶ <http://www.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-klein-EN/ENS-klein-EN.htm> accessed 04.04.2008 The most precise account of the ‘immaterial zones of pictorial sensibility’, and their most rigorous analysis, can be found in Denys Riout’s *Yves Klein: Manifestes l’immatériel* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004). (pp. 96–116).

being a concept to being a consumable commodity. Ownership of an invisible work thus functioned exactly “as mystery does,” Klein declared.⁵⁷ Some critics at the time argued that this “immaterial art” thus exchanged was ‘nothing other than Klein’s aura paid for’.⁵⁸ Yet, this is exactly what we are now prepared to spend our real shopping money on: ‘brands’. Klein helped us make the connection that art (as most things we encounter) is foremost a view and therefore by nature immaterial and that these “immaterial things” possess exchange value simply because we give it to them (see our expensive obsession with certain “labels”).

Global consumerism has become a valid way of life for many of us. Our global corporate system is, by its own necessity totally committed to finally consume itself. As a result of policies and programs of certain international bodies such as the US corporations controlled World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the World Economic Forum, G7, G20, and other large commercial interest groups together with their bias political ‘think-tanks’ and bought politicians, the twin culture of global corporatism/hyper-consumerism has effectively taken over the entire planet at the beginning of the twenty first century.⁵⁹ The world now seems compelled by some crazed totalizing economic doctrine sponsored by our transnational corporate rulers to pursue the ideal of infinite economic growth at any price. The problem with such an ideology is the necessity for the economy to grow faster forever which is obviously impossible. Hyper-consumerism can thus

⁵⁷ Riout, Denys *Yves Klein: Manifestes l'immatériel*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004.

⁵⁸ <http://www.uwo.ca/visarts/projects/kleinmystery/galleries/jen.htm> accessed 23.05.2008

⁵⁹ <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/0> accessed 23.05.2008

be compared to the pathology of our time - namely cancer - a growth that perpetuates itself until the entire system is consumed.

However, immateriality is not simply meant as an antidote to an ever-expanding consumerism (driven by global corporations and corporate governments) but it is something much greater. In short, it is a much broader and deeper concept than current ideas of anti-corporatism and anti-consumerism, even those implied by contemporary concepts surrounding sustainability and ecology. We need to keep remembering that immateriality is in no way a negation or a dismissal of matter, perceptions, or reality experiences, quite the opposite.

More recent conceptualizations of immateriality describe it as an extension and a fundamental rethinking of the way the multiplicity of matter is understood. Clearly an expanded awareness of immateriality impacts fundamentally on our own traditional consumerist /corporatist interpretations of life.⁶⁰

Contemporary interpretations of immateriality initially appear intended to describe fundamental conditions necessary for matter and materiality to function. Yet, the deeper meanings of today's immateriality go well beyond the reassessment of the materiality of objects, even beyond enquiring into the status of phenomena 'which may or may not exist'. Indeed the expanded ideas of immateriality are self-aware of serving as metaphor for the un-sayable as well as acknowledging the seemingly paradoxical luminosity aspect of lived experiences – pointing to a borderless, interconnected and interdependent nature of reality, that is to say: to the still somewhat radical idea of 'Interdependent Origination'.

⁶⁰ *Immateriality*, Irving Thalberg, in *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 92, No. 365, Jan.1983,p 105-113.

Immateriality and Art

A significant stream in contemporary art is always being made using concepts surrounding immateriality in one way or another. With these understandings in mind art can be regarded as the manifestation of certain levels of human awareness or art as representing human consciousness evolution per se. Read this way, art objects themselves are specific symbols of the immaterial process, - admiring art and ideas with such mindfulness could already be seen as immateriality.⁶¹

When thinking in the expanded terms of Joseph Beuys' "Social Sculpture" for example some art may never acquire any physical existence, not even that of silence, and some art works may never have actually 'happened' (i.e. myth).⁶²

I suggest that some pure abstract paintings for example can connect one to the numinous causing experiences of higher conscious awareness, which may well be their intended point. I suggest that these kinds of personal art experiences can also materialize an awareness of something that seems to have been there all along (known) as Goethe and others have pointed out.

⁶¹ Atkinson, Terry. *Letter to Lucy Lippard and John Chandler concerning their article "The Dematerialization of Art"*, reprinted in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* by Alexander Alberro, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. p.52-58

⁶² <http://theorynow.blogspot.com/2007/10/matter-of-immateriality.html> accessed 15.04.2008
'Lawrence Weiner had also proposed that the material properties of the art object were becoming obsolete. His "36" x 36" removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wall-board from a wall" was a witty reversal of the additive logic used in constructing an art object. His legendary Statements would determine the materiality of the artwork yet the work "need not be built" to become art. This seemingly dead-pan neutrality predicts an indeterminacy in art's "spatio-temporal specification" and yet further envisioned conceptual art as both "timeless and placeless." Like Sol Lewitt, Weiner would not require fabrication for the idea to become art but Weiner insisted that his ideas became "pieces" when he described them in words, i.e., when they became linguistically determinate.'

Semir Zeki⁶³ agrees that looking at some abstract images can elicit not only an aesthetic appreciation but that it simultaneously triggers an intellectual (multilayered) dialogue enhancing other modes of being.

In short at some point when doing or viewing abstract art a certain expanded awareness might arise wherein the viewer becomes conscious of an experience requiring a more instinctive, intuitive response to one's normal mode.

At that point, according to the founding father of phenomenology,⁶⁴ Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), what is occurring is the primary or foundational level of human experience. A secondary stage begins when we start to categorize and rationalize our experiences –conceptualizing our reality intellectually.⁶⁵

It seems the purpose of much early European art was primarily about the physicality of the art object itself which was regarded either as beautiful, special, or even ugly, functioning as either 'tasteful' or 'provocative' cultural materials - serving mainly as divertimentos or moralistic reminders for the cultural elites.

However, all through the ages, many great thinkers and artists including Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Antoni Tapies⁶⁶, and Marina Abramovic,⁶⁷ to mention but a few recent ones, have always considered art to firstly represent our human

⁶³ Zeki, Semir *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

⁶⁴ Husserl distinguishes between phenomenology as a science of pure consciousness and psychology as a science of empirical facts. For Husserl, the realm of pure consciousness is distinct from the realm of real experience. Husserl explains that phenomenology is a theory of pure phenomena, and that it is not a theory of actual experiences (or of actual facts or realities). <http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html> accessed 14.08.2007

⁶⁵ Haney, Kathleen *Phenomenology and the Challenge of History*, in *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, Volume XC, *Logos of Phenomenology and Phenomenology of the Logos*, Book Three, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, Springer, Dordrecht, 2006.

⁶⁶ www.fundaciotapies.org accessed 12.04. 2006

⁶⁷ <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/artist/abramovic+ulay/biography/> accessed 10.03.2008

state of mind on an evolutionary level, individually as well as collectively, beyond any personal desires or ideas of power etc.

In this way these artists and thinkers have always regarded any great work of art as the material effect of a greater awareness that is underlying everything. Put succinctly they propose that great works of art represent specific high water marks of possible levels of human consciousness achieved (realized) individually as well as culturally.

Materiality

Materiality in the context of contemporary art is synonymous with surface and texture. It currently describes the choice of materials used, transformed, substituted, invented, inverted, or recreated etc. However, materiality is also beginning to be conjoined with a heightened sensibility towards nature and environmental issues, as well as an affect-awareness concerning specific places and spaces, external as well as internal. Materiality then is a term that is ever more widely applied even though some major encyclopaedias curiously (or tellingly(?)) still define materiality as “the magnitude of an omission or misstatement of accounting data that misleads financial statement readers and practitioners of the art of accountancy”.⁶⁸

Fact is there are currently no easy definitions of the term material, substance, or physical matter which take into account both our contemporary knowledge of

⁶⁸ ‘Materiality’: as in *Roget's II: The New Thesaurus*, Third Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, London, 1995.

relativity and quantum physics and which at the same time satisfy most people's experience and common sense intuitions about the pain labeled 'the real world,' or maybe the bliss of 'the joy of life' however we may personally find the famously observed "light of things" as Wordsworth put it. The expanded conceptions pointed to by contemporary immateriality aims to increase our understanding of contemporary life and art and is intended to bring about a deeper appreciation of the natural world at large.

Immateriality -an expanded field of Art

Most communications, especially artistic expressions inevitably rely on modes of abstraction. After all, this pipe is not actually a pipe, even though I am describing a photograph of Magritte's painting of a pipe titled "This is not a Pipe"...

Most young children seem to start their artistic output using what appears to be a form of pure abstraction. Eventually most children grow up learning to favor representation over expression and when as adults we see certain abstract artworks we are often triggered to exclaim "it looks like my child could do that!" And maybe we are right. Yet, something does seem to be different when we apply non-objective abstract ways of seeing as adults. Why is that?

Visual abstraction can be a beautiful art practice and seems to be the expression of, amongst other things, expanded notions of immateriality. Using abstraction, especially 'pure' abstraction can open up the required space for new possibilities not easily available otherwise. To me representational works can best describe, explain, or 'show and tell' the conventionally known in a narrative manner,

communicating in a more rational and sometimes even didactic way. In contrast, most abstract art seems more open and appears to be operating on an entirely different level compared to many of the traditional representational images. The open content of abstract fine art seems to make one feel more respected as the viewer since it appears easier for an engaged individual viewer to see their own interpretations and their own world-views reflected back to them.

This self-reflexive clarity or luminosity of abstract art is ideally unimpeded by a lot of overt (representational) content that would otherwise occlude many possibilities of interpretation. Thus the potential freedom and openness of abstraction makes it an attractive form of art for people who would like to make or see art at a level where intention and motivation is a more self-conscious act and where viewer and doer are naturally more equal. Prescribed representational content is already inscribed all around us more and more - choosing to empty content in the name of individual liberty and true equality seems to be an intuitive counterbalance important for our greater wellbeing.

Self-conscious acts of intention as well as quiet self-reflection can lead to the use of a lot of white. John Cage once wrote about Robert Rauschenberg's notorious *White Paintings* at Black Mountain College⁶⁹: "Bill's *White Paintings* were

⁶⁹ In the summer of 1951 Robert Rauschenberg created his revolutionary *White Paintings* at Black Mountain College, near Asheville, North Carolina. At a time when Abstract Expressionism was ascendant in New York, Rauschenberg's uninflected all-white surfaces eliminated gesture and denied all possibility of narrative or external reference. In his radical reduction of content as well as in his conception of the works as a series of modular shaped geometric canvases, Rauschenberg can be seen as presaging Minimalism by a decade. The *White Paintings* shocked the artistic community at Black Mountain, and word of the "scandal" spread to the New York art world long before they were first exhibited at the Stable Gallery in October 1953. While generally misunderstood at the time, the works were highly

airports for the lights, shadows and particles." Rauschenberg was able to make nothing the subject of a painting in a way that Cage would later make nothing the subject in his famous 4'33'' piece of music.⁷⁰

When Cage first encountered Rauschenberg's bold move everything suddenly became valid and workable. Cage said: "Having made the empty canvases (a canvas is never empty), Rauschenberg became the giver of gifts."⁷¹

Earlier Kazimir Malevich wanted his own famous *White on White* (1918) paintings to create a sense of transcendence. For Malevich white was the color of infinity signifying most purely a realm of higher feelings and possibilities.⁷²

After all it is from white that the infinity of shades of the visible spectrum originate and it is also wherein all colors resolve as Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) proofed when he famously split white light with the help of a crystal prism into all the colors of the rainbow while in the same experiment he returned the self-produced rainbow back into white light with the help of a second prism

influential for Rauschenberg's frequent collaborator, the composer John Cage. Under the sway of the Buddhist aesthetics of Zen, Cage interpreted the blank surfaces as "landing strips" or receptors for light and shadow, and was inspired to pursue the corresponding notion of silence and ambient sound in music. His response, 4'33" (1952), consisted of the pianist sitting quietly at the piano without touching the keys for four minutes and thirty-three seconds so that incidental sounds in the surrounding environment—such as the wind in the trees outside or the whispering of audience members—determined the content of the piece.

http://guggenheim.org/exhibitions/singular_forms/highlights_1a.html accessed 12.04.08

⁷⁰ http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/cage_j.html accessed 25.06.2008

⁷¹ <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue8/erasuregenteel.htm> accessed 12.04.08.

⁷² For Malevich, that realm, a utopian world of pure form, was attainable only through nonobjective art. Indeed, he named his theory of art Suprematism to signify "the supremacy of pure feeling or perception in the pictorial arts"; and pure perception demanded that a picture's forms "have nothing in common with nature." Malevich imagined Suprematism as a universal language that would free viewers from the material world.

http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=80385 accessed 12.04.08

turned the other way. Newton showed that white light and the light of the rainbow could be thought of as one and the same.

Newton's experiment could serve as a symbolic demonstration of immateriality in the sense that 'unity' and 'multiplicity' are shown to be interdependent and simultaneously always existing as different aspects of one and the same phenomena, or put more radically: - that they always (and only) arise together.

Ours is a time where we are increasingly able to live with the realization that all meanings are neither fact nor forever as disconcerting as that may sound considering the ethical implications of such an assertion. A post-Cartesian reality⁷³ is presenting us with new kinds of freedoms and potentialities that might initially appear frightening, even unstable, -a groundless mad kind of new world when seen from the old perspectives. Yet, it will hopefully turn out to be our first

⁷³ Marsh, James L. *Post-Cartesian Meditations*, Fordham University, New York, 1988. p 96-99: "Phenomenology, though historically indebted to Cartesianism, is essentially oriented to overcoming it. Such overcoming has several dimensions or aspects. The first is the "triumph of ambiguity," a move away from meaning conceived as abstract, universal, clear, exact, and apodictic to meaning conceived as concrete, pluralistic, contextualistic, implicit, and tentative. There is a critical turn insofar as history reveals itself as contradictory, at odds with the incarnate, intelligent, free social subject. If phenomenology is to be fully descriptive, then it has to describe the particular historical experiences of alienation rooted in such structures as capitalism. If phenomenology is to be fully critical, it must reflect on the contradiction between its own affirmation of the incarnate, free subject and the practical negation of that subjectivity in industrial society. Only with explicit reflection on the relationship of phenomenology to alienating social structures such as capitalism does phenomenology become fully self-reflective. Phenomenology is dialectical insofar as it emerges from history as a result of a dialectic between objectivism and subjectivism. Insofar as Cartesianism defines modern philosophy in the narrow sense of a critical, transcendental turn into the knowing subject and in a broader sense giving rise to two different, opposed philosophies of subjectivism and objectivism, a division corresponding to the Cartesian separation of thinking and extended substances and the reduction of the objective world to a set of primary qualities known scientifically it is a reflection on the entire tradition of modern philosophy, Our new meditations are post-Cartesian insofar as they both retain Descartes' valid insights into subjectivity, critical radicality, and the values of full, self-conscious, autonomous living and knowing, and integrate these insights with new insights into the lived body, the life-world, the limits of science, language, intersubjectivity, freedom, and the personal and social unconscious."

decisive step away from organized religions and perpetual wars – becoming another decisive leap in human consciousness evolution.

The Point of Intention

In examining cause and effect the role of the ‘doer’, or better put the role of intention is most crucial. Thanks to highly sophisticated experiments using huge particle accelerators we have realized that a specific research question posed before any practical experiments are planned and scientifically worked out, greatly influences, even produces its’ own results. In other words, it is always our motivation or innermost intentions that make an action what it effectively becomes and not what it initially looks like or even ‘feels like’ to any perceiver. The subtleties and the implications of such a realization are staggering since it means that literally the flapping of a butterfly’s wings, could in real terms, be the cause of a hurricane. We might have always assumed that this sort of hyperbole was unbelievable and that ‘interdependence’ is an elegant concept but “why push it so and thereby lose the argument?” Amazingly, the idea holds if we incorporate the consideration of intention⁷⁴ into this well-known butterfly thought experiment. It clearly demonstrates that for any one of us to become more self-aware may well shift that single grain of sand that is changing the world.

⁷⁴ (Latin: *intentio*), in scholastic logic and psychology, a concept used to describe a mode of being or relation. In knowing, the mind is said to “intend” or “tend toward” its object, and a thing as known, or in the knowing mind, has “intentional being.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9042534/intention> accessed 20 May 2008.

Immateriality and other Ontologies

“Consciousness is structured through history.” Paul Celan⁷⁵

Ontology is the science of defining entities and their relationships to each other. It is a branch of philosophical research that asks the question: ‘What is really out there?’

In practice, an ontological commitment is an agreement to use a defined vocabulary (i.e. to ask or to make assertions) in a way that is consistent and useful - at least for practical human thinking and communication. In this, ontology is slightly different to epistemology⁷⁶ with which it is often confused. Concerning the age-old disparity between ‘the one and the many’, epistemology concerns itself mainly with the more detailed specifics of ‘the particular’ while ontology deals more generally with cataloguing ‘the many’ as much as possible. Roughly speaking, epistemology is ‘the science of knowledge’ and represents the scientific knowledge of particular objects and measurable events. Epistemology is therefore the more scientific end of the spectrum of meanings when seen from the wider ontological or philosophical perspective.⁷⁷ Naturally epistemology is part of the more general ontology.

⁷⁵ Wolosky, Shira *Language Mysticism*, Stanford University Press. Palo Alto, 1995.

⁷⁶ Epistemology: ‘The study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge. The term is derived from the Greek episteme (“knowledge”) and logos (“reason”), and accordingly the field is sometimes referred to as the theory of knowledge.’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed 20 May 2008. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9106052/epistemology> accessed 20.03.2007

⁷⁷ Ontology: ‘The theory or study of being as such; i.e., of the basic characteristics of all reality. Though the term was first coined in the 17th century, ontology is synonymous with metaphysics or “first philosophy” as defined by Aristotle in the 4th century BC.’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9057152/ontology> accessed 22.03.2007

The West's three main Ontologies

Historically there are three major constructions of ontology (systems of meanings) that are still forming our reality picture today. The Developed West continues to draw on historical (Aristotelian) *Realism*⁷⁸, (Kantian) *Conceptualism*⁷⁹, and more recently on several derivations of (Husserlian) *Descriptivism*⁸⁰ when defining (our view of) the world. These contemporary Western ways of seeing reality generally reflect the struggle to make sense of our specific historical and modern experiences here in the Developed World. It is important to remember that ontologies are always specific and thereby restrictive and discriminatory -especially when seen from the point of view of different believers (cultures) and especially non-human others.

Formal ontology, being a Western invention within rationalism, always attempts to split our (=human) reality into its many apparent component parts, fracturing perception and experience into ever smaller 'workable' categories, subcategories, and sets of 'this and that'.

In the process of perceiving, we thus habitually switch from 'the many' to 'the particular' in an attempt to understand and control the world around us. Our modern western ontology, then, resembles a list of specific entities that we can single out from the apparently infinite mass of appearances, phenomena, and sense impressions we continuously encounter. We use language to make these ontological lists, further revealing our individual and collective attitudes when

⁷⁸ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-categories/> accessed 12.03.2008

⁷⁹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/categories/> accessed 12.03.2008

⁸⁰ Ibid

ordering and dividing (“reality”) up so as to suit our own particular fears and desires. The diverse labels (language itself) that we use can only ever *represent*, or stand in for the infinite possibilities that are always present. However, not even a singled-out concept or specific meaning is ever stable or fixed. Everything seems in constant flux making our ‘selection’ thoroughly unreliable. Thus language itself can only ever be fluid requiring constant adjustments. The Romanian poet Paul Celan⁸¹ wrote about this fluidity in the following way:

“I write poetry in order to orient myself, ... to outline reality for myself. ... certainly it is never language itself, language as absolute, but rather always in terms of the specific angle of inclination of the existence of the speaking I, for its contours and its orientation. Reality does not exist, reality is to be sought and won.”⁸²

Any philosophical system of categories (ontology) is in fact nothing more than a list of the highest kinds of words or concepts (genera) that seem to work for us at a specific point in time and place. Traditionally, and following Aristotle, the system of categories undertaken in a ‘realist spirit’ for example would ideally provide a complete inventory of ‘everything that actually is’ at least as far as we are personally concerned.

Skepticism about the possibility of discerning ‘reality’ via the use of innumerable rational categories, has led some thinkers to approach category

⁸¹ <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/316> accessed 01.06.2008.

⁸² Wolosky, Shira *Language Mysticism*, Chaper 3, Stanford University Press.Palo Alto, 1995.

systems with a different aim to that of attempting to complete the list of all possible kinds of genera. Theirs is instead the fundamentally different aim of elucidating the actual reasons for the separate compartments we invent for ourselves.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant⁸³ (1724-1804) was one of the first to take this more conceptualist approach in the West by drawing out categories that for him were *a priori*⁸⁴ or *necessary* for our (human) cognition of any object. Kant's famous *a priori* categories (by which he meant our genetically inherited human thought and perception patterns) are guaranteed to apply to any possible object of cognition. However, by Kant's own admission, their application is limited to only the perception of phenomena and somewhat disregards the realist's notions of 'the very things themselves'. In the ancient realistic mode we prefer to think of objects as entirely independent and separate from us and we do not regard them as merely our own interpretations of our own projections.

Kant was the first to assert that our sense impressions and personal experiences of external objects are always based upon *a priori* knowledge. "The external world", he wrote, "provides those things that we sense. It is our mind, though, that processes the information about the world and gives it a certain order, allowing us to comprehend it for ourselves."⁸⁵ Kant saw our mental perception as supplying the conditions of space and time in order to enable our conscious experience of objects thus perceived. According to Kant's 'transcendental unity

⁸³ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-mind/> accessed 23.05.2008

⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781], trans. Norman Kemp Smith, St. Martins, New York, 1965.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

of apperception' -the capacity of the mind to grasp concepts (rational understandings) and our propensity for intuitions (conscious feelings)- is perfectly synthesized as 'human awareness'. In short, without mental concepts, our intuitions remain nondescript; without intuitions or feelings, our concepts are meaningless. Kant's most famous quote on this interrelatedness creating our awareness says: "Intuitions without concepts are blind; concepts without intuitions are empty."⁸⁶

After Kant, the project of categories was further developed by the philosophical idea of 'Categorial Descriptivism', a term coined by Brian Carr⁸⁷ as recently as 1987. Carr argued that the intention of Descriptivism is to better describe the categorial structure that the world appears to have *according to our* own thoughts and language use (-the 'our' here still refers, as Brian Carr points out to mean: exclusively human, mostly white, mainly Western, definitely middle class, conventionally middle aged, and almost automatically male⁸⁸). It was the well-known philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)⁸⁹ who initially started the idea of descriptive ontology by laying out the categories of *meanings used* to choose the ontological categories of *possible objects meant* (without empirical concern as to whether these entities actually existed independently or not).

The Aristotelian, Kantian, and Husserlian systems of ontological categories continue to have a great many uses in our philosophy as well as our empirical

⁸⁶ quoting Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781], trans. Norman Kemp Smith, St. Martins, Cambridge, MA, 1965. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-metaphysics/> accessed 23.04.2008

⁸⁷ Carr, Brian *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, 1987.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/> accessed 15.05.2008

sciences today, yet, every one of them faces a variety of difficulties. In fact, to continue to be useful any system must be clear about its own reasons and methods when used to distinguishing one category from another. For example, any ontology needs to firstly establish whether or not there is a single *summum genus* subsuming all other categories, as in the traditional hierarchical system of Aristotle, or whether there should be multiple dimensions of categories, as in the more recent Husserlian typology.

Skepticism as to whether it is actually possible to make a single complete list of ontological categories⁹⁰ has caused the discussion to shift from attempts to offer complete systems to simply drawing more and more distinctions within already existing major linguistic categories. Unfortunately, work on category difference, unlike work on fresh new ordering systems, does not generally purport to answer the deep metaphysical question whether things really-, or ‘merely’ perceptually exist in this world.

Aristotle's approach to categories is in the spirit of what Brian Carr has called ‘Categorial Realism’⁹¹. This approach conceives of the world as a system of categories resembling a list of the highest possible genera. What is implied by this approach is that a complete list of categories would offer a systematic inventory and a complete conceptual overview of ‘all that is’. As such a categorial realist regards her work as no less than the central task of metaphysics,

⁹⁰ Thomasson, Amie L. *Categories*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/categories>. accessed 23.04.2008

⁹¹ Ibid.

that is, 'to provide a single overarching system of categories.'⁹² Such a system would provide us with the basis for all definitions and distinctions by firstly specifying the most general category (genus) and then by ever further categorizing the difference of one thing from another inside the same genus via referring to species and subspecies and so on. This kind of approach was most famously accomplished in the field of biology by the botanist, physician, and zoologist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) in his seminal tome *Systema Naturae*.⁹³ It represents the classical realist's approach that has endured to the present.

Kantian Conceptualism

The shift from merely reacting to reality towards a much greater philosophical self-determination came about when a more conceptual and self-conscious mode of awareness was widely initiated by the celebrated publication of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. Kant famously denied that we could ever have access to the 'very thing itself' let alone to possible intrinsic divisions that might or might not lie somewhere behind appearances. However, he strongly believed that we can know the categories that govern our own perceptions.

Kant argued that certain given or *a priori* categories form the very foundation for

⁹² Grossmann, Reinhardt *The Categorical Structure of the World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN., 1983.

⁹³ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evolution/> accessed 29.04.2008 (Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish doctor of medicine published the *Systema Naturae* in the year 1735. Its full title is *Systema naturae per regna tria naturae, secundum classes, ordines, genera, species, cum characteribus, differentiis, synonymis, locis* or translated: "System of nature through the three kingdoms of nature, according to classes, orders, genera and species, with [generic] characters, [specific] differences, synonyms, places".)

general human perceptions and that they in fact make possible the cognition of phenomena outside of us. In other words, for Kant *a priori* categories are what actually create ‘the reality’ we experience via the body. The theorist H. J. Paton⁹⁴ elucidated Kant’s insightful ontology in this way:

We can have *a priori* knowledge by means of the categories, only because those categories are due to the human mind itself and are imposed by the mind on the objects it thus knows.⁹⁵

For Kant any empirical judgment which purports to refer to actual objects rather than merely to subjective intuitions or connections of sense impressions (phenomena), and which further purports to be universally valid for all judging subjects alike, is endowed with its objectivity and generality only by virtue of *a priori* concepts already inhabiting the minds of all those who are judging.⁹⁶

It is clear that for Kant all categories always find their original source in *a priori* principles of human perception and not in any intrinsic divisions existent ‘out there’ in some mind-independent reality.⁹⁷ Kant’s categories thus are not discoverable through scientific studies of the physical world, not even through the study of linguistics, which Kant referred to as the ‘study of our contingent

⁹⁴ H. J. Paton was the author of several important books (see below), he has also produced definitive translations of Kant into English.

⁹⁵ Paton, H.J. *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948.

⁹⁶ Paton, H.J. *Kant's Metaphysic Of Experience: A commentary on the First Half of the Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, Macmillan, New York, 1936.

⁹⁷ *Lectures on Metaphysics/Immanuel Kant*, ed. and tr. by Karl Ameriks and Steven Naragon Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

manners of speaking'.⁹⁸ They are discoverable primarily by paying attention to and becoming aware of possible forms of personal and human judgments.⁹⁹ Kant's approach has been adopted and extended by many of the more recent philosophers including Edmund Husserl.¹⁰⁰

Husserlian Descriptivism

Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) approach extended the study of ontology in the West after Kant. While Aristotle had used language as a clue to ontological categories, Kant identified given or primary (*a priori*) human concepts as the route to his 'objects of possible cognition'.¹⁰¹ Husserl, for his part, distinguished yet more subtly between *meanings* and *objects meant* in a deliberate attempt to reunite, or at least draw out correlations between different categories. His enterprise was not another seemingly endless and arbitrary splitting of categories into ever more sub-categories - a process Husserl regarded as spurious.¹⁰²

Husserl distinguished *meanings* by which we can think *about* different kinds of objects - from categories of *objects meant*.¹⁰³ The latter term refers to the highest characteristics that entities appear to have and which we automatically take as given rather than as 'thought of' or as 'mind created' by the perceiver.

⁹⁸ Tyler Burge, *Philosophy of Language and Mind: 1950–1990*, Philosophical Review, Vol.101, 1992.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jansen, Paul *Emund Husserl: Einführung in seiner Phänomenologie* Karl Alber Verlag. München, 1976.

¹⁰¹ Ameriks, Karl *Kant's Theory of Mind*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, Ed. 1999, (org. 1982).

¹⁰² Thomasson Amie L. *First-Person Knowledge in Phenomenology*, in *Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind*, ed. David W. Smith and Amie L. Thomasson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Husserl clearly stated that for him the study of categories is always already an *a priori* or given matter. That is, the various categories of meanings and their objects always “arise simultaneously” in relation to our varying thought-functions. Their ‘concrete’ basis is solely to be found in our very act of thinking [them]”.¹⁰⁴ Thus Husserl’s ontological categories are only *descriptive* categories and do not purport to provide a reliable inventory of any thing that might *actually* exist as a matter of ‘empirical fact’.¹⁰⁵

More recently Roman W. Ingarden (1893-1970)¹⁰⁶ took Husserl’s multi-dimensional ontology a step further by distinguishing categories not only formally and materially but also in a third dimension, namely in an existential category that describes an entity’s ‘own’ *mode* of being. This way Ingarden’s highest existential categories or ‘modes of being’ include for example: the ‘real’ (spatio-temporal being), the ‘ideal’ (abstract being), the ‘absolute’ (completely independent, atemporal being), even the ‘purely intentional’ (consciousness-dependent arising being) etc. Since any conceivable entity should be locatable in one category of each of his main divisions, Ingarden’s approach provides multiple ways of considering each entity under analysis. To give an example, a particular sculpture could be categorized *formally* as an object, *materially* as a

¹⁰⁴ Husserl conceives of phenomenology as prior to empirical psychology, since it is concerned with analyzing and describing the ‘intentional essences’ of experiences of presentation, perception, judgment, imagination, etc., and thus with clarifying the essences or types of mental states that empirical psychologists must assume in their observations and experimentation. From Husserl Edmond *Logical Investigations*, loc. cit., Volume II, Investigation VI, Introduction, p183.

¹⁰⁵ Thomasson, Amie L. *Introduction to Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind*, ed. David W. Smith and Amie L. Thomasson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ingarden/> accessed 23.05.2008

work of art, and *existentially* as pure intention etc.¹⁰⁷

The fact that there are numerous possible ways of classifying reality suggests we may not ever know reality itself completely. Even when applying the most rigorous spirit of categorical description most thinkers seem at best only capable of offering a growing catalogue of different ways of ‘seeing and being’. As recently as 1994, Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz¹⁰⁸ laid out yet another old-fashioned tree-form system of categories, with *entity* as the *summum genus*, subdividing into *abstract* and *concrete*, rather than Chisholm's¹⁰⁹ *contingent* and *necessary* for example. Naturally they all fracture ad infinitum.

The proliferation of ever more sub-categories renders any ontological system almost useless in practical terms. Provided the famous ‘Law of the excluded middle’¹¹⁰ is maintained (see below), an endless supply of mutually exclusive and exhaustive so-called ‘proper classifications’ can be convincingly generated at will. For example, things can be divided into the spatio-temporally located and the non-spatio-temporally located, the intentional and the non-intentional, the extended and the non-extended etc., to name but a few of the more recent approaches to separating things out.

Philosophers have always selected particular borderlines as *their* fundamental category difference. For René Descartes, for example, it was between the body

¹⁰⁷ Thomasson, Amie L. *Roman Ingarden*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ingarden> accessed 13.04.2007

¹⁰⁸ Hoffman, Joshua/ Rosenkrantz, Gary *Substance among other categories*, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, 1994.

¹⁰⁹ Chisholm, Roderick M. *A Realistic Theory of Categories* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

¹¹⁰ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-noncontradiction/> accessed 24.03.2008

and the mind, which in strict philosophical terms is similar to saying the extended and the un-extended.

The reason for doubt about the probable existence of an independent 'ur'-set of categories comes from the fact that categories are supposed to be the most inclusive genera under which things can possibly be described. However, as we can see any given entity always sub-divides further and further in a great variety of ways even if we are careful about mutual exclusivity and exhaustiveness. Ensuring that these last two properties are in place is necessary in order to keep on the right side of the aforementioned 'Rule of the excluded middle'. This law of logic is based on Aristotle's ancient assertion that "...it will not be possible to be and not to be the same thing simultaneously".¹¹¹ The ancient Latin designation for this law is *tertium non datur*: "there is no third 'possibility'". Modern quantum physics has since destabilized Aristotle's ancient logic because of contrary discoveries using huge particle accelerators that have proven that the same thing can appear in different and unpredictable locations simultaneously.¹¹²

The variety of category systems explicitly offered by a multitude of thinkers and scientists may be most interesting as evidence of their particular personal presuppositions, including those of their particular time and place. They may not, however, provide any evidence about anything to do with 'the world as it is from

¹¹¹ In the *Metaphysics*, Book IV, Section 4, Aristotle presents the law of the excluded middle. In modern terms, the law of the excluded middle can be expressed by the truth table for (p and not-p), which is false in all cases (a contradiction).

¹¹² Jammer, Max *Concepts of Simultaneity: From Antiquity to Einstein and Beyond*. xii + 308 pp. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. And: http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au/einsteinlight/jw/module4_time_dilation.htm accessed 23.04.2008

its own side'. For example, Stephan Körner's¹¹³ discussion of categorial frameworks was designed to make explicit the way in which a particular thinker's framework of categorizing objects of perception is a reflection and a practical demonstration of their personal reasons for holding that particular view.¹¹⁴

In a similar vein, in 1998 R. G. Collingwood declared the task of metaphysics to be merely the uncovering of 'certain presuppositions underlying ordinary science in each particular age and place'.¹¹⁵

The contemporary multidimensional systems approach acknowledges that different dimensions of categorization are possible, and that no one-dimensional list can possibly claim any completeness. In principle, today's multi-dimensionalists may even accept that there is no fixed number or any limit on how many categories can be generated. This is in complete contradiction to conventional list makers, who proposed that their lists provide the correct categorization of the entities thus considered. Such lists appear useful for communication or conventional scientific research but only for the time being.¹¹⁶

To repeat, instead of seeing immateriality simply as part of the old binary system opposing materiality, perception, and experience the discussions of immateriality

¹¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephan_K%C3%B6rner for best overview and links, accessed 25.05.2008

¹¹⁴ Koerner, Stephan *Categorial Frameworks*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1970, p95.

¹¹⁵ Collingwood, R. G. *Principles of History and Other Writings in the Philosophy of History*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999.

¹¹⁶ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/categories/> accessed 14.02.2008

represent instead an extension and a fundamental rethinking of the multiplicity of matter and our reality experiences.

In short, the expanded views of immateriality go well beyond concerns to do with the materiality of a thing, event, or memory. As mentioned earlier, any so called ‘pure and simple matter’¹¹⁷ can no longer be seen as: “an independent entity existing outside of the multidimensional causal net of relations”.

The Ancients

It has long been acknowledged by philosophers in the West, from Plato and Socrates, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Deleuze et al that we need to differentiate between things *as they appear* (to our human understanding, i.e. ‘appearances’ as treated in the field of empirical sciences), and things *as they really are* (which is very much in question). The latter uncertain category includes all phenomena including god(s), the soul or spirit, the mind, human perceptions, intentions, language, and so on.

St. Thomas Aquinas and beyond

Writing in the thirteenth century St. Thomas of Aquina (1225-1274)¹¹⁸ articulated his famous (ontological) distinction in the work entitled *In Libros De*

¹¹⁷ Colin McGinn (born 1950) has written that we are ‘entitled—or perhaps driven—to the conclusion that the self should be conceived as a simple mental substance’. However he agrees with his critics argument that any notion of a ‘simple substance’ does not appear to have a clear common-sense connection with materialism. In *The Character of Mind*, Oxford,1992, p122.

¹¹⁸ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/#A1> accessed 11.05.2007

Anima Expositio ('Commentary on *De Anima*'), which addressed the seminal text by Aristotle¹¹⁹(384 BC – 322 BC) *De Anima* ('On the Soul')¹²⁰:

“Living beings have a twofold existence. One obviously which is material, in which they are like other material things; but also another which is immaterial, in which they have a certain sharing with non-material, i.e., spiritual, things. There is a real difference between these two kinds of existence: for by material existence, which is restricted or limited by matter, any given thing is itself alone -- as this rock is nothing other than this rock; whereas by immaterial existence, which is fuller, and in a certain manner infinite (unlimited inasmuch as it is not terminated by matter, a thing is not only that which it is, but other things as well.) ... Among animate beings moreover there are two grades in this immaterial existence. For one level is immaterial simply speaking, as in intellectual experiences; whereas at the sensible level experiences are intermediate between material and intelligible existence (since in sensation a thing has existence without matter, but not without the individuating conditions resulting from matter, nor without the cooperation of a bodily organ). And it is in

¹¹⁹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/> 12.05.2007 (The notion of soul used by Aristotle is only distantly related to the usual modern conception. He holds that the soul is the form, or essence of any living thing; that it is not a distinct substance from the body that it is in; that it is the possession of soul (of a specific kind) that makes an organism an organism at all, and thus that the notion of a body without a soul, or of a soul in the wrong kind of body, is simply unintelligible.)

¹²⁰ http://www.reipublicae.org/wiki/index.php?title=On_the_Soul_%28writing%29 accessed 27.05.2008 *De Anima* is Latin for *On the Soul* is a major treatise by Aristotle, outlining his philosophical views on the nature of living things.

reference to these two grades of immateriality that Aristotle says that the soul is in a certain way all things at once.”¹²¹

The original Aristotelian and Thomistic definitions of the term immateriality are currently expanded by relating them to aspects of ancient Indian Vedic and Buddhist conceptions known as *sunyata* in ancient Sanskrit. The idea of *sunyata* attained wider popularity firstly in India with the development of Mahayana Buddhism in the early centuries of the Common Era. In summary *Sunyata* describes the emptiness or immateriality of all compounded things - including concepts, imputed labels, -even the act of labeling itself now or later. Conceptually speaking *sunyata* appears to extend the initial Western Aristotelian-Thomistic usage of immateriality by not only including the non-physical categories but also through consciously including all and any existent phenomena that might be thought of, including the very act of thinking as well as through an expanded time awareness that includes the past, the present, and the future etc. The somewhat crude sounding term ‘labeling’ is intended to include any perceived feelings, sounds, signs or marks. In short, through the concept of *sunyata* all perceptions are understood as reflections of the perceiving mind including images, expressions, memories, and symbols etc.¹²² Thus *Sunyata* had already long ago declared that our fixations are that which materialize and that

¹²¹ St. Thomas Aquinas’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima* [On the Soul] as *In Libros De Anima Expositio*, c. 1268.

¹²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labeling_theory best site for overview and links accessed 23.03.2008 (As an application of phenomenology, the theory of labeling hypothesizes that the labels applied to individuals influence their behavior, particularly the application of negative or stigmatizing labels (such as "criminal" or "felon") promote deviant behavior, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, i.e. an individual who is labeled has little choice but to conform to the essential meaning of that judgment.)

all concepts including perception and perceiver always arise together -that everything is interdependent.

Our use of the term immateriality in the contemporary West functions as a philosophical concept because it attempts to deal with reality in a much more general way rather than trying to explain it as certain, fixed, or even independently real.

It is my contention that the quality of this new immateriality precedes any process of labeling or categorizing. Immateriality is already present before we are conscious of any perceptions or conceived ideas of ‘this or that’. According to Buddhist commentaries concerning the most famous text in the Mahayana Buddhist canon, the *Heart Sutra*¹²³ (see below), the idea of emptiness or immateriality attempts to describe the very nature of phenomena. In other words, this celebrated Buddhist text outrageously proclaims that it is approaching the actual conditions necessary for reality to appear and to function as it does:

“-Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way feeling, perception, formation and consciousness are all empty. Therefore, Shariputra, all phenomena are empty, without characteristics. They are unborn and unceasing; they are neither impure nor free from impurity. They neither decrease nor increase.

¹²³ <http://www.heartsutra.org/> accessed 21.05.2007

*Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; there is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no appearance, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no perception. There are none of these all the way up to the sphere of mental consciousness. There is no ignorance; nor is there destruction of ignorance... there are none of these all the way up to there is no old age and death; nor is there destruction of old age and death. Thus there is no suffering, no cessation and no cause of suffering and no path. There is no wisdom, no attainment and no non-attainment.*¹²⁴

¹²⁴ McLeod, Ken, translator, Website: *Unfettered Mind, Pragmatic Buddhism*. Translation taken from <http://www.unfetteredmind.com/translations/heart.php>, accessed 27.04.2008. Excerpt is from the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* summary known as *Hrdaya Sutra* or *Heart Sutra*, supposedly taught by the Buddha on Vultures Peak, India, ca. 2500 years ago. The oldest known manuscript can be dated to 400 C.E and is Kumarajiva's Chinese translation of Sanskrit. See <http://www.purifymind.com/OnHeart.htm> accessed 02.03.2008 For the complete text see Attachment 2.

Immateriality in Relation to Abstract Art

A Compressed Review of Relevant Visual Abstract Art

Visual signs and colors are powerful because of the primacy we must have been giving to the visual sense for thousands of generations. In general we have developed into a highly visual species with large parts of our complex brain -not to speak of the miracle that is the human eye: highly evolved, adapted and ready from infancy to absorb and process visual imagery. Specific areas in the human brain that are even larger than those processing language comprehension facilitate our visual capacities.¹²⁵ Because of these facilities we receive information more readily, almost instinctively via visual stimuli rather than via verbal or written language, which are functioning more on the conceptual perception levels (slower).¹²⁶ The knowledge of the power of certain imagery combined with music is an accepted and much applied wisdom in the advertising and media industries.

The field of pure abstract painting naturally has its own specialized language, and - to extend the metaphor - various dialects (genres) that best communicate emotions, intellectual perceptions, intuitions, and states beyond logos etc.

Philosophically speaking the two dimensional visual arts, as is the case with all the arts and culture generally, may exist and persist because they help to heal. Visual art inspires us by facilitating experiences that may not be described or

¹²⁵ Hubel, David *Eye, Brain, and Vision*, Scientific American Library, Washington, 1988.

¹²⁶ Livingston, Margaret *Vision and art: the biology of seeing*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., N. Y., 2002.

conjured up quickly or directly through verbal language. Colors, certain marks or markings, many sounds, including singing and instrumental music, or symbolic acts like dancing, meditative rituals and prayers, as well as certain poetry (i.e. Haiku) and so forth might at times communicate, heal and inspire more effectively than mundane words spoken or written. Especially non-didactic art forms appear to connect more directly by either cutting through, or simply by going around rationality in order to create or recreate a more direct sensory and intellectual (re)connection. In short, music and abstract art can more easily than many other kinds of communications inspire an *anagogic*¹²⁷ response – a reaction that transcends our rationally habituated thinking minds.¹²⁸

It is generally acknowledged that art and culture can help give meaning to life. Some art seems to self-consciously react as an antidote to the human experience of meaninglessness. The arts more than any other expression can help in recapturing feelings and experiences we once had and would like to have again. The arts can help us to share feelings and experiences more effectively with others and helps us make sense of our own situation. All the while this kind of communication process of recreation, repetition, and sharing creates entirely new relational connections –often accidentally. Thus over time ever more complex combination clusters of meanings are produced which in turn produce (evolve, create) brand new concepts and entirely original perceptions (=creative,

¹²⁷ Anagogy: *anagoge*, from Late Greek, spiritual uplift, from *anagein*, to lift up : *ana-*, *ana-* + *agein*, to lead; see *ag-* in Indo-European roots. In psychology, deriving from, pertaining to, or reflecting the moral or idealistic striving of the unconscious: anagogic image; anagogic interpretation. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/anagogic> accessed 12. 03.08

¹²⁸ Solso, Robert *Cognition and the Visual Arts*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996.

generative) -resulting in different and sometimes entirely new realizations up to and including material actualizations (=new physical entities, realities). Evolution sciences call this process: “accidental mutation through sequence repetition”.

The arts seen in this evolutionary way must obviously serve to deepen our life-world by helping us to continuously expand our minds and by creating better understandings and through deepening our feelings of connectedness. We are in fact more and more appreciating that the arts contribute to new realizations which in turn can materially affect physical reality. It could well be argued that the arts may be one of the major contributors in the production of new states of being -new realities. Indeed, it appears that once we have reached beyond the various survival stages in our development - both individually and as a species - the arts appear the most productive generators of progress and evolution. In time art’s journey must reach ever more important and essential levels of involvement where new and expanded notions of art will assist us in further understandings of the deeply immaterial aspect of creativity -even of life *per se*.

Art, like us, seems amazingly capable of constant transformation, - it appears able to self-renew on each new plateau reached.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ V.S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein *The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience*, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 6, No. 6-7, 1999. p. 15–51. As a starting point for the attempt to discover universals in art based on our knowledge of neuroscience, and visual neuroscience in particular, V.S. Ramachandran has proposed ten principles of art: 1. Peak shift, 2. Perceptual Grouping and Binding, 3. Contrast, 4. Isolation, 5. Perceptual problem solving, 6. Symmetry, 7. Abhorrence of coincidence/generic viewpoint, 8. Repetition, rhythm and orderliness, 9. Balance, 10. Metaphor.

Immateriality and post-Cartesian possibilities

I agree with Jacob Lillemose¹³⁰ in his aforementioned essay when he argued that immateriality is more than just another descriptive notion, or a broad formal diagnosis of art produced in the age of digitization. For him immateriality constitutes and contributes something bigger to the discourse of contemporary art as the new immateriality understanding appears to be able to generate new kinds of aesthetic enquiries and deeper ethical realizations.¹³¹ Immaterialities' expanded concepts thus make entirely new perspectives possible by way of expanding simultaneously our vision of the physical and the non-physical in a more non-dual approach -beyond time and space.¹³² The new ways of seeing arrived at in this way might help the ushering in of new post-Cartesian possibilities urgently needed in order to keep abreast of rapid developments in the bio-sciences and new nano-technologies with their enormous ethical implications especially in regards to their as yet unborn and unknown future progeny.

¹³⁰ <http://www.artnode.org/intra/people/index.html> accessed 29.03.2008

¹³¹ Lillemose, Jacob *Immateriality*, talk given at *Argos festival*, October 16, 2005.

¹³² <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-545504/simultaneity> accessed 23.03.2008

Origins of Abstraction in Art

Abstract art is not an invention of the twentieth century as widely believed, nor did the industrialized West first discover it. Current communication sciences have established that in order to communicate or express anything abstraction is necessary. In fact, we have come to realize that even so-called representational images are always an illusion in some way and that humans of every age and culture have always consciously used some form of abstraction in order to communicate, particularly when communicating using art.¹³³ Our human capacity for abstract thinking is an evolutionary facility that finds creative expression in our ability to communicate concepts as well as appreciate abstraction aesthetically.¹³⁴ However, in reviewing culturally specific abstract visual art the obvious examples are from cultures influenced by strict doctrines of iconoclasm. In Islam and some orthodox Jewish traditions for example believers were always prohibited from depicting human beings in their images. Especially Islamic societies have therefore developed a high standard of decorative arts as well as sophisticated forms of calligraphic writing. Non-figurative arts became their main avenues for artistic expressions. These practices took place well before the idea of abstract art began to emerge in the industrialized West.

Abstract art as a term and concept only became a proper category within the developed Western cultural sphere at the beginning of the twentieth century. The

¹³³ Basch, M. F. *Psychoanalysis and Communication Science in Annual of Psychoanalysis*, Vol.4, p.385-421, 1976.

¹³⁴ Ramachandran, V.S. and Hirstein, William *The Science of Art: A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience*, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 6, No.6-7.p.15–51.

movement that helped to establish the perceptual conditions necessary for ‘Abstract Art’ to exist started around the end of the nineteenth century when landscapes were reinterpreted in a way that was more idealized or allegorical than realistic by the old standardized terms of representational Realism. Eventually this divergence blossomed into the famous artistic movement known as Impressionism.

Impressionism

Impressionism officially took birth at the end of the nineteenth century when the visual arts were connecting with the newly emerging philosophical tenets of scientific Rationalism. Despite the weight of this scientific ‘Naturalism’ - or maybe because of it - the climate and circumstances produced a number of painters who tried to research the very nature of light as well as human visual perception in a more detached scientific manner. Early photography, for example, both challenged the long held creed of painters to be ever more ‘true to nature’ while at the same time it encouraged visual artists to exploit aspects of the painting medium that photography still lacked: in particular color. A divergence away from trying to paint ever better ‘photograph-like’ paintings first appeared in the work of a group of younger artists who, from 1874 to 1886, exhibited independently from the conservative establishment institution that was the Paris Salon.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Salon best site for overview and links accessed 12.06.2008 (The Salon beginning in 1725 was the official art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. Especially between 1748–1890 it was arguably one of the greatest annual or biannual art events in the world.)

The leaders of this counter movement were Claude Monet, August Renoir, Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, and Mary Cassatt. They became known the world over as the Impressionists because a contemporary newspaper critic, Louis Leroy,¹³⁶ derided their paintings as mere sketches or impressions. The Impressionists however always considered their canvases to be finished works of art.

When painting, Claude Monet would sometimes come back to the same spot at different times of the day or season to paint the same scene again and again. In 1892, for example, Monet rented a room opposite the Cathedral of Rouen and continuously painted one canvas after the other of exactly the same view. Still, he never copied himself because the light and colors continuously changed. Thus each variation was actually a different painting since it was, and self-consciously so, a purely subjective record of an individual's experience of light perceived at specific points along a certain timeline. In reference to this way of working Monet eventually became acknowledged as 'the painter of light'.¹³⁷

Realism¹³⁸ as the Impressionists chose to understand it meant for them that a painter ought to record the subtlest sensations of reflected light he or she perceived at a certain moment. This inversion of the traditional interpretation of what Realism stood for made them the original rebels and essentially ushered in the age of modern art. By trying to capture specific kinds of light effects on a person's psyche and by viewing reality as a personal collection of singular,

¹³⁶ Leroy's review was printed in *Le Charivari* on 25 April 1874 with the title *The Exhibition of the Impressionists*. The term was taken from Claude Monet's 1872 painting 'Impression: soleil levant' (*Impression, Sunrise*). <http://www.britannica.com/eb/topic-106540/Le-Charivari> 12.03.08

¹³⁷ Stuckey, Charles F. *Monet: A Retrospective*. New York: Park Lane, 1985, p 271.

¹³⁸ www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/realism/ accessed 12.03.2007

fleeting moments in a much larger flow of time the Impressionists re-emphasized the notion of individualism in Western art. Monet could thus also be described as ‘the painter of time’, or more precisely as ‘the painter of subjective moments experienced consciously by a wider and therefore more inclusive self-awareness’. Impressionist painters like Monet and Renoir¹³⁹ attempted to record imminent conscious sense impressions of light by recording them with a quick touch of paint in a little stroke-like comma right as it is happening -almost simultaneously.

In Monet’s days, the public was upset that the Impressionist’s paintings looked comparatively sketch-like and did not appear to possess the same ‘polished and finished look’ of the traditional paintings.¹⁴⁰ However the application of paint in tiny strokes allowed Monet, Renoir, and others to record light and color sensations more directly. More importantly, as each individual color was kept unmixed the resulting effect is of a higher intensity of hue requiring a greater involvement of the viewer in the reception process creating the actual overall effect of the work. Here for the first time the viewer's mind was not only allowed but required to blend the colors through their own inner processes of perception. By achieving brighter colors, and by consciously acknowledging the viewer’s active participation, these paintings better approximated an experience of the scintillation of natural light.

¹³⁹ <http://www.renoir.org.yu/biography.asp> accessed 12.03.2007

¹⁴⁰ Louis Leroy's article in *Le Charivari* from 25th April 1874 took the form of a dialogue between two skeptical viewers of the work: “Impression I was certain of it. I was just telling myself that, since I was impressed, there had to be some impression in it — and what freedom, what ease of workmanship! A preliminary drawing for a wallpaper pattern is more finished than this seascape.”

In short, the painting's effect comes closer to 'being there' -hence the Impressionist's rebellious claim of producing a 'better Realism'.

This 'improved Realism', as the Impressionists would boldly claim also lay in their depiction of personal and subjective sensations unheard of in traditional or academical renderings. More radical still, for the Impressionists it no longer mattered whether any so-called 'objectivity of the thing itself' actually existed or not. The concern for representing anything in particular faded, while an emphasis on representing subjective experiences as accurately as possible grew. Thus, the focus on subjectivity intensified as artists became more concerned with expressing individuality through depicting our own individual visions of reality. A new paradigm started to emerge whereby reality was regarded as that which the individual saw, or more accurately how those psychological sensations made him or her feel. The era of Individualism¹⁴¹ - even in fine art appreciation - had well and truly arrived since with Impressionism, the meaning of Realism was transformed into the new concept of subjective Realism,¹⁴² ultimately giving birth to the big Subjectivity of modern art.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/methodological-individualism/> accessed 23.05.2008 (This doctrine was introduced as a methodological precept for the social sciences by Max Weber, most importantly in the first chapter of *Economy and Society* (1968 [1922])). It amounts to the claim that social phenomena must be explained by showing how they result from individual actions, which in turn must be explained through reference to the intentional states that motivate the individual actors.-)

¹⁴² "Subjective realism may be at its most complex in *Death of a Salesman* (1949) by Arthur Miller," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, Bigsby, C. E. W., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006.

¹⁴³ Buser, Thomas, *Experiencing Art Around Us*, Thomson Learning, London, 1995.

From Attitudinal Shift to Pictorial Shift

Abstraction's tectonic shift in perception had already started when German Romanticism¹⁴⁴ first put forward ideas that radically differed from those of Classicism's¹⁴⁵ long lasting emphasis on imitation and idealization of ancient Greece which had been started during the Roman Empire lasting well into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. German Romanticism was the very first to break with this meta-conservatism by (re)-emphasizing the role of the individual and by asserting the importance of his or her particular experience and imaginations. However, by some unfortunate extreme human-centered hubris, the quality of expression of an individual's imaginations was also seen in passionate opposition to nature. This misguided dichotomy sadly turned into an extremist version of the age-old binary view of 'light vs. dark,' or 'good vs. evil'.

Individualism defined through such a grand, passionate opposition provided the seedbed for some dangerous excesses to occur in the history of Germany and eventually the entire world. German Romanticism eventually refracted all of life through this 'god-like' struggle until everything became perversely observed on an extreme symbolic level as if operating in a Wagnerian opera (and no longer realistically or even rationally). This human chauvinism reduced the natural world to being merely the representation of our unconscious. Nature itself was

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.iep.utm.edu/g/germidea.htm> accessed 21.02.2008 (In the philosophy, art, and culture of German-speaking countries, German Romanticism was the dominant movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In contrast to the seriousness of English Romanticism, the German variety is notable for valuing humor and wit as well as beauty.)

¹⁴⁵ <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=68> accessed 03.12.2007 "Classicism", in the arts, refers generally to a high regard for classical antiquity, as setting standards for taste which the classicists seeks to emulate.

declared to symbolize ‘the other’, which in a Wagnerian twist was nothing but ‘the shadow’ of one’s ego as well as that of the super-Id.¹⁴⁶

Once again the already ancient ‘*über*’-myth of ‘man versus nature’ still provided some of the essential creative drivers of German Romanticism. In a move away from this age-old dead end narrative some painters started to claim entirely new territories at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. They were interested in a new kind of freedom and started to acknowledge and accept responsibility for curbing their own individual perceptual hubris. They started to understand that their total anthropocentrism¹⁴⁷ was nothing but a colonizing force of the ‘selbtsüchtige Romantik’ (‘Self-addicted Romanticism’). They knew of the newly discovered realizations in psychology (Freud, Jung, etc), which clearly demonstrated that all manner of selfish attitudes eventually lead to repression, alienation, and result in a depressive self-imprisonment.¹⁴⁸

Most major art movements of the first two decades of the twentieth century, especially Fauvism and Cubism, emphasized the gap that had started to open up between art perception and appearances. The view of the subjective human

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.lava.net/~pagios/shadow.html> accessed 23.04.2008 (In Jungian psychology, the shadow or "shadow aspect" is part of the unconscious mind consisting of repressed weaknesses, shortcomings, and instincts etc.)

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.kheper.net/topics/worldviews/anthropocentrism.html> accessed 23.04.2008 (Homocentrism is the attribution of Human qualities to non-human beings or phenomena, such as God or nature for example.)

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.wilderdom.com/self/> accessed 23.06.2008 (The very notion of selfhood is an attacked idea because it is seen as necessary for the mechanisms of advanced capitalism to function. In *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*, Nikolas Rose (1998) proposes that psychology is now employed as a technology that allows humans to buy into an invented and arguably false sense of self. Rose sees that current notions of freedom assist economic rationalist governments and general commercial exploitation via mass marketing.)

individual began to be seen in conflict with the more objective, scientific-industrial 'real world' perspective that had started to displace the old romantic primal relationship of man versus nature with a new kind of rationality labeled 'common sense'. The study of nature now turned entirely scientific while in the visual arts the abstracting of appearances eventually turned into pure abstraction. In other words the arts and sciences parted ways.

Pre war self-centered philosophical romantic notions were replaced with post war modern kinds of utilitarian and rational-economic values that unfortunately have revealed themselves as still being deeply homocentric, unashamedly egoistical, and purely opportunistic.

Abstracting versus Pure Abstraction

In an essay written in 2007, Rose-Carol Washton Long¹⁴⁹ made the following comments about the Guggenheim collection:

“The term “non-objective” is a very free and misleading translation of the German word *gegenstandslos*. Although “without objects” or “objectless” might be a more accurate translation, “non-objective” has been used in the U.S. as a synonym for abstract art since its introduction and popularization by the German artist and curator Hilla Rebay. Rebay came to the States in 1927 to help the industrialist Solomon R. Guggenheim assemble a group of primarily abstract works, including paintings by Vasily Kandinsky, Robert Delaunay, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. She became the first director of his “Museum of Non-Objective Painting”, as the Guggenheim was called from 1939 to 1952. Hilla Rebay used the term “non-objective” in the first catalogue of the collection, which she prepared for a traveling exhibition in 1936. In this catalogue and in others that followed, Rebay attempted to divide abstract painting in general and Kandinsky’s paintings in particular into their evolutionary developmental stages which according to her moved from partly abstract - “objective abstraction”, to fully abstract - “non-objective”.”¹⁵⁰

Kandinsky and other pioneering abstract painters such as Piet Mondrian¹⁵¹ did

¹⁴⁹ Rose-Carol Washton Long is Professor of Art History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her books include: *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*.

¹⁵⁰ http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/concept_Non_Objective.html accessed 22.03.2008

¹⁵¹ <http://www.pietmondrian.net/> accessed 18.05.2008

not like the schematization or the translation of *gegenstandslos* into the English ‘non-objective’. They felt it implied, even evoked, the negative connotation of exactly the kind of romantic ‘subjectivity versus nature’ idea they were trying to get away from. In Kandinsky’s correspondence with Rebay from the 1930s, he agreed that for some paintings, such as *Black Lines* of 1913, he had not utilized concrete objects to arrive at the particularly imagery, but nevertheless he indicated his dislike for her schematic quantifications. Kandinsky himself had used the German term *gegenstandslos* in earlier essays such as in his autobiography published in 1913. There he had used it in order to describe his goal of *obscuring* specific, material objects and recognizable phenomena in his paintings. Later Kandinsky more often relied on the word *abstrakt* to indicate the deeper direction and motivations his work had taken. In an essay of 1935 he eventually criticized the tone of both *gegenstandslos* and ‘non-objective’ explaining that in both the ‘non-’ and the ‘-los’ were devoid of positive meanings for him.

By the time the famous Frank Lloyd Wright building that now houses the Guggenheim collection opened in 1959, the name ‘Museum of Non-Objective Painting’ tellingly changed to that of its main financial sponsor. In the ensuing years, even the usage of ‘non-objective’, with its convoluted classification of different types of abstraction, steadily fell out of favor.¹⁵²

¹⁵² http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/concept_Non_Objective.html accessed 01.03.2008)

Artists like Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich¹⁵³ and Robert Delaunay¹⁵⁴ had first turned to producing pure abstract art during the four or five years preceding World War I. Over a period of several years Kandinsky's paintings for example had moved gradually away from figurative subjects. Finally in 1910 he consciously produced a watercolor deliberately not using any reference to so-called objective reality. Two years later in his influential book, *On the Spiritual in Art*,¹⁵⁵ he promoted pure abstraction as a new way for making art.

In his influential book, Kandinsky valued pure abstraction as the most effective stylistic means by which to reveal hidden aspects of the empirical world, while simultaneously staying true to our own subjective realities. Kandinsky further claimed that because of this facility abstract art, like music could best aspire to the metaphysical. Simply stated Kandinsky believed that music and abstract art offered some of the best possibilities available for being truly regenerative and healing for humanity and the world at large.¹⁵⁶

It is important to note that Kandinsky claimed he always wanted (motivation, intent=cause) the evocative power of carefully chosen and dynamically interrelated colours as well as those of any shapes or lines he may use to elicit a specific response (=result) from the viewer of his images, namely "deep psychological healing".¹⁵⁷ He believed that the intentions, motivations, and inner

¹⁵³ http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_bio_94.html accessed 24.04.2007

¹⁵⁴ http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_bio_39.html accessed 24.04.2007

¹⁵⁵ Kandinsky, Wassily, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. originally published in 1911, Sadler, M.T.H. transl., originally published in English 1914 as *The Art of Spiritual Harmony*.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Henry, Michel *Seeing the invisible* orig. *Voir l'invisible. Sur Kandinsky*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1988. "Kandinsky calls abstract the content that painting must

visions of an artist could best be translated into a universally accessible communication using pure abstraction.¹⁵⁸ Together with music Kandinsky thought of abstract visual art as one of the most true and effective human means of expression and communication. He was convinced that visual abstract art could circumvent the limitations of verbal languages and in this be almost equivalent to the power of music. Kandinsky believed that because of the inner motivations of the artist there existed a hidden pictorial construction or meaning that could “emerge unnoticed from the picture and [would thus be] less suited to the eye than the soul.”¹⁵⁹

Wassily Kandinsky

Born in Moscow in 1866, Kandinsky had spent his early childhood in Odessa. His parents played the piano and the zither and he himself learned the piano and cello at an early age. The influence of music in Kandinsky’s paintings is evident in the names of many of his works such as *Improvisations*, *Impressions*, and *Compositions*, etc. In 1886 he enrolled at the University of Moscow and studied law and economics. After passing his examinations he lectured at the Moscow Faculty of Law where he enjoyed success not only as a teacher but where he also

express, that is to say this invisible life that we are. In such a way that the Kandinskian equation can be written in as follows : Interior = interiority = invisible = life = pathos = abstract.”

¹⁵⁸ http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_work_md_71_17.html accessed 03.10.2007

Nancy Spector: ‘By 1913 Kandinsky’s aesthetic theories and aspirations were well developed. He valued painterly abstraction as the most effective stylistic means through which to reveal hidden aspects of the empirical world, express subjective realities, aspire to the metaphysical, and offer a regenerative vision of the future. Kandinsky wanted the evocative power of carefully chosen and dynamically interrelated colors, shapes, and lines to elicit specific responses from viewers of his canvases. The inner vision of an artist, he believed, could thereby be translated into a universally accessible statement.’

¹⁵⁹ <http://myweb.dal.ca/agirling/writing.html> accessed 20.05.2007: Kandinsky wrote several essays after the publication of *Sounds*. The first was called *Painting as Pure Art* in 1913, then *Reminiscences* which was a reflection on the theory behind three of his paintings, in 1913. The three paintings were *Composition IV*, *Composition VI* and *Picture with the White Edge*.

wrote extensively on spirituality, a subject that remained of great interest and eventually caused him, as he himself admitted, to become a public artist.

In 1896, Kandinsky attended his first French Impressionist exhibition in Moscow where he saw Monet's *Haystacks at Giverny*.¹⁶⁰ He stated, "It was from the catalogue I learned that this was a haystack. I was upset to not have recognized it. I also thought the painter had no right to paint in such an imprecise fashion. Dimly I was aware too that the object did not really appear in the picture..."¹⁶¹ Soon thereafter, at the age of thirty having decided to become an exhibiting artist, Kandinsky left Moscow and went to Munich to study life drawing, sketching and anatomy regarded as basic requirements of a visual arts education.

Ironically, Kandinsky's work eventually moved in a direction that was of much greater abstraction than that pioneered by the Impressionists. He wrote of his own abstract painting method: "I applied streaks and blobs of colors onto the canvas with a palette knife and I made them sing with all the intensity I could".¹⁶² Kandinsky soon became an active participant in several of the most controversial and influential art movements of the twentieth century, among them the *Bauhaus*,¹⁶³ which included Paul Klee¹⁶⁴ and Arnold Schönberg¹⁶⁵ the composer and in 1911 he founded the *Blaue Reiter*¹⁶⁶ along with Franz Marc¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.renoirinc.com/biography/artists/monet.htm> accessed 29.02.2008

¹⁶¹ Wassily Kandinsky. *Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art*. Da Capo Press, Cambridge, Ma., 1994.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ <http://www.cs.umb.edu/~alilley/bauhaus.html> accessed 07.10.2007

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/K/klee.html> 17.06.2008

¹⁶⁵ http://www.schoenberg.at/default_e.htm accessed 14.05.2007

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=86> accessed 23.05.2008

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/M/marc.html> accessed 20.05.2008

and August Macke.¹⁶⁸

The *Blaue Reiter* succeeded the first well-known German Expressionist movement, *Die Brücke*,¹⁶⁹ which dissolved in 1913. The *Blaue Reiter* was to become the high point of German Expressionism¹⁷⁰ and with its stand for free experimentation and its striving for true originality it helped open the way to pure abstraction. The group had a highly sensitive view of nature and it celebrated the art of children and that of other, more primitive, cultures. *Die Brücke* however had no precisely described artistic program or doctrine other than being interested in a new connectedness with everything, especially nature. *Die Brücke's* Franz Marc (1880-1916) and August Macke (1887-1914) chose to express their feelings with emphatic colors and a symbology drawn from the natural world. Both were killed in World War I.

Neither Marc nor Macke ever became true abstract painters in their short lives. It was Kandinsky who would finally follow an 'interior necessity' pushing him to leave behind the representational image. By the time the *Blaue Reiter* was established, he was already 'abstrakting' as he chose to call what he was doing. Seeing a painting of his own, lying on its side, he was struck by its beauty, a beauty way beyond that he could see when he set it upright. It was precisely the liberated colors and its formal independence that inspired in Kandinsky an entirely new level of conscious awareness. It was, as he put it, 'something to do

¹⁶⁸ <http://www.augustmacke.com/> accessed 20.05.2008

¹⁶⁹ http://the-artists.org/movement/die_Brucke.html 27.04.2008

¹⁷⁰ <http://virtualology.com/hallofartmovements/germanexpressionism.org/> 25.04.2008

with the very nature of reality - a whole new dimension of seeing'.¹⁷¹ Kandinsky, determined yet sensitive, was a good prophet to receive this vision. He preached it by word and by deed, and even those who were suspicious of his self proclaimed conceptual leap were frequently convinced by the strong effect of his powerful canvases.¹⁷²

Abstraction after Kandinsky

Initially - and for some time to come - even the most progressive early twentieth century artists regarded the complete abandonment of any degree of representation with disfavor. However, with the emergence of *de Stijl*¹⁷³ group in the Netherlands and the *Dada*¹⁷⁴ group in Zürich during World War I, the spectrum of abstract art finally started to widen.

During and in between World War I and World War II, contemporary art movements unfortunately had to deal with totalitarian politics and as a result there was a renewed emphasis on representational imagery. Forms of socially critical Realism¹⁷⁵ and to a certain degree also Surrealism¹⁷⁶ flourished while Abstraction hibernated. World War II and Hitler's condemnation of modern culture and art as well as his persecution of Jewish believers and any of their descendents led to the emigration of many European avant-garde artists to the United States, mainly to New York. The result was an enormous impact on the

¹⁷¹ Thurleman, Felix *Kandinsky uber Kandinsky, der Kunstler als Interpret eigener Werke* Author of Review: Maurice Rummens, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 130, No. 1027, Oct., 1988, p. 781.

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ <http://char.txa.cornell.edu/art/decart/destijl/decstijl.htm> accessed 22.03.2008

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/> 12.05.2008

¹⁷⁵ <http://www.germanculture.com.ua/library/weekly/aa072599.htm> accessed 28.03.2007

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

contemporary American art scene rapidly leading to the birth of American Abstract Expressionism.¹⁷⁷ This mainly visual art movement was centered mostly in New York where its best-known proponents were Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko. Other well-known labels used in connection with American Abstract Expressionist Art were The New York School, or Action Painting.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/abex/hd_abex.htm accessed 28.03.2007

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Abstract Art since Duchamp and Pollock

When the American abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock¹⁷⁹ died in 1956 his prime champion, the art critic Clement Greenberg,¹⁸⁰ hailed him as the legitimate inheritor of the great tradition of European abstract art. Kirk Varnedoe, in his famous A. W. Mellon Lectures¹⁸¹ in 2003 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., suggested that maybe the more accurate analogy would be that Jackson Pollock carried the torch of innovations lit by Picasso and others before him when he boldly eliminated deep perspectival space. Pollock did this in his trade mark ‘all-over’ compositions and Greenberg proposed that Pollock had advanced the line of abstraction’s logical progression toward its supposedly ‘destined goal’ which Greenberg thought was to express the essential visual qualities of painting itself without any extraneous literary content (i.e. painting about painting). This was an argument also used by Gaston Bachelard¹⁸² in his famous treatise *The Poetics of Space*, originally published as *La poetique de l’espace* in 1958.¹⁸³

Kirk Varnedoe¹⁸⁴ however proposed that in addition to Greenberg’s idea of Pollock’s drip paintings extending the European avant-garde tradition these works also displayed some entirely new aspects that had so far not been part of

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.cartage.org.lb/en/themes/biographies/mainbiographies/p/pollock/pollock.htm> accessed 28.04.2008

¹⁸⁰ http://rowan.edu/open/philosop/clowney/Aesthetics/philos_artists_onart/greenberg.htm accessed 02.05.2008

¹⁸¹ <http://www.nga.gov/programs/abstracts/varnedoe/varnedoevideo.shtml> accessed 14.05.2008

¹⁸² http://www.philosphere.com/article80.html?&MMN_position=67:67 accessed 14.05.2008

¹⁸³ Bachelard, Gaston *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas, Orion Press, New York, 1964.

¹⁸⁴ Varnedoe, Kirk *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2005.

the history of Western art. He made the point that for the first time these radical new paintings had made their production process the only knowable visible subject. For the first time in Western art history emerged the realization that these canvases - which were universally acknowledged as fine art paintings, as great paintings even - were actually nothing other than the containers for, or simply the 'book keeping records of' particular experiences and certain creative developments gone through. In other words a creative process had produced them as a kind of leftover or residue. Put another way, the art object itself could now be understood as a mere effect of, or the only visible result of some creative process -hinting at the emergence of a new kind of realization and manifestation of awareness picked up on especially by the New Age movement later on. This new awareness horizon recognized artworks; even the concept of art itself as being mere symbols - in the context of art history this still represents an enormous achievement.

Pollock's works then tell of a certain event that took place at some specific moment in time – intended and intuited by a certain individual for a certain purpose. We the audience, are now able to somewhat recreate his journey for ourselves if we are open to it. In other words, we feel the works are a kind of testament of a certain level of conscious awareness achieved. One feels and knows that they were created by expressive actions producing marks that seem to have happened almost spontaneously and somewhat miraculously, spiritually even. Still today we can sense that Pollock must have been using a higher kind of mindfulness fueled by a deep conviction, powerful intentions, combined with

great courage not only to listen but also to act on deeply intuitive hunches.¹⁸⁵

Pollock's pouring and dripping of paint onto huge canvases laid out on the floor of his Long Island studio allowed for a forceful expression of something seemingly numinous and primordial in the way that Pollock was able to make the paint fall and settle in meaningful spatters, drips and layers across the entire surface and often without any bias it seems. His free form simply dissolved traditional categories such as 'the artist's hand', or old ideas about drawing skills etc. There simply was no more direct mark making, nor was there the art of coloring in any conventional sense. His drip paintings radically broke with the traditional language of picture making by completely disregarding such holy grails as composition, perspective, figure and ground. Most courageously, they disregarded the illusion of three-dimensional space - the *summum genus* of all pictorial conventions until then in Western art. These parameters had long been the very standard by which a picture might qualify as fine art for the public who always seems to faithfully and somewhat automatically follow so called 'learned conventions' or 'art critical trends'.¹⁸⁶

Our collective habit of art viewing seems to exist in a self-perpetuating circle where we the public appear to be leading and following all at the same time. This situation comes about because we are willing to be guided and influenced by magazines and other media, which in turn follow the galleries we frequent (to

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.askphilosophers.org/question/1533> accessed 18.06.2008 (Intuition has many related meanings, usually connected to the meaning "ability to sense or know immediately without reasoning".)

¹⁸⁶ Varndoe, Kirk *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2005.

look there at pictures we see in the magazines, papers, and books...). Pollock's new images represented a break in this self-perpetuating circuit, a revolution in the history of art, especially Western art, yet they still belong to a long tradition and in turn they too gave birth to their own offspring along certain connectable lines of thought and actions. For after all there had already been German Romanticism, the Impressionists, the Fauvists, the Expressionists, the Cubists, the Surrealists, the Dadaists, and many others - but most importantly there had already been Marcel Duchamp before these paintings ever came into existence.

Marcel Duchamp

The work of Marcel Duchamp¹⁸⁷ (1887-1968) seems to have provided the intellectual revolution necessary for the revolution of Action Painting to follow. Marcel Duchamp clearly appears to be the one who first broke open and created the vital space required to liberate Western perceptions and art making from certain atrophying patterns and self-limiting viewing habits. It was Duchamp who realized and made possible the idea of Conceptual Art and who by extension made it possible for someone like an abstract drip painter to suddenly become world famous, even critically acclaimed. In fact, Duchamp's conceptual and intellectual revolution opened the way for all artists generally to embrace, use, and mix any method or media. For a visual artist there should be no separation between photography, advertising imagery, 'ready-mades', pop art, video, installation, etc., all the way to contemporary computer art and

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.marcel Duchamp.org/> accessed 18.04.2008

holographic animation as well as ephemeral nature art a la Andy Goldsworthy, or the mythological (art) walks of Richard Long, etc. The innovations of Warhol and many others may not have happened had it not been for Duchamp's intellectual prowess and his actual claiming of the 'territories beyond' by planting his notorious 'R. Mutt' flag beyond the known horizons.¹⁸⁸

Marcel Duchamp thus symbolizes the true turning point between the meta-circles of the old and the new in Western art consciousness and global art history. He has become, as Kirk Varnedoe argued, the point between the end of Modernism and the inauguration of our multi-faceted Post Modern world. In Varnedoe's opinion, the work of Duchamp establishes the dividing line separating an earlier age of art history that spanned the period from before the Renaissance all the way to Henri Matisse and Picasso. In short, the entire history seemed to shift thanks to Duchamp's immense contribution.

Abstraction after Pollock

The generation of painters that came after Jackson Pollock in the 1960s practiced a new kind of hard-edged abstraction that emerged in sharp reaction to the loose, gestural marks of American Abstract Expressionism. Their new attitude of Minimalism was so drastically reductive that it appeared utterly nihilistic. "Yet within the dead certainties that it seemed to propose lurked many an ambiguity and contradiction" claimed Kirk Varnedoe. The important point being, as he

¹⁸⁸ Varnedoe, Kirk *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2005.

argued in his book *Pictures of Nothing*¹⁸⁹ that the seemingly opposite strains of art practice and philosophy always overlap and blend in all directions. According to Vanedoe, it is this creative alchemy of blending and overlapping that causes the reactions and actual emergences of new artistic languages. He strongly argues that any achievements in the way of fresh perceptual visions or conceptual understandings are always the result of unexpected hybrids and unlikely relationships.¹⁹⁰

According to Vanedoe, Minimalism changed around 1968 with new works by artists like Eva Hesse and Richard Serra. These artists started to rebel against the strict and seemingly cold and unconnected geometry of Minimalism. In the case of Eva Hesse's cube piece, *Accession II* (1967), with its rubber tubing entering the inside of a galvanized steel cube represented a new kind of organicism – an attitude that brought with it entirely different psychological and social ramifications, particularly in regards to body awareness and women's politics.¹⁹¹

Later, much of the 1980s were dominated by a highly politicized critique of abstract art - the inevitable counter-revolution so to speak. The dismissive interpretation of abstraction as mere design has always been the lowest common denominator in the critique of abstract art. Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Claus Oldenburg and others pointed out that exactly the same designs and patterns that appealed to us in some well-known abstract imagery can also be found anywhere including on crass, man-made objects. Their critique of

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

abstraction helped make it a much more commonplace phenomenon opening up the opportunity for a new generation of abstract painters to emerge for which abstraction was no longer the final destination of their artistic strivings but simply another station along the way. Thus, for the current generation of artists abstraction has become an artistic option to be used as merely one more strategy. Famous practitioners include Gerhard Richter, Julian Schnabel, Cy Twombly, Sigmar Polke, and many others.¹⁹²

Abstraction has by now become simply another creative medium and communication tool of choice where even video works are now being made using abstraction as their creative driver. Yet in spite of, or maybe because of the use of abstraction in many digital forms, including contemporary music and film current public regard for purely abstract paintings seems to be in limbo, even in eclipse, as Kirk Vanedoe lamented in his celebrated lectures on the subject.¹⁹³ He asked his audience to examine popular questions like: What's the use of these 'pictures of nothing'? Isn't abstract art just decoration? -What could abstract art possibly be good for?

Vanedoe acknowledged that for many people abstract pictures seem to show nothing but themselves. He argued against this all too common perception because he believes that there would have to be some reason for abstraction. He thinks we might eventually discover an underlying logic, or at least a 'logic of the time', to borrow an idea from the art historian E. H. Gombrich. In fact

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid, *A. W. Mellon Lectures*, Washington D.C., 2003. The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts have been delivered annually since 1952 at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Vanedoe wanted his Mellon lectures to be as ground breaking and enlightening for abstract art as Gombrich's 1956 Mellon lectures had been for representational pictures when Gombrich famously posed the question: "Why does art have a history?"¹⁹⁴

In his landmark exploration, Gombrich sought an explanation through the evolutionary succession theory of different styles of artistic expression throughout certain epochs and in different regions of the planet. For Vanedoe, however, this enquiry commenced from a basis that had questionable pre-judgments and uncertain foundations. These, Vanedoe argued, included the assumption that the elements of the natural world have always looked the same because our human vision and general perception have always functioned as they appear to presently. Yet, Gombrich wondered why ancient Egyptians, medieval Italian monks, and Bavarian baroque ceiling painters all depicted the world differently from each other. As a solution he proposed in his lectures that the '*Zeitgeist*' progresses cumulatively - although not always in a linear pattern or in straight lines - through successive ages and societies. As proof for his argument Gombrich used the example of the entire Western art history where he could trace a halting but ultimately rational line of progress all the way toward an achievement of credible Illusionism'.¹⁹⁵

Gombrich's celebrated Illusionism was the feat of getting the viewer to conjure from painted marks on a flat surface a convincing perception of such things as

¹⁹⁴ In 1956 Ernst Gombrich delivered the *Mellon Lectures* in Washington, DC, called "*Art and Illusion*", appearing in book form in 1960 as *Art and Illusion*, Princeton Books, Princeton, 1960.

¹⁹⁵ Vanedoe, Kirk *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2005.

seamlessly receding space and three-dimensional volumes etc.

However, this Illusionism, Gombrich realized, was not just ‘out there’ for us to observe and to simply copy but instead it is the result of a persistently enquiring and striving mind over many generations of hard working and courageous artist creators.¹⁹⁶ Varnedoe argued that for Gombrich, illusionistic visual representation was a willed and hard-fought achievement of human culture and that it was the result of a cumulative dialogue between invented conceptual schemas and their continuous corrections and improvements in regards to function, new realizations, as well as perpetually changing aesthetics and social ethics. He viewed it as a dialogue that was worthy of being regarded, like science, as a unique virtue of the Western tradition of research and progress - stretching from what Gombrich called the Greek miracle, through Dürer and the Italian Renaissance up to Constable’s landscapes and beyond.

Varnedoe declared that, from an historical perspective, one might call the art of the twentieth century the lee shore on which the “MS Gombrich” finally foundered. The demise of his cherished Illusionism was the triumph of new conceptual and abstract forms of art. Varnedoe, unlike Gombrich, does not believe in the reflection of history argument and wondered, “Whether there are any hard reasons why abstract art had to be?”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Ibid

¹⁹⁷ Varnedoe, Kirk *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2005.

Despite the widespread presence of a somewhat confused and nebulous understanding, abstract art is clearly a valid art form that has been officially part of our culture for almost a century. Importantly in all this time it has proved itself not to be the big hoax that some skeptics had warned it would turn out to be. Instead, it has often been at the very centre of cultural debate and for many people it is still a self-renewing, vital and affecting tradition. According to Kirk Varnedoe, rather than destroying representation, abstract art steadily expanded the possibilities of art generally, causing important human developments. Indeed abstract art has added new words and phrases not only to the language of art and art making but also to our day-to-day reality experiences through its remarkable system of productive reduction as well as expansion - constantly expanding our potential for new forms of perception, expression, and communication.

Abstract visual art works, especially pure abstract paintings, can still be a good mind trigger and seem to retain a huge potential to raise sensible awareness to new levels through opening up conscious relationships within new forms of multidimensionality. In short, thanks to abstract art our day-to-day interactions are enlivened and energized by newfound conceptual possibilities that implicitly acknowledge the immaterial nature of things and events -our so-called 'real world'.

Popular language now amazingly includes terms such as emptiness and immateriality. The presence of these concepts alone fosters new ways of thinking that make plausible entirely different experience dimensions. Merleau-Ponty¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/merleau-ponty/> accessed 20.05.2008

(1908-1961) in line with many other famous thinkers argued, that with each new concept and each new word widely used, new organs of perception and whole new (physical) realities are created. Again, fresh terms and conceptualizations enable and lead to entirely new physical manifestations proofing the power of abstract ideas and their mysterious creative forces. New concepts and ideas are no longer reducible or classifiable as mere mental fiction lacking causality and eventual embodiment. Thanks to work done in perception research,¹⁹⁹ we now know that it is no longer a question of whether the chicken or the egg came first. In answer to the question of how to understand the process of causation, Merleau-Ponty famously declared that each new concept (=cause) and its actuality (=realization/result) arise together -simultaneously-.²⁰⁰ In other words cause and effect are together.

It was a conceptual milestone in Western history when, some 50 years ago, a famous thinker like Merleau-Ponty could seriously answer the question “What is philosophy?” with these three significant words: “Philosophy creates concepts”. And it is thanks to art, philosophy, and cutting-edge modern sciences we are now certain that each new concept creates and manifests new realities - instantly and simultaneously. Amazing.

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.nici.kun.nl/Divisions/d3/info.html> accessed 29.03.2008 In the general field of perception research, a distinction is made between three levels of perception, namely: Low-level perception, that is, feature extraction from information in sensory registers. Middle-level perception, that is, feature integration into mental representations of perceptual organizations. High-level perception, that is, every-day functionality of perceptual organizations and their interaction with memory and knowledge.

²⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. by Colin Smith, (New York: Humanities Press, 1962) and (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) translation revised by Forrest Williams, 1981; reprinted, 2002. p 207.

Interdependent Origination and Intention

Originally abstract art clearly exemplified the urge to push against perceived limits and a desire to lay claim to territories beyond the borderlands - where the new emerges. Yet, Varnedoe finds it amazing that abstract art which was first advanced by its advocates as demonstrating a culture of crypto-religious, timeless certainties, associated closely with the new monolithic collectivism in our Western societies should have been reinvented as Post-abstraction and now flourish as a paradigmatic example of secular diversity.²⁰¹ Varnedoe thinks it is a prime example of our modern Western society's willingness to invest the fate of its communal culture in the play of subjectivities and it also shows a new acceptance in the West of the permanent uncertainties, pluralities and never-ending irresolvable debates that are the by-product of our inhabiting the new territories as post-modern peoples.

Those who have made the first great land grab beyond the borders of the old modernist/enlightenment paradigms may well carry the responsibility for this change. In any case, the origin myth of post-modernity has its own narrative and the exact moment of 'R. Mutt's pissoir' being put down on the plinth has been conceptually speaking, much more significant than Pollock's later moments of radically dripping and flicking paint onto canvas.

This origin myth might be told something like this: "Once upon a time a young French artist named Marcel Duchamp asked a gallery director to have a white

²⁰¹ Varnedoe, Kirk *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 2005.

plinth placed in the centre of the white cube space of the gallery. As Duchamp hoisted up his chosen object, a white porcelain pissoir, and let it slowly come down Western art history was approaching ‘ground zero’ -the point where a conceptual atom bomb would go off when the porcelain touched the wood.”²⁰²

It did happen, he laid it all down and we are still living in the background radiation of that event. Naturally it did not really happen like this but as a propagation legend it works as well as any other. It seems the historical backgrounds and proper truths behind Duchamp’s *Fountain* are even more mysterious.

Fact is, Duchamp’s “*Fountain*” changed everything and things will never be the same because of it. The impact was initially felt in the art world, yet the expansion of possibilities in Western art and culture quickly translated and transmitted into all spheres of contemporary Western human endeavors. Marcel Duchamp was the one who introduced us to the notion that all meaning is created by the context (including our own). Change the context of anything and you change it’s meaning. This new conceptual art contradicted the long held view valuing craftsmanship. Instead it favored practical intelligence employed in the making of certain expressive forms whether they were paintings, dance, theatre, music, or film, etc. Duchamp completely contradicted the prevailing emphasis on form, quality, aesthetics, and not least our perceived need for physical materiality –criteria that hitherto marked out any so called ‘works of art’.²⁰³ Suddenly art

²⁰² Creation myth by the author.

²⁰³ Hungerland, Isabel C. *The Concept of Intention in Art Criticism*, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 52, No. 24, December 27-29, 1955. p. 733-742

became, not only self-consciously conceptual, but it also seemed to be truly free and autonomous for the first time. This newfound freedom is reflected in many new kinds of communication processes and mediums by which art can now be achieved and disseminated. Any higher levels of collective awareness thus arrived at are now the new territories we are laying claim to through our conscious 'inhabitation' of them.

For example, we appear to have a deeper awareness of the effects of certain subconscious constructions and seem more able to work consciously with our own inner or 'secret' intentions. We now acknowledge that most decisions we take are partly based on conscious as well as unconscious intentions affecting every experience of reality. The ethics of inhabiting these newly conscious territories require new paradigms and aesthetic decisions -turning into conscious ethical 'lifestyle choices' for an ever-increasing number (should things go well).

Andrej Tisma²⁰⁴ in his 2006 essay, *Art and Spirituality*,²⁰⁵ describes a deeper kind of awareness of immateriality and a more direct transmission method of the artist's intention during an interesting discussion on the phenomena of mental resonance.²⁰⁶ Tisma cites how some spiritually intended artworks deliberately use mind-altering experiences such as visualization, meditation, ritual, repetition, rhythm, hypnosis, telepathy, and awareness exercises in their creation process. Artists have always tried to extend art further in order to include all of life.

²⁰⁴ Andrej Tisma is a Novi Sad (ex-Yugoslavia) based artist, art critic and curator. Since the early '70s mail-artist and networker. Founder of The Institute for the Spreading of Love (1991) and Embargo Art campaign (1992). Since 1997 Internet artist and activist: <http://aaart.tripod.com/>

²⁰⁵ http://members.tripod.com/~aaart/art_and_spir.htm accessed 13.05.2008

²⁰⁶ Carruthers, Mary *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, rhetoric, and the making of images*. New York University, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

Additional knowledge concerning this ‘milieu raising’ process is also coming from frontline research in contemporary biology including the theory of morphogenetic fields in combination with new developments in physics, including holographic constructions and string theories, to mention just a few. Tisma believes that spiritually motivated artists might attempt to manifest or create as consciously as possible inside the dimensions of spiritual interchange using the latest scientifically accepted ideas surrounding interdependence.

According to Tisma it has been found that there is a discernable resonance between people via the medium of general consciousness. Interestingly resonance seems to occur only up to the level of awareness of everyone involved (=“the lowest common denominator”). It is for this reason Tisma believes that many spiritually motivated artists have always tried to consciously radiate inspiration to their surroundings in order to lift the entire spiritual milieu - ultimately increasing the general receptivity for healing and positive changes.

A spiritually motivated artist might therefore try to inspire higher levels of awareness and connectedness that would ideally change everyday life into an all-encompassing artwork and bringing to full realization the Beuysian conviction that ‘Everyone is an Artist’. This well known central *Leitmotiv* of Joseph Beuys is currently embodied by contemporary practitioners like Marina Abramovich who publicly admits that she trying “like so many of us to live and work following the Duchampian-Beuysian lineage.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ McEvelley, Thomas *Performing the Present Tense in Art in America*, no 153, April 2003, New York, p 114-117.

Immateriality and Buddhist Concepts of Emptiness

“- Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way feeling, perception, formation and consciousness are all empty. Therefore, Shariputra, all phenomena are empty, without characteristics. They are unborn and unceasing; they are neither impure nor free from impurity. They neither decrease nor increase.

Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; there is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no appearance, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no perception. There are none of these all the way up to the sphere of mental consciousness. There is no ignorance; nor is there destruction of ignorance... there are none of these all the way up to there is no old age and death; nor is there destruction of old age and death. Thus there is no suffering, no cessation and no cause of suffering and no path. There is no wisdom, no attainment and no non-attainment.”²⁰⁸

The above excerpt is taken from the ‘*Heart Sutra*’, a one page text of Buddhist scripture within the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* which is Sanskrit for *The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. In the tradition of Mahayana (‘Middle Way’) Buddhism it is

²⁰⁸ McLeod, Ken, Ibid. Translation taken from <http://www.unfetteredmind.com/translations/heart.php>, accessed 27.04. 2008.

generally accepted that the *Heart Sutra* was taught, or rather ‘inspired’, by the Buddha himself some 2,500 years ago. The word inspired is used since the actual text appears to be principally spoken by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara while the Buddha himself seems to have only a few encouraging words to say at the end. The ‘discoverer’ and promoter of this text was Nagarjuna who can be dated to approximately 150-250 of the Common Era.²⁰⁹

Nagarjuna, the Interpreter of the Heart Sutra

Tibetans and other Mahayana practitioners of Buddhism around the globe often refer to Nagarjuna as ‘the second Buddha’. He has been attributed with discovering the aforementioned *Prajnaparamita* text. Nagarjuna’s famous explication of the concept of *sunyata*, or emptiness, is precisely developed in his *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* and essentialized in his small *Heart Sutra* text. Its publication resulted in a huge increase in Mahayana philosophical literature surrounding the concept of emptiness -causing it to become the central Buddhist doctrine.

Nagarjuna’s other works include the *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* (*Mulamadhyamakakarika*) and a further elucidation of the doctrine of emptiness *Seventy Verses on Emptiness* (*Sunyatasaptati*). Nagarjuna also produced a famous explication of Buddhist philosophical logic, the *Sixty Verses on Reasoning* (*Yuktisastika*).²¹⁰ However the greatest inspiration to the Mahayana tradition coming out of these momentous works came from the aforementioned

²⁰⁹ ‘Nagarjuna, c.150-250’, by Douglas Berger, Southern Illinois University *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/n/nagarjun.htm> accessed 08.09.2007

²¹⁰ Ibid.

summary text, *The Heart Sutra*, which is still being recited daily in many Mahayana Buddhist traditions around the globe.²¹¹

The concept of *sunyata* or emptiness has had fundamental implications for Indian and Asian philosophical and scientific models of causation, substance ontology, ethics, epistemology, and the conceptualization of language and mathematics etc. It proved seminal for the Buddhist Mahayana philosophies throughout Asia and more recently also in the developed West. By now Nagarjuna's innovative interpretation of emptiness has profoundly influenced all fields of mental enquiry globally whether we are aware of it or not.

Nagarjuna's Story

Nagarjuna was born a Hindu in a south Indian upper-caste Brahmin clan, which in his day connoted religious allegiance to the ancient Vedas.²¹² However, Nagarjuna converted to the more contemporary philosophy of Buddhism and emigrated from Andhra (South India) to study Buddhism at famous Nalanda University²¹³ situated in present-day Bihar. At that time, Nalanda University was the greatest Buddhist monastery of scholastic learning with an estimated student population of over 10,000 students.

At Nalanda University Nagarjuna eventually came into his own as a philosopher, debater, and as a critical commentator on the Buddha's original scriptures (the

²¹¹ Unbroken lineages exist in Tibetan, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese Buddhist traditions.

²¹² The Vedas is a large corpus of texts originating in ancient India. They form the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature and represent the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism.

²¹³ <http://www.nalanda.nitc.ac.in/about/NalandaHeritage.html> accessed 03.02.2005

Sutras). He thrived on the exciting new scholastic methods of rigorous philosophical debating practiced throughout northern India among and between Brahminical and Buddhist thinkers. Indian philosophical schools such as the Samkhya,²¹⁴ which divided the cosmos into spiritual and material entities, and the Vaisesika, or atomists (who believed that the universe was comprised of smallest particles), were probably already well established at Nalanda when he arrived there. However a Vedic school of Logic (Nyaya) was making its literary debut, positing an elaborate Realist ontology that catalogued types of ‘basic knowable things’ and formulated a theory of knowledge that was to serve as the basis for all truth claims through drawing up a full-blown theory of correct and fallacious logical argumentations. Alongside it, within the Buddhist philosopher’s camp, specialist groupings of metaphysicians emerged with their own separate doctrines of atomism and ever more subtle and fundamental categories of matter. Nagarjuna eventually undertook a forceful engagement with all these ancient and emerging Brahminical and Buddhist ontologies.

The interpretive key Nagarjuna used for undoing every single one of the known metaphysical schools of philosophy - especially the sophisticated new views that were starting to flourish all around him - was the concept of Emptiness which he had read about in earliest Pali Buddhist literature as well as in the ancient Indian

²¹⁴ “Sankhya , Sanskrit Samkhya (“Enumeration,” or “Number”) one of the six orthodox systems (darshans) of Indian philosophy (q.v.). Samkhya adopts a consistent dualism of the orders of matter (prakriti) and soul, or self (purusha). The two are originally separate, but in the course of evolution purusha mistakenly identifies itself with aspects of prakriti. Right knowledge consists of the ability of purusha to distinguish itself from prakriti. Although many references to the system are given in earlier texts, Samkhya received its classical form and expression in the Samkhya-karikas (“Stanzas of Samkhya”) by Isvarakrsna (c. 3rd century AD). Vijñanabhiksu wrote an important treatise on the system in the 16th century.” Taken from: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9065215> accessed 04.05.2008

Vedas.²¹⁵ Nagarjuna found in these ancient texts mention of an absence of a stable and inherent existence of anything in the world including the self and even the mind itself.²¹⁶ From that moment on his entire philosophical career seems to have been a concerted attempt to deconstruct all systems of thought which analyze the world as a given, fixed reality composed of stable substances and final essences, as possessing any kind of eternal valid structure. He dismissed all views including those that regarded perceived reality as ‘truth’ or as a system that functioned due to measurable scientific or even so called natural laws up to and including the sacrosanct law of cause and effect, Karma.

According to Nagarjuna’s interpretation model of emptiness even the subtlest levels of reality (appearance) lack any final essences. In other words, there is no fixed or final nature or phenomenological truth-value at the core of anything. Nagarjuna categorically declared that nothing would ever finally be found by any technical, scientific, or logical means.²¹⁷ He argued that change – by which is meant the transformation of one thing into another – could only and precisely happen because of this crucial lack of ‘final essences’ concerning everything. In other words Nagarjuna understood that each thing could only exist momentarily

²¹⁵ Pali is a Middle Indo-Aryan language or prakrit. It is best known as the language of the earliest extant Buddhist canon. ‘In the Tipitaka (Pali: “The Three Baskets”; Sanskrit Tripitaka), collected and compiled 300 years after the Buddha's mahaparinirvana (attainment of Buddhahood), at the council at Pataliputra (3rd century BC), both the canonical and philosophical doctrines of early Buddhism were codified.’ Taken from <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-61584/Indian-philosophy#314606.hook> accessed 27.04.2008.

²¹⁶ According to Husserl, essential Being must be distinguished from actual existence, just as the pure Ego must be distinguished from the psychological Ego. Essences are non-real, while facts are real. The realm of transcendently reduced phenomena is non-real, while the realm of actual experience is real. Thus, phenomenological reduction leads from a knowledge of the essentially real to a knowledge of the essentially non-real.

<http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html> accessed 27.04.2008

²¹⁷ This insight is supported by modern science that has also failed to find any essential underlying particles using the latest scientific particle accelerators etc.

due to emptiness. *Sunyata* or immateriality (as one of the many contemporary Western translation terms) is the very reason how the scientifically accepted concept of *interdependent origination*²¹⁸ seems to function.

With his expanded understanding of emptiness, voidness, immateriality, or lack of essences, Nagarjuna was to help contribute to an entirely new reality understanding ushering in a new level in the evolution of human consciousness, perception theory, and the arts and sciences.

Armed with his notion of the emptiness of all phenomena, Nagarjuna built his extensive literary corpus. He wrote his own commentary on the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* and termed them *The Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way (Mulamadhyamakakarika)*.²¹⁹ This great philosophical work articulated his explicit abandonment of all elementary distinctions between *samsara* and *nirvana*. This binary of binaries had always been regarded as the fundamental division of an ordinary human being's experience and that of a so-called enlightened being's experience – in short 'heaven and hell' as the West would have it. By abandoning this long held non-plus ultra division, Nagarjuna cast off our long held reliance on the philosophy of Dualism for good. He boldly stated that: "There is not the slightest distinction between *samsara* and *nirvana*," and,

²¹⁸ Common to all schools of Buddhism, *pratityasamutpada* means that phenomena arise together in a mutually interdependent web of cause and effect. It is variously rendered into English as "dependent origination", "conditioned genesis", "dependent co-arising", "interdependent arising", etc.

²¹⁹ Madhyamaka is a Buddhist philosophical tradition that asserts that all phenomena are empty of "self-nature" or "essence" (Sanskrit: Svabhāva), that they have no intrinsic, independent reality apart from the causes and conditions from which they arise. Nagarjuna's Mūlamadhyamakārikā or Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way now stands at the centre of modern philosophical analysis of the Madhyamaka philosophy, which is rapidly proliferating to match the rich and varied commentarial tradition that the text has accumulated over the centuries since its composition (most likely in the 2nd century). <http://www.indopedia.org/Madhyamaka.html> accessed 24.04.2008

“the limits of one are the limits of the other.”²²⁰ In other words Dualism, according to Nagarjuna, is just like anything else we can perceive and label - merely another human construct, a thought.

But how could Nagarjuna possibly claim, let alone prove, that the age-old ultimate binary of *samsara* and *nirvana*, or ‘heaven and hell’ –symbolized as the suffering of an ordinary person set against the life of a Buddha who is supposedly without suffering - be null and void by being one and the same?

How could someone possibly declare two opposing parts to be identical -as having no distinction- without totally undermining the theoretical basis and practical aims of any religion or any kind of scientific research project that relies on division? For if there is allegedly no difference between the world of suffering and the attainment of peace and happiness, then what sort of work is a religious or scientific person to do, especially if their intention and declared vocation were to seek an end to suffering not only for themselves but for the entire world?

Nagarjuna answered this by reminding his audience that the historical Buddha Shakyamuni (c.500 BCE) had already undermined all the various metaphysical as well as empirical ‘Substantialisms’ when he put forward the radical concept of ‘no-God’ (*anatman*). In other words, the historical Buddha himself had already sought to replace the seemingly eternal binary view with a more precise idea of ‘simultaneous interdependence’ in which the phenomenal world originates and persists through the idea of a ‘dependent arising’ (*pratityasamputpada*) net of

²²⁰ in *The Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way (Mulamadhyamakakarika)* by Nagarjuna

simultaneous relations totally relying on one another.²²¹

Nagarjuna reiterated the earlier doctrines of the ancient Vedas and those more recent of the Buddha by saying that cause and effect arise together and remain together (in accordance with the intervening and cohesive conditions of time) precisely forming an intricate nets of interdependent relations -continuously self-creating and self-sustaining (the wheel symbol is used to mark this insight). Nagarjuna's poetic explications of the Buddha's emptiness realizations popularized them widely throughout the Indian Mahayana Buddhist Traditions and beyond. Nagarjuna's commentary on the Buddha's teachings consciously took a non-substantialist position and rejected not only the causal theories that necessitated notions of fixed nature (*svabhava*), but also dismissed theories that metaphysically reified or emphasized difference (such as ultimately between *samsara* and *nirvana*).

To repeat, Nagarjuna's philosophical development beyond Dualism was made possible by using the concept of *sunyata* as summarized in the *Heart Sutra*. It has since become the most important Buddhist concept in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

In a single page, the *Heart Sutra* succinctly declares the absence or emptiness of any kind of essences. And, as already mentioned, one of the most radical and revolutionary applications of this concept was Nagarjuna's interpretation that the Buddha could no longer be thought of as a pure being, a kind of god of peace and compassion who would put to rest the delusions of an otherwise defiled world.

²²¹in *Seventy Verses on Emptiness (Sunyatasaptati)* by Nagarjuna

Such god worship had become popular with many lay people. For Nagarjuna however the old dualistic separation between ‘the Buddha’ and ‘us’ could no longer serve as a theoretical basis or justification for distinguishing between some ordinary ignorant world (*samsara*) and a kind of perfect enlightenment (*nirvana*) elsewhere. Nagarjuna repeatedly emphasized that constant change; including transformations leading to enlightenment are possible precisely because of *interdependent* causality. In other words, change functions because all things and phenomena including all labeling and change itself lack any kind of fixed nature or essences in and of themselves. He explained that in truth things, even thoughts lack the materiality we believe them to possess. In other words, all things or events have the exact same nature –namely that of emptiness or immateriality.

The implications of this assertion are still radical today. It clearly spells out to us that our experience of existence, whether in a fortunate or an unfortunate situation, is not a fixed or permanent one. Every experience, phenomena, concept, or thought, including the notion of enlightenment itself²²² is open to constant, directionless, beginningless and endless transformations.

According to Nagarjuna the Buddha could only become the Buddha because the nature of reality has the qualities of emptiness (nothingness) as well as interdependence (everything) at the same time. The absence of any essences enabled the transformation of the Indian Prince Siddhartha Gautama into the historically known Buddha. Even more scientifically speaking we now know that

²²² in *Sixty Verses on Reasoning (Yuktisastika)* by Nagarjuna

all possibilities ‘exist’ equally, instantly and simultaneously (the scientific term for the time aspect is ‘*simultaneity*’) and in every location (the scientific term for the space aspect is ‘*collocation*’).²²³

Nagarjuna's Skeptical Method

Nagarjuna, the great skeptic, adopted the Buddha’s ancient “Four Errors Method” of debating entailing a very precise critique of any position taken while never actually putting forward a definite proposition of his own. This radical debating dialectic aims squarely at dismantling all truth claims that are ever put forward.

Douglas Berger²²⁴ writes: “There was a different debating technique to the still standard debating format of thesis versus thesis which the ancient logicians called the *vitanda* or ‘destructive’ debate. In *vitanda*, the proponent of a thesis attempts to establish it against an opponent who merely strives to refute the proponent’s view without establishing or even implying his or her own. If the opponent of the proffered thesis cannot refute it, he or she will lose; but they will also lose if in refuting the opponent's thesis, they are found to be asserting or implying a counter-thesis.”²²⁵ “For his own part, Nagarjuna would only assent to enter any philosophical debate as a *vaitandika*, committed to destroying the

²²³ <http://www2.slac.stanford.edu/vvc/theory/relativity.html> accessed 19.06.2008 Collocation depends on one's reference frame, simultaneity also depends on one's reference frame. The postulate that light moves at the same speed in all reference frames leads inevitably to the dependence of simultaneity on a reference frame.

²²⁴ ‘Nagarjuna, c.150-250’, by Douglas Berger, Southern Illinois University *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/n/nagarjun.htm> accessed 02.05.2008

²²⁵ ‘Nagarjuna, c.150-250’, by Douglas Berger, Southern Illinois University *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> accessed 23.04.2008.

proponents' metaphysical and epistemological positions without necessitating a contra positive."²²⁶

In this style Nagarjuna was considered great not only by his Brahmanical opponents but also by the many different Buddhist philosophical traditions because he indiscriminately called into question everyone's basic categorial presuppositions as well as all the criteria of proof that were universally assumed to be a given or simply axiomatic. Indeed Nagarjuna took on the entire philosophical establishment with his radical skepticism. However, he also tried to publicly demonstrate that a disciplined, methodical skepticism could lead somewhere. He clearly stated that doubt and critical enquiry should never be haphazard, and that a systematic logic and a highest possible motivation together with clear moral convictions were required in order for any philosophical speculation to be fruitful rather than merely destructive in their various attempts at deconstruction.²²⁷ Nagarjuna's idea that doubt should be methodical was an ancient idea already implicit in ancient Vedic and Buddhist writings. In order to strengthen these known critical methods Nagarjuna expanded them to include the idea that one's method of doubt should not even be one's own choice, but rather ought to be temporarily borrowed from the opponent, or from the idea or concept one is critically examining.

²²⁶ Ibid

²²⁷ Ibid.

The 'What Came First?'-Question

When asked the perennial origin question of whether the chicken or the egg came first, or whether the world had a beginning or not, the Buddha himself had already adopted a way of refusing to answer such habitually dualistic rhetoric hoping to exemplify and inspire better metaphysical knowledge. His method became known as the 'Four Errors Method'. It responded to the perennial 'what came first?' by denying all logical alternatives such as for example: "No, the world does not have a beginning; nor does it fail to have a beginning; both propositions are true; and neither of them are correct." These four denials should not be seen as logically defective because of appearing to violate Aristotle's ancient 'Law of the excluded middle' (=A cannot contain both B and not B), since this method is more a principled refusal to answer than proffering an actual counter-thesis. In other words, it is more a decision not to say anything. Thus one cannot object to the 'Four Error Denial' by countering it with the self-righteous ratio-logic of: "The world either has a beginning or it does not!" The Buddha himself recommended that one should not take a position on any such dualism-affirming origin questions. Today this kind of methodology is relatively well accepted as *illocution* in modern propositional logic.²²⁸

As mentioned, Nagajuna used the Buddha's original method in his arguments against the diverse and often subtle 'Substantialisms' that had started to become widely accepted by many traditions and the new philosophies of his own time.

²²⁸ <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Asia/AsiaBerg.htm> accessed 25.05.2008. The three components of a communication, from a pragmatic point of view, are: Locution--the semantic or literal significance of the utterance; Illocution=the intention of the speaker; Perlocution=how it was received by the listener.

Before Nagarjuna there had been two other famous great skeptics in the Buddhist traditions. The first of them was of course the Buddha himself and the other was Moggaliputta-tissa, who had won several pivotal debates against a number of traditional sectarian groups at the request of the great Mauryan emperor Asoka (304 BC–232 BC). Moggaliputta-tissa's efforts resulted in the first written debate manual of the Buddhist tradition. While the Buddha himself had recommended that the 'Four Errors Method' be used to discourage especially the advocacy of religious positions, Moggaliputta-tissa constructed a discussion format that examined various doctrinal disputes found to represent positions that were logically invalid. Inspired by such logically sharpened skeptical approaches, Nagarjuna refined his own use of the 'Four Errors Method' from a strictly illocutionary and pragmatic tool into a radical method that would dissolve every possible metaphysical and philosophical view.

While some Buddhists proposed a person (*pudgala*) or its essence (*svabhava*) as an entity upon which karmic causes were able to be carried from life to life, Nagarjuna by contrast, argued that any real change or true progress, which the Buddhists claimed they was attempting, was only possible if (even) beings did not have any permanent essences of any kind. Nagarjuna encouraged his opponents to closely examine the phenomena of change because one will find that change cannot produce itself, nor can it be introduced by an extrinsic influence, nor does it come about from no influence, nor can it result from both. Again, all logical alternatives of a given position are tested and cancelled by the 'Four Errors Method' because of these basic logical reasons: First, it would be

incoherent to assume that anything with a fixed nature or essence should change, for that change would violate its fixed nature and destroy the original premise. In addition there are no subjective experiences that do not constantly change. The rules of philosophical logic are thus observed not for earning victory, but for the purpose of showing all players that it is merely a game of different perceptions and changing opinions in a universe that is continuously self-arising from interrelated causes governed by conditions with no fixed 'reality' or final positions from their own side.²²⁹

The skeptic Nagarjuna tried to dismantle all and any fixed theoretical position wherever he would find it, and he did so in a logical manner. Like the great skeptics of the classical Greek traditions, who thought that critical self-questioning could resolve doubt about dogmatic assertions and that an examined life could lead to peace of mind, Nagarjuna likewise saw skepticism as the very key to insight and ultimate personal freedom. For in the process of dismantling all metaphysical, religious, and epistemological views Nagarjuna proved that any phenomena, or concept, -even the self lacks any fixed essence in and of itself and that this lack, or emptiness, is exactly why and how phenomena are amenable to change, transubstantiation, and not least evolution.²³⁰

Nagarjuna understood that change is the basic condition for an experience of life and death, suffering and liberation. Indeed, on occasion Nagarjuna referred to his own use of the ancient 'Four Errors Method' as a means to refute and explain while simultaneously 'emptying' all truth claims. Yet, like all Buddhist methods,

²²⁹ <http://philo.ruc.edu.cn/pol04/mirror/www.iep.utm.edu/n/nagarjun.htm> accessed 29.11.2007

²³⁰ Ibid.

once even this logical foil has served its purpose, it too has to be discarded and exchanged for the wisdom that it helped confer lest it becomes itself another obstacle.²³¹

Logicians, aware of this brought against his explanation of emptiness their own criticism: if all things are empty of a fixed nature, then that would include, would it not, Nagarjuna's own claim that all things are empty? For one to say that all things lack a fixed nature or truth would also include the thesis itself. If such a basic and all-encompassing thesis must admit that it has no fixed meaning or properly grounded reference, then why should anyone believe it? Put succinctly the thesis "all things lack a fixed essence and are thus empty" refutes even itself since it is a universal quantifier covering all things?²³²

Indeed, Nagarjuna's stance satisfied no one within the myriad Indian philosophical traditions and schools. To reiterate, he took the stance of a *vaitandika*, a person who refutes all philosophical views while advocating no position of his own.²³³ Despite all the other disagreements between Brahmins and Buddhists they nevertheless agreed that such a stance could not possibly be a proper philosophical one, for while a person who occupied it may be able to

²³¹ Ibid

²³² <http://www.rangjung.com/authors/Nagarjuna.htm> accessed 14.05.2008

²³³ Nagarjuna's primary concern had been to establish the authenticity of the philosophy of emptiness in opposition to the earlier schools of Buddhist philosophy. Arguments ad absurdum are designed to expose contradictions and absurdities in opponents' positions. For example, the theory of self-production (i.e., that entities originate from existent things) was advocated by a rival of the *Prasangikas*, the *Sankhya* philosophical school. Self-production can be refuted by the argument that if entities originated from themselves, then they would go on originating indefinitely and we would have an endless series of reproductions of the same existing entities. In other words, there would be nothing new under the sun. The *Prasangika* argument is that entities do not originate from themselves because they already exist, and the origination of something that already exists is plainly absurd. Besides, if existent entities do originate, then they will go on reproducing themselves ad infinitum. Dr. Peter Della Santina, *The Development of Mahayana Philosophy*, <http://www.purifymind.com/MahayanaPhi.htm>

expose dubious theories, no one could ever hope to learn the truth about the real world from them. Such a person, it was widely suspected might indeed be a charlatan.²³⁴

Edmund Husserl

Edmund Husserl²³⁵ (1859-1938) is regarded as the founder of so called Phenomenology in the West. He was the leading light of the German phenomenological movement and taught at Göttingen University from 1901 until 1916, and in Freiburg from 1916 to 1928. Husserl saw his own ventures into what Western philosophical researchers would eventually start calling Phenomenology as a scientific expedition into "a new field of experience, exclusively its own - the field of 'transcendental subjectivity'"²³⁶ as he chose to call it. Importantly he also claimed to have found "a proper way to access this new and expanded 'transcendental-phenomenological sphere'".²³⁷

The idea of an applicable method or path in Western philosophy was certainly a bold claim and a pioneering effort of wide ranging influence. Husserl effectively saw himself as the West's 'first explorer' of some hitherto unknown dimensions. He described himself using the metaphor of explorer who had opened the way into new territories so that others could conquer, map, and eventually inhabit them.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/> accessed 28.05.2008

²³⁶ Ibid

²³⁷ Bruzina, Ronald *The enworlding (Verweltlichung) of transcendental phenomenological reflection: A study of Eugen Fink's "6th Cartesian Meditation"*, in *Husserl Studies*, Springer Netherlands, Volume 3, Number 1 / January, 1986.

Husserl wrote of himself:

"He who for decades did not speculate about a new Atlantis but instead bodily journeyed in the trackless wilderness of a new continent and undertook the virgin cultivation of some of its areas will not allow himself to be deterred in any way by the rejection of geographers who judge his reports according to their habitual ways of experiencing and thinking and thereby excuse themselves from the pain of undertaking travels in the new land". He described his philosophical vision as: "I can see spread out before me the endlessly open plains of true philosophy, the 'promised land', though its thorough cultivation will come after me".²³⁸

Husserl had first employed a spatial metaphor in a 1913 text, *Ideen I*, although without explicit reference to himself as explorer. In it in *Chapter One* he distinguished states of affairs (*Sachverhältnisse*) from essences (*Wesen*) by assigning them to different 'spheres': the factual (or material) and the formal (or eidetic) respectively. For Husserl these two spheres are connected by the mind's ability to travel between them and within either of them. However, according to Husserl, these two spheres do not connect or overlap on their own. He proposed that there are no actual causal links between them other than the human mind. The terms, 'movement between' and 'movement within' are of course further elaborations upon Husserl's spatial metaphor and served to designate the ability of human consciousness to expand, travel, concentrate, linger, combine, focus, or disperse, etc. at will. Yet, for Husserl, these acts of consciousness still belonged

²³⁸ <http://www.iep.utm.edu/h/husserl.htm> accessed 29.02.2008

to the conventional and well-known spheres of the 'worldly' and the 'psychological' -in short, to traditional Dualism.²³⁹

Husserl made it his task to get *from* these spheres to somewhere else- a new 'field' -quite unlike them. Husserl proposed a larger, more inclusive sphere that would be the sphere of absolute consciousness, pure awareness, pure mind. This would be a type of consciousness that became self-aware the moment it no longer moved (thinking is movement =causality), lacking directionality, even bias (=equanimity). Husserl called this 'the region of pure consciousness'. According to Edmund Husserl one cannot just 'go there' with 'a normal day-to-day mind'; instead "one has to first let the worldly and the psychological go and then start inhabiting whatever may or may not be left". The exact word he used was the German word *ausklammern*, meaning one had to bracket, literally to mind-bracket or to go beyond the mind itself.²⁴⁰

Husserl's koan-like question was: "*Was kann als Sein noch setzbar sein, wenn das Weltall, das All der Realitat eingeklammert bleibt?*" which can be paraphrased as: "What can remain, if the whole world, including ourselves with all our *cogitare*, is bracketed?"²⁴¹ Husserl's expanded idea of pure consciousness seems located somewhere in the very gap between different brackets][or thoughts; between all that is perceivable and all that can possibly be thought of

²³⁹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness-phenomenological/> accessed 19.04.2008

²⁴⁰ Husserl, Edmund *Aufsätze und Rezensionen (1890-1910)*
in *Husserliana: Edmund Husserl – Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 22, 1979
and <http://www.iep.utm.edu/h/husserl.htm> accessed 27.05.2008

²⁴¹ Kersten, Fred translation found in *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy by Edmund Husserl*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1983.

including words, the self, and all mind activity.²⁴²

Science and the Phenomenological Reduction²⁴³

For Husserl there existed an awareness whereby it is possible for us to come to the world with no knowledge or preconceptions; it is the experience of ‘astonishment’ (see Goethe’s ‘wonderment’) as he tried to label it for the purpose of communication. He claimed that the ‘knowing’ we have at that moment stands in stark contrast to the ‘knowing’ we have in our everyday lives where normally we come to the world with “theories and habitual thought patterns at the ready” (subconscious), “with our minds wholly made up” (entire personality structure). Unfortunately our subconscious reliance on habitual patterns and preconceptions reduces the every act of our perceiving. In fact, Husserl claimed that it appears reduced to something akin to mere pattern matching.²⁴⁴

Husserl’s ‘phenomenological reduction’ (or ‘bracketing out’-method) is at once a description as well as a prescription of a path allowing one to attain and sustain something akin to his ‘astonishment’ realization.

Husserl believed that higher conceptual cognition could be consciously affected and that over time the ‘knowing’ quality of astonishment could thus be brought more into everyday experiences. In short, Husserl’s was not only a scholarly

²⁴² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/> accessed 21.04.2008

²⁴³ Husserl explains that phenomenological reduction is the process of defining the pure essence of a psychological phenomenon. Phenomenological reduction is a process whereby empirical subjectivity is suspended, so that pure consciousness may be defined in its essential and absolute Being. This is accomplished by a method of "bracketing" empirical data away from consideration. "Bracketing" empirical data away from further investigation leaves pure consciousness, pure phenomena, and the pure Ego as the residue of phenomenological reduction. <http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html> accessed 19.04.2008

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

theory or a theoretical explanation of a certain state of consciousness but also a practical application technique, a self-healing method, an actual path to higher conscious awareness no less. This was and still is somewhat unorthodox in our Western scientific research traditions.

It is by virtue of the ‘knowing’ experience and via the more aware perspectives generated through the proper performance of the phenomenological reduction technique, that Husserl’s Phenomenology claims to offer new and radically expanded views of the world. In other words, the phenomenological reduction properly applied is a regimen designed to transform a philosopher into a phenomenological practitioner. Husserl himself regarded his method for the attainment of these new and expanded perspectives as more than intellectual exercise. He proclaimed it to be a practice that required rigorous and persistent effort over a long time. For him it was a new *species* of meditation because, unlike ordinary meditation practices, which seem to always involve (or revolve) around the thinking mind his radically expanded form required participants to go beyond ordinary (automatic) thinking processes –required them to go beyond the mind!

Husserl discovered the need for such ‘mind’-bracketing once he realized that the foundations upon which even our so called most rigorous and rational scientific inquiries rested are not only compromised by so called latest scientific frameworks but also by every psychological assumption each individual scientist or researcher brings to their research project.

The phenomenological reduction method, Husserl claimed, was a kind of meditative practice whereby the person consciously generates an intention to liberate him- or herself from the unconscious and subtle captivations in which he or she is held by all that they accept as 'real' or as 'given'. Only when liberated from this captivation by the underlying 'acceptedness' of habitual and automatic thought-patterns is the researcher able to view the world not as given but as something less contaminated by personal, unexamined, psychological self-presuppositions. These do include the many universal and traditional frameworks that we as a whole generation or as a member of a specific group, even species take as given. Subtler still are those attitudes and views that are the very background noise behind our 'personal' (or so we think) ideas about certain things. We mostly regard these subtle background noises as 'natural' or simply 'inevitable' should we be aware of them at all.²⁴⁵

During his entire career Husserl concerned himself with the adequacy of the foundations upon which our so-called rational and scientific assumptions rest. Husserl's thorough analysis of the foundation of scientific inquiry clearly demonstrated the need for a phenomenological reduction method when attempting to do any kind of original research that would ultimately become useful. He illustrated his misgivings by asking his audience to consider for example the logical relationship between the axioms of geometry and its theorems and proofs. The point of doing proofs in geometry is to show that each

²⁴⁵ Sinari, Ramakant *The Method of Phenomenological Reduction and Yoga*, Philosophy East and West, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, Vol. 15, No. 3/4 (Jul. - Oct., 1965), p.217-228.

theorem of geometry is adequately grounded in the axioms – namely that which is assumed as ‘a given’ in geometry. In all scientific inquiry generally, what scientists take as being a given is finally the natural world itself. Consequently those things in it are never questioned but are simply and simplistically taken to be the logical bedrock upon which all scientific investigations are founded and developed. In other words, scientists always take the world to be their ultimate axiom. And it is precisely this axiomatic status that Husserl throws into question when he shows that the results of even the most rigorous scientific investigations are necessarily the functions of the architectonics of traditional scientific hypotheses combined with all the personal and psychological colorings of the investigating scientist.

For this reason, Husserl claimed, if we are ever to be able to access a purer world - so that it can act as a better basis- we must strip away all qualifications and go to ‘the thing itself’ (*die Sache selbst*) as much as possible. That is, we must return to the world as it was before it became contaminated either by the categories of science and scientific inquiries as well as all our own psychological assumptions. For this reason Husserl’s phenomenological reduction technique attempted to consciously ‘bracket out’ all interfering influences as much as possible.²⁴⁶

During the application of this technique Husserl describes two occurrences. The

²⁴⁶ Hut, Piet *The Role of Husserl's Epoche for Science: A View from a Physicist*, invited paper presented at the 31st Husserl Circle conference in Bloomington, IN., in February 2001.

first is *epoché*,²⁴⁷ which is the Greek term for cessation of appearances. The second is the reduction method proper, which is a continuous feed-back-loop eventually leading into ever purer layers of conscious awareness, a perpetual re-examination that causes ever higher dimensions of awareness -the aim of the exercise.²⁴⁸

The Epistemological Problem

The prevailing epistemology during Husserl's time in Germany was a neo-Kantian one. Roughly put, the Kantian epistemological position strives to ameliorate the stark contrast between René Descartes and his critics especially Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. In other words, Kant's position is one that seeks to strike a balance between the Rationalists and the Empiricists. Kant's epistemology, however conciliatory toward each camp, still leaned heavily on certain perceptual aspects of Descartes' dualistic view of the world; notably, the binary relationship between the mind and objects. Yet, both Kant and Descartes still took as their philosophical foundation the apparent split between consciousness and the body, albeit in Kant's terms this distinction was somewhat softened to a distinction between his 'noumenal' and 'phenomenal' world. Using this way of categorizing Kant made a conscious effort to bridge René Descartes'

²⁴⁷ Phenomenological reduction is also a method of bracketing empirical intuitions away from philosophical inquiry, by refraining from making judgments upon them. Husserl uses the term *epoché* (Greek, for 'a cessation') to refer to this suspension of judgment regarding the true nature of reality. Bracketed judgment is an *epoché* or suspension of inquiry, which places in brackets whatever facts belong to essential Being. <http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html> accessed 14.08.2008

²⁴⁸ Husserl argues that bracketing is a neutralization of belief. Doxic positing (i.e. the positing of belief) may be actual or potential. Doxic positing may occur in every kind of consciousness, because every consciousness may actually or potentially posit something about Being. The phenomenological reduction, as practised by Husserl, also involves relinquishing any claim to scientific truth. <http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html> accessed 17.03.2008

complete separations inherent in his extreme Dualism.²⁴⁹

Kant arrived at his own ontology by asking his famous research questions: “What would have to be the case in order for our experience of the world to be as it is?” This question is commonly referred to as the question determining the conditions for the possibility of personal experience, or more specifically as the question, which leads to Kant’s famous ‘transcendental deduction’²⁵⁰. Martin Heidegger later adapted this well known line of enquiry by asking his own central research question as: “Why is there anything rather than nothing?”²⁵¹

Edmund Husserl’s epistemological insight and philosophical achievement was the realization that there is - in actuality - no true distinction between consciousness and objects. The split had simply been assumed in the developed West and had become ‘official’ ever since René Descartes.²⁵² This assumption of separateness was continued in different forms by most of the subsequent philosophers, including Kant. In Husserl’s mind however his terms ‘noesis’²⁵³ and ‘noema’²⁵⁴ do not so much identify distinct items set apart or against one

²⁴⁹ Smith, Joel *Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenological Reduction*, in *Inquiry*, Vol 48, 2005.

²⁵⁰ ‘Transcendental Deduction: the explanation of the manner in which concepts can relate a priori to objects. The deduction of pure concepts of the understanding is absolutely necessary: Because they speak of objects through predicates of pure a priori thought, not of intuition. Because they relate to objects universally. And not being ground in experience, they cannot exhibit any object that might serve as ground for their synthesis. Therefore we need to prove how subjective conditions of thought can have objective validity in reference to our valid categories using the example of cause and effect.’ Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*, Book I, *Analytic of concepts*, 1781. p. 124, translated by Norman Kemp Smith. London : Macmillan, 1929

²⁵¹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nothingness/> accessed 23.05.2008

²⁵² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/> accessed 23.05.2008

²⁵³ Noesis is a Greek word meaning "the ability to sense or know something immediately". In phenomenology, it is an act of consciousness.

²⁵⁴ Noema is Greek for the meaning of something. It is the intentional thinking act which is directed upon the noema. In contrast to noesis (ability to sense or know something immediately), a noema is the object itself of perception or thought.[The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Edmund Husserl, Section 5:(Ideas I, 1913)]

another (as in consciousness versus its' object). Instead they are distinctions providing a linguistic vehicle that makes obvious the interpenetration and interdependence of one thing by all others –simply being differing aspects of what Husserl referred to as one single and unified 'Life-world'.²⁵⁵

Kant's 'Transcendental Deduction'²⁵⁶

The key point made by the philosopher Edmund Fink in his 1933 article, "*The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism*" in the journal, *Kant-Studien*²⁵⁷ is that when we think of the world, it is always a world already containing us thinking it. This fact is overlooked by the 'neo-Kantian'²⁵⁸ picture of the world which is a picture that assumes a perspective that is neither consciousness nor world but which sets each against the other in a seemingly 'eternal'(or real) binary opposition. However this has never been more than a theoretical definition using simple (one-dimensional) opposition. For Kant such an imagined (or self-created) perspective makes possible his famous distinction between the noumenal²⁵⁹ and the phenomenal worlds. Ironically, it is

²⁵⁵ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/> accessed 20.03.2008 (To a single subject of experience, the life world can be looked upon as the rational structure underlying his or her "natural attitude". That is to say: a given subject's life world consists of the beliefs against which his everyday attitude towards himself, the objective world and others receive their ultimate justification.)

²⁵⁶ 'Objective validity of the categories as a priori concepts rests on the fact that so far as the form of thought is concerned, through them alone does experience become possible.' Kant, Immanuel *Critique of Pure Reason*, Book1, *Analytic of concepts*, 1781

²⁵⁷ <http://www.kant.uni-mainz.de/Welcome.html> accessed 20.03.2008 (Founded in 1896, *Kant-Studien* is still being published every year with ca 25 research articles around Kant's philosophy)

²⁵⁸ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/jaspers/> accessed 23.04.2008 (The Neo-Kantian schools that began in the 1860s tended to emphasize scientific readings of Kant, often downplaying the role of intuition in favour of concepts.)

²⁵⁹ Of or pertaining to the noumenon; real; - as opposed to phenomenal.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-aesthetics/> accessed 09.04.2008 (The noumenon (plural: noumena) classically refers to an object of human inquiry, understanding or cognition. The term is generally used in contrast with, or in relation to, "phenomenon" (plural: phenomena), which

also this imagined view that makes Kant's 'transcendental deduction' necessary because the distinction between his noumenal and phenomenal world is a state of affairs to which we do not have direct access (other than of course via our imagination). As a result of this requisite deductive process we might conclude that what we may actually be discussing here is only the way in which things appear to exist for *us*, yet, even this conclusion exists only as a mere imagination in our own minds. In other words all and every position taken on anything, including so called 'scientific' or 'theoretical' ones, can only ever be a subjective perspective, a personal view, -a mere thought in fact.

Hence Husserl attempted to construct a more sophisticated position from which we might be able to actually observe that consciousness is conscious *of* something; and that it is precisely our 'awareness of awareness', which establishes the connections between his idea of noesis and noema etc. Husserl also insisted that if knowledge is ever to be established at all, it is established in and through such kind of higher conscious awareness. The epistemological problem then for Husserl was to define consciousness, since without initial consciousness no knowledge would be possible.²⁶⁰

Consciousness according to Edmund Husserl is the original condition necessary

refers to appearances, or objects of the senses. A phenomenon is that which is perceived; A noumenon is the actual object that emits the phenomenon in question. The philosopher Immanuel Kant used the term noumenon synonymously with the phrase 'thing in itself' (das Ding an sich).

²⁶⁰Husserl emphasizes that phenomenology is concerned with the essence of what is immanent in consciousness, and that it is concerned with describing immanent essences. To confuse the essences of things with the mental representations of these essences is to confuse the aims of phenomenology and psychology. Phenomenology is a descriptive analysis of Being as Consciousness, while psychology is a descriptive analysis of Being as Reality. The difference between Being as Consciousness and Being as Reality is the difference between transcendental and transcendent Being. <http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html> accessed 03.2008

for the possibility of knowledge. Since we are already in the world we can only properly describe what it is if we begin with a thorough examination of this original and present 'I'- or 'me'-consciousness.²⁶¹ Husserl speaks of going 'back again and again' [*Rückfrage*] because where the 'I' or 'me' is found always already includes a sense of self-thinking it.

This Self-identity are sedimentary layers of self-consciousness built up through temporal experiences and if we were to thoroughly examine the 'I' we will work back down through its' many diverse layers. Husserl recommended to continually confronting ourselves with the question: "Who or what is this 'I'?"

²⁶² Such questioning is the actual method of Husserl's phenomenological reduction's second phase and it aims to lay bare the 'I', which according to Buddhism for example does not actually exist at all independently. In the Mahayana Buddhist practices of so called inquiring meditation (Sanskrit: *vipassana*) such laying bare of the 'I' is supposed to lead to realizations of higher levels of self-awareness which in turn can lead all the way to the realization of the 'emptiness of self', -understanding great *sunyata*-emptiness.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Thomasson, Amie L., *First-Person Knowledge in Phenomenology*, in *Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind*, ed. David W. Smith and Amie L. Thomasson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

²⁶² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/> accessed 19.03.2008

²⁶³ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/emptiness.html> accessed 17.04.2008
<http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/husserl.html> accessed 17.04.2008
Husserl asserts that every actual cogito has an intentional object (i.e. it is a consciousness of something). The cogito may itself become a cogitatum, if the principle that "I think" becomes an object of consciousness. In the cogito, the act of thinking is itself an intentional object. However, in contrast to the Cartesian principle that "I think, therefore I am" (cogito ergo sum), the phenomenologically reduced cogito is a suspension of judgment about whether or not "I am," or whether or not "I exist." The phenomenologically reduced cogito is a suspension of judgment about the question of whether or not thinking implies existence. Thus, phenomenology examines the cogito as a pure intuition, and as an act of pure consciousness.

Immateriality – ‘the Label’

Immateriality, then, is a contemporary label given to a concept with a traceable history via Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.)²⁶⁴, earliest Buddhist philosophers, and earlier still to ancient Indian Vedic scholars and scribes who were the first as far as we know today to record such knowledge some 5000 years ago. Along its extensive timeline concepts around immateriality have been known by diverse names, each emphasizing certain contemporary aspects and qualities. In its present incarnation the concept of immateriality takes its position in relation to an attitude that particularly describes our time and culturally specific reality, namely materialism/corporatism, or in short hyper-consumerism.

As has already been stated, immateriality is not meant to be merely seen as materialism’s antonym, but rather as a more inclusive and overarching expanded concept linguistically hinting at certain imbalances caused by our current obsession with consumerism fostered by an unrestrained ‘free market’-corporatism coupled with an age-old over-emphasis on homocentric Rationalism.

Many of today’s highly developed societies, particularly those driven by an almost exclusive focus on economics, lament their collective loss of the numinous. The common response appears to be a general flight into hyper-consumerism in an attempt to fill a psychological void left by unattended aspects of a full and connected life. Turning to spiritual and religious fundamentalisms are possible alternative ways of dealing with the current overemphasis on ratio-economic gluttony (corporate and individual) worldwide. Religious extremism in

²⁶⁴ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/> accessed 02.05.2007

poor nations and extreme right wing 'free market' orthodoxies in the traditional developed nations seem to be reflecting each other as the respective ends of today's pendulum swing.

Art critic and historian, Suzi Gablik, has been talking for some time about the lack of ecstatic experience in our contemporary cultures. In her seminal book *The Re-Enchantment of Art* published in 1992 she wrote:

“Our loss of ecstatic experience in contemporary Western society has affected every aspect of our lives and created a sense of closure, in which there seems to be no alternative, no hope, and no exit from the addictive systems we have created. In our manmade environments, we have comfort and luxury but there is little ecstasy.”²⁶⁵

Gablik defines ecstatic experience as an archetypal desire that is not being met. She observes that boredom; cynicism, violence, and chronic consumerism are some of the symptoms of the contemporary lack caused by its non-fulfillment.²⁶⁶ This contemporary worldview, which the current term immateriality bespeaks, did not always need to have an anti-materialistic/anti-consumerist emphasis. In ancient India, for example the philosopher and scholar Nagarjuna popularized the Sanskrit term *sunyata*, *which* in the common English translation is simply emptiness. When this vast concept eventually migrated to China in the early centuries of the Common Era it started to blend with indigenous Chinese views and became known as Tao. When it spread from China to Japan it was taken up

²⁶⁵ Gablik, Suzi *The Re-enchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1992, p84.

²⁶⁶ Ibid

especially by the Zen tradition and expressed there through a number of unique artistic genres such as Ikebana, Haiku poetry, design, and certain calligraphic styles including Zen painting etc.

Sunyata (Emptiness)

The Buddhist usage of the ancient Sanskrit term *sunyata* conveys the once ultra secret notion that all apparent phenomena are mere subjective perceptions: ‘as in a dream’, or ‘like an illusion’. This is, as mentioned, because the very nature of things, including that of beings is ultimately empty of essences. However, *sunyata* was never meant to diminish existent reality in any way, neither was it meant to denote any kind of qualitative hierarchy as is implicit in the English translation of the Sanskrit term. Upon first encounter, terms like ‘emptiness’, ‘voidness’, even ‘immateriality’ seem to unfortunately communicate some vast and cold nothingness or ‘lessness’, essentially a kind of philosophical position of nihilism. Such a position represents a philosophical extreme and is therefore considered incorrect.

Yet, many ancient philosophers and modern thinkers make the point that a logical analysis of ‘the thing itself’ can never properly proceed without first acknowledging our role in their perception. This acknowledgement first puts into question *whether*, and then *how*, the object of analysis might or might not actually exist outside and independently from our own perception of it. Simply put, ‘the thing itself’²⁶⁷ is something that appears in a certain way and with

²⁶⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), admitted to following Eastern religious perspectives, when he rejected the assumption that the world presents itself directly to the human mind. He believed

certain measurable qualities because of *who* and *how* we are at the moment of encountering, even measuring it. For us perceiving still means perceiving something as other than ourselves. Yet all that can ever be the subject of scientific or philosophical analysis are our own perceptions. In other words, any analysis of that which might or might not be out there only produces more arbitrary positions helping to maintain and expand this ‘phantasmagoric net of appearances’.²⁶⁸

Nagarjuna had conclusively proven that any position whatsoever is false through being either nihilistic (=“nothing actually exists” and by implication everything is false) or eternalistic (=“some things are actually real” and by implication they therefore must exist forever). Both views are considered invalid and extremist’s positions since they fall under the ‘Four Errors’ mentioned earlier.

Nagarjuna proved that in fact any position taken would always turn out to be just another one of the ‘Four Extremes’ and will therefore always be defeatable. The Buddha himself had already emphasized hundreds of years earlier that practically speaking there can only ever be a “relative positioning” (inside relative truths) which should best be done as much as possible as some middling, between the

it is more accurate to say that people construct representations of the world and then respond to these ideas or images as though they were objective reality. Even such powerful ideas as life and death are framed within the conventions of language and societal custom. Not denying that there is a core of reality (he described it as ‘the will to life’) within representations, he argued that people often respond more to representations than reality. The philosopher's quest to understand the world through words, logic, and reason had been missing the point, according to Schopenhauer, since words are usually limited to the superficial appearance of reality. <http://www.deathreference.com/Py-Se/Schopenhauer-Arthur.html> access 12.03.2008)

²⁶⁸ Nagarjuna asserts the tentative or merely conventional nature of all truth in his great work *The Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*, MMK#22:11.

‘Four Extremes’ (hence the well known Buddhist idea of the ‘The Middle Way’).²⁶⁹

The ancients knew that committing to any position results in the age-old problem of ‘the particular versus the general’, that is, the non-correspondence of ‘the one and the many’. As post-modern people we might be more able to appreciate the constant ambiguity and precarious ambivalence of infinite possible views. While it is easy to understand that any particular position can easily be proven wrong, the taking of no position can equally be proven wrong. Thus the concept of *sunyata*, as articulated in the *Heart Sutra*, is not put forward as solution or single truth set against all others but ideally it is meant to point out a viewless view.²⁷⁰

Like most radical philosophies - and most new art - such extended visions of reality were first mainly appreciated by those who had the necessary leisure and the mental space to concern themselves with such subtleties. The rich leisure class of ancient India had everything including lots of precious time to devote to personal grooming and growth, including art, philosophy and deeply private spiritual pursuits. Long before the *Heart Sutra* came to be written the search for ultimate freedom and greater esoteric understandings of the world and the mind were earnestly pursued. The elite classes of the most advanced societies existing in every age often engage in this. One such person was an Indian prince who eventually became known as the Buddha. His personal enlightenment was realized after he had undergone rigorous spiritual quests for many hard years

²⁶⁹ Garfield, J. L. *Dependent Arising and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Why did Nagarjuna start with causation?* in *Philosophy East & West*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, Apr 94, Vol. 44, no. 2, p 219-32.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

achieving numerous complete personal transformations through which he finally became a truly free individual – a Buddha.²⁷¹

This famous historical Buddha eventually summarized his teachings under four big headlines known as ‘The Four Noble Truths’²⁷²: 1. –The truth of suffering, 2. – The cause of suffering, 3. –Liberation is possible, and 4. –Certain ways out of suffering.

The Buddha suggested numerous specific methods or paths that could lead to the cessation of suffering, a state he described simply as ‘non-self.’ His great realization of the emptiness of mind is still widely considered one of the highest philosophical achievements so far. The idea has since inspired and influenced directly and indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, millions of progressive thinkers, seekers, and creative people around the globe. He inspired the founding of Buddhist universities all over India dedicated to teaching as many students as possible and from all classes of society. This new inclusiveness was itself a political revolution in an environment that was functioning under a strict caste system for everything. Yet, Nalanda University, which was founded in 427 CE survived only for some 700 years when in 1193 CE Moghul Muslims totally destroyed it. During their long occupation of India, which lasted until the British

²⁷¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/history/history.shtml>http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Buddhism accessed 02.02.2008 -The History of Buddhism spans from the 6th century BCE to the present, starting with the birth of the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama. This makes it one of the oldest spiritual methods practised today. It evolved as it encountered various countries and cultures, adding to its original Indian foundation Central Asian, East Asian, and Southeast Asian, and even Hellenistic cultural elements (from official Buddhist interaction with Hellenistic Greece at the time of king Ashoka (260–218 BCE).

²⁷² <http://www.thebigview.com/buddhism/fourtruths.html> accessed 08.09.2007 -Strictly speaking, "truths" is a mistranslation; "realities" would be better: these are "things", not statements as in the original grammar.[Gethin, Rupert in *Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. 1988.}

took over in the mid nineteenth century, the Moghul Muslims all but wiped out Indian Buddhist culture. Nalanda, one of the world's greatest universities during its heydays, had a library considered even bigger than the famous (Arabian) library in Alexandria. The invaders took an entire week to burn it completely to the ground, making sure they destroyed every single volume of the thousands of hand written texts that were mostly the sole copies ever in existence.²⁷³

Contemporary Art and Buddhism

Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob put forward a compelling argument in their preface to *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*.²⁷⁴ They claim that there is a deeply pervasive influence of Buddhism on contemporary art that still runs beneath the surface of broader critical consciousness and has not yet been openly acknowledged. For Bass and Jacob modern art criticism and current art theory still appear to be held hostage by the influence of a type of Rationalism that accommodates the denial of the numinous as well as the deeply personal in art. They feel that many contemporary art writers and critics artificially keep this jaded attitude alive by overtly denying these elements publicly or by simply excluding them in any of their official discourses. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that there exists a great tradition of research by thinkers and philosophers of many different cultures and ages into the nature of the human mind and into that of perceived appearances. These torchbearers include amongst them the Buddha,

²⁷³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nalanda> best overview and links accessed 23.05.2008 (Nalanda was a Buddhist center of learning from 427 CE to 1193 CE. It is known as "one of the first great universities in recorded history.")

²⁷⁴ Baas, Jacqueline and Jacob, Mary Jane *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Ahmanson-Murphy, UCLA, Los Angeles, 2004.

Nagarjuna, Aristotle, Hegel, Deleuze, et al. Thanks to the continuity of their inheritance, which has extended over hundreds of generations worldwide, a way forward is prepared and continuously kept open. Their work enables us to have a constructive dialogue between the perceiving mind and the creative mind.²⁷⁵ Thanks to their universal efforts we can now distinguish between the critical mind and a nature of the mind that is beyond. We can now easily realize for ourselves that the meditative mind is entirely different from the thinking mind.²⁷⁶ And, we have come to understand that the word ‘mind’ is a very imprecise and small term, as is consciousness. Generations of artists, scientists and philosophers as well as meditation practitioners contributed to an expansion of practical awareness and general human intelligence. For a long time - often without its influence being officially acknowledged - the philosophy and methods of Buddhism have been global players in this evolution and expansion of reality perception and higher consciousness per se.²⁷⁷

One does not need to be a so-called Buddhist to appreciate the practical intelligence of greater awareness and the palpable leveling effects of greater compassion since compassion ultimately fosters an attitude of equanimity.

Today we all including many artists, scientists and scholars around the globe utilize such philosophical insights either deliberately or unconsciously. Yet, the

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Buddhism best overview and links accessed 02.09.2007 The conversion of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka the Great (273–232 BCE) to Buddhism marks the first spread of Buddhism beyond India. According to the plates and pillars (British Museum) left by Ashoka (the ‘Edicts of Ashoka’), emissaries were sent to various countries in order to spread Buddhism, as far South as Sri Lanka, and as far West as the Greek kingdoms, in particular the neighboring Greco-Bactrian Kingdom, and possibly even farther to the Mediterranean.

historical link to contemporary artistic practice, including academic scholarship, can still be somewhat secretive and hidden, even denied, while on closer inspection a lot of work evidently resonates with the very characteristics of ancient spiritual wisdoms.

Clearly, the Buddha's realizations have always been available to scholars and thinkers. Ever since ancient Greece from well before Alexander the Great who invaded and occupied the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent already in 325 B.C.E., -the very period when Buddhism was flourishing there. Even well before this the famous Silk Routes had already served the world's great cultures for hundreds of generations as continuous channels of communication.

Buddhism in the West

There are various dates that could be used to mark an official introduction of Buddhism to the general public in the modern West. A significant publication, for example, was Eugene Burnouf's *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, which first appeared in Paris in 1844. Another key date could be 1893, when Buddhist teachers were an influential presence at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The clearest point of influence however, particularly for contemporary culture in the United States and Europe, were the lectures given by the famous Zen Master, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki at Columbia University in New York from 1950 onwards. D.T.Suzuki had already been publishing books on Buddhism in English since 1898. His lectures, however,

became legendary and influenced a great number of our most influential writers, artists, and musicians in deeply formative ways. One of them was the composer John Cage²⁷⁸ whose own influence has been vast.

Buddhism's pacifism and especially its non-theistic philosophy turned out to be meeting the spiritual hunger of the revolutionary 1960s peace generation. It appears that Buddhism's non-god ideas are more relevant than ever as the world regresses into axes of 'good and evil' in an economically renewed rivalry. Buddhism's special capacity to embody the values of unbiased compassion and deeper wisdom through its balanced philosophical understanding of universal interdependence along with its' compassionate ability to coexist with other world views, seems particularly helpful in regards to present day religious bigotry and human environmental devastation. In Buddhist philosophy all forms of non-harming faiths are seen as enhancing lives. This is denoted in the commonly used Buddhist phrase 'for the benefit of all sentient beings' encompassing life even beyond our own human experience.

Importantly in Buddhism there exists a deep understanding that any belief, including Buddhism itself, is nothing more than a strategy, a mere life-tool. In other words, neither religion nor philosophy, including Buddhism itself is ever the ultimate destination or solution. The classic Buddhist edict for this is: "A person trying to reach the other shore they must leave the boat once they reach there."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ <http://www.wvnorton.com/college/music/enj9/shorter/composers/cage.htm> accessed 09.11.2007

²⁷⁹ Batchelor, Stephen *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, Penguin, New York, 1997.

The influences and resonances of Buddhism have been wide ranging, not so much as a prescriptive religious doctrine, but as a way of seeing that can achieve higher levels. According to the Buddhist writer and scholar Stephen Batchelor,²⁸⁰ “Buddhism appeals to contemporary Western people because it places less emphasis on faith and more on actual practice. It entails *doing* something – namely transforming yourself – through a range of methods and exercises.” He finds that “practice has often come almost exclusively to mean an introspective spiritual discipline of one kind or another”. He makes the point that in current Western Buddhist understanding of practice, the meaning is changing from traditional introspection meditation to a more open and connected kind of life-attitude. This, Batchelor claims, is a mentality that is concerned with the quality of attention we bring to the way we conduct our lives from moment to moment and about the palpable quality and equality of connections we achieve.²⁸¹

Many past and contemporary artists it seems are intent on cultivating the possibility for satisfying aesthetic experiences engendered via an open and aware state of mind in them as well as in their audiences. To this end they practice first getting in touch with their deepest motivations and decide with an as aware as possible conscious mind to actualize, transform or manifest something for the highest good of all sentient beings as much as possible (=ethics+ aesthetics).

"As in the beautiful parable of the raft any dharma [teaching] is merely a temporary device to get you from one side of a river to another. Its meaning is completely distorted if it is raised to the status of an end in itself. For myself, the end for which the Buddhist path is the means can only be the penetration of this mystery of being thrown into birth only to be ejected again at death."

²⁸⁰ www.stephenbatchelor.org/ accessed 23.03.2008

²⁸¹ Batchelor, Stephen *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, Penguin, New York, 1997.

Marcel Duchamp - a closet Bodhisattva Artist?

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) appears to us the historical germinal point of conceptual art paving the way for the postmodern era. He said in an interview: “The word ‘art’ interests me very much. If it comes from Sanskrit, as I’ve heard, it signifies making.” Duchamp was probably referring to the ancient Indo-European root, *ar*, which means to join. It is the root of the Sanskrit word *ara*, which interestingly also signifies the spokes, or radius of a wheel and in Buddhism, the wheel is associated with the turning of ‘the wheel of Dharma’ – the liberating truth set in motion by the Buddha.²⁸² Duchamp claimed that initially his own work *Bicycle Wheel*, which he made a hundred years ago (!) in 1913 by attaching a bicycle wheel to a stool, was only ever meant for his own personal use. Duchamp had to remake the lost Paris original when he moved to New York, and late in his life between 1951 and 1964 he eventually authorized the creation of twelve more replicas.

Duchamp claimed from early on and throughout his long career that it is definitely one’s intentions that are of the highest importance in any art making. He was convinced that it is by one’s intentions that one ‘realizes’ or ‘makes real’ (manifests) anything. He said, “In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions.”²⁸³ Duchamp also discovered that there is a ‘gap’ that “represents the inability of the artist to

²⁸² Baas, Jacqueline and Jacob, Mary Jane *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Ahmanson-Murphy Collection UCLA, Los Angeles, 2004.

²⁸³ Duchamp, Marcel *The Creative Act*, A paper presented to the convention of the American Federation of Arts in Houston, Texas, April 1957. Listen to Marcel Duchamp reading it on: <http://ubu.artmob.ca/sound/aspn/mp3/duchamp1.mp3> accessed 05.12.2007

express fully his or her intentions”. This gap, according to Duchamp, can be filled by the participation of the spectator whose own realizations represent the “phenomenon of transmutation: the very act of transubstantiation in which inert matter or conscious moments are perceived as ‘works of art’.”²⁸⁴

Elsewhere Duchamp said, “The creative act is not formed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his or her own contributions to the creative act. In the end it is actually the viewer who makes the picture.”²⁸⁵

In ancient Sanskrit one can find a single word for Duchamp’s viewer-response theory of art, *rasa*. It translates as emotive aesthetics and it supposedly resides not in the maker/doer, nor the object/event, but in the perceiver during the act of perceiving – just as the taste of wine exists not in the vintner nor in the bottle, but in the one who swallows.²⁸⁶

Conceptual art was the twentieth century’s great contribution to the history of art and Marcel Duchamp, an artist who curiously defined art, as “a process of making” was its progenitor. The solution to the Koan – how can an artist ‘make’ conceptual art? – is the profound idea that art is made in the mind of the perceiver and that the viewer is thus also the ‘doer’ and visa versa. It is since Duchamp and others, like Joseph Beuys that doer and viewer have become acknowledged as equal participators in the game of art (doer=viewer=doer). According to Duchamp, the kind of consciousness that can perceive art in this way is a more

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasa> accessed 3.10.2008-Rasa (aesthetics) a concept in Indian art.

overall, inclusive and numinous awareness originated in the mind itself and it can therefore be activated and cultivated at will by anyone. Yet, in 1949, at a conference called ‘Western Round Table on Modern Art’, Duchamp further explained that, “Art cannot be understood through the rational intellect but is felt through an emotion presenting some analogy with a religious faith or a sexual attraction –like an aesthetic echo.”²⁸⁷ As such Duchamp’s theory of how art works is the precise opposite of the attitude “it’s art because I say it is” still being ascribed to Duchamp and to Conceptual Art.

The practice Duchamp initiated with works like *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and *Fountain* (1917) etc. shifted attention away from traditional artistic manufacture of art to the inner artistic and creative processes and relationships. Duchamp: “I was interested in ideas, not in visual products. I wanted to put painting back in the service of the mind.” His radical new art view shifted responsibility for the art process to include the perceiver as an integral, vital co-producer. In other words, ‘doer’ and ‘viewer’ were equalized which made entirely new acts of art construction possible.

This shift has since produced a profound change and it altered the entire cultural landscape of the twentieth century. “I literally believe that Duchamp made it possible for us to live as we do now”, said John Cage²⁸⁸ in one of his last interviews in 1992. Art today is increasingly understood as being immaterial and can now be understood as a reflection of certain conscious interrelations.

²⁸⁸ <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/cage/> accessed 25.05.2008

Marcel Duchamp changed not only how we experience art, but also how each of us is able to experience our own lives as conscious creative beings. Joseph Beuys, who was Duchamp's contemporary, proclaimed in all seriousness "Everyone is an artist". For Beuys: "to live is a creative act through conscious awareness".²⁸⁹ Like Duchamp, Beuys realized that everything in this world is worthy of attention, and furthermore he made us understand that the quality of our attention, and every single moment of conscious awareness achieved, is definitely a creative act that causes real shifts –everywhere instantly.

"If you wish," Duchamp said at the end of his life, "my art would be that of living: each second, each breath as a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral. It's a sort of constant euphoria".²⁹⁰

According to the critic and philosopher Arthur Danto²⁹¹ Duchamp had solved the age-old problem of overcoming the distinction of art and life. In Duchamp's art-life paradigm one actively tries to live in a higher kind of awareness where constant attention and vigilance form the basis for a creative life producing conscious acts regarded as art.

Heisenberg's²⁹² famous principle of indeterminacy - which he might as well have called the principle of interdependency - states that scientific concepts have meaning only in terms of the experiments used to measure them. In other words,

²⁸⁹ http://www.leninimports.com/joseph_beuys_bio.html accessed 25.05.2008

²⁹⁰ <http://www.marcelduchamp.net/> accessed 25.05.2008

²⁹¹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conceptual-art/> accessed 29.05.2008

²⁹² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qt-uncertainty/> accessed 02.04.2008 In quantum mechanics, the position and momentum of particles do not have precise values, but have a 'probability distribution'. There are actually no states in which a particle has both a definite position and a definite momentum. The narrower the probability distribution is in position, the wider it is in momentum and visa versa.

the content or the meaning of something is defined by and relies entirely on the context wherein it exists. And as Duchamp put it, “It is not what you see that is art, art is the gap that we are made *aware* of”. Both the making and the experiencing of art share a state of mind in which - as the psychiatrist Mark Epstein²⁹³ puts it “- self (subject) and art (object) feel reciprocally enhancing and mutually informative.”²⁹⁴ Our standing question then becomes: “What quality of attention are we bringing to this moment?” If to live consciously is a creative act then being an artist is the very act of treating something or everything with that attention. Furthermore, by continually observing or raising the quality of our attention intentionally we truly become active creative artists. It seems literally a self-enhancing circular phenomenon once set in motion. Hence, the *Bicycle Wheel*, which Duchamp claimed he initially made for his own personal use as a kind of constant reminder.

The aforementioned philosopher Arthur Danto was a young professor at Columbia University in the 1950s when he first sat in on some of the legendary lectures given by D.T. Suzuki. Danto wrote, “The direction of art history itself changed in what I think was a radical way. Whether Dr. Suzuki helped cause this change, or merely contributed to it, is not something to say with certainty by anyone. But the people who made the changes were themselves Suzuki’s students one way or another. It was here that my study of Buddhism, such as it

²⁹³ Mark Epstein’s books include *Thoughts Without a Thinker*, Basic Books, N.Y. 1995. And especially *Going to Pieces without Falling Apart*, Broadway Books, N.Y. 1998. -Both books deal with the difficult and counter-intuitive Eastern teachings of non-self, a concept that has sometimes proved so alien to the Western mind as to be out of reach for many Western Buddhists.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

was, and of Dr. Suzuki's writing in particular, came to my aid in understanding Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*", which Danto claims turned out to be a career-changing encounter.²⁹⁵ The key for him was Buddhism's assertion that there is no difference between illusion and reality and by extension, therefore, "nothing need distinguish artworks from mere real things." Art is not something that "looks" one way or another. "It is," Danto realized, "simply put a more conscious way of seeing."²⁹⁶

John Cage, another of Suzuki's many famous students, saw that there is no need for an art/life debate since as he put it: "I was no longer interested in destroying the barrier between art and life, or even blurring it. I was interested mainly in observing that there is no and never has been a barrier between the two."²⁹⁷

The art critic for the *New York* magazine, Kay Larson, claims that the 'enlightened' prince Siddhartha could be regarded as the world's first performance artist since he was at once completely free while at the same time completely connected with everyone and everything around him. Larson stated:

"The Buddha at his awakening saw that all beings have the same enlightened nature as himself and that we are all artists expressing and manifesting through the ongoing, minute-by-minute activity of making our own lives out of the flux of a super fluid world. Some of us may be more conscious of this process and may even manifest so-called art

²⁹⁵ Danto, Arthur *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, N.Y., 1992,.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ John Cage. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Wesleyan Paperback, New York, 1973, (first edition 1961).

(works) *deliberately* while for others this way of seeing is new and therefore not yet instantly apparent. In short we have come to realize that it is always our very perception that changes everything instantly”. Larson goes on, “It is precisely this understanding of human potential, which comprehends the active artist in each of us”, and this she believes is “Buddhism’s great contribution to a conversation about human creativity”.²⁹⁸

Joseph Beuys, one of the most famous 20th century German artists and a contemporary of Marcel Duchamp, made a well known work referring to him in his 1964 piece “*Das Schweigen Marcel Duchamps ist überbewertet*”²⁹⁹ (*The silence of Marcel Duchamp is overvalued*). Beuys like Duchamp spent his time and energy trying to bridge the separation, even apartheid as he saw it, of art and life. To be truly alive and free for him was the ultimate creative act and he believed that one of the greatest possible artworks was to live life as consciously as possible. He urged us through all that he made and said and especially through his self-conscious art actions to follow him in such a view of art-life as much as possible. The intention and aspirations he was trying to exemplify was the wish to self-realize constant awareness through continuous conference and dialogue, ultimately a fully conscious connectedness with everyone and everything as

²⁹⁸ Kay Larson in Jacqueline Bass and Mary Jane Jacob’s *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Ahmanson-Murphy Collection UCLA, Los Angeles, 2004.

²⁹⁹ 1964 prime time live transmission on German ZDF television of Beuys’ action “*Das Schweigen Marcel Duchamps is ueberbewertet*.”

much as possible. Beuys: "To make people free is the aim of art, therefore art for me is the science of freedom."³⁰⁰

The former museum director and exhibition curator Marcia Tucker declared, "Many of us in the visual arts feel the need for a sea change in the way our cultural institutions think about art, artists and audiences".³⁰¹ She believes that, "If contemporary art were to become a familiar part of people's lives – or at least, if people weren't made to feel that it is alienating and incomprehensible—then discomfort might turn to delight as imaginations are exercised and 'business as usual' is shut down for at least a little while".³⁰² She said further, "It is in qualitative, not quantitative terms that a solution needs to be found. That's why this seems a good time to explore the parallels between Buddhism and contemporary art. Buddhism teaches us to relate to the world with openness, acceptance, generosity, and joy", and asks: "could it teach us to relate to art in the same way?"³⁰³

View, Meditation, Action -and Duchamp

The Taiwanese art historian and critic, Tosi Lee³⁰⁴, has provided a description and critique of the current 'cosplay' (costume play) phenomenon where young people - especially in Japan and South East Asia - dress and pose as individual

³⁰⁰ Oman, Hiltrud *Joseph Beuys. Die Kunst auf dem Weg zum Leben*, Heyne Verlag, München, 1998.

³⁰¹ <http://www.marciatucker.com/publications.html> accessed 12.11.2007

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Tucker, Marcia "No Title," in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, ed. Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 2004, p 25.

³⁰⁴ Tosi Lee is the president of AICA Taiwan, International Association of Art Critics.

characters found in comic books (Japanese *Manga*³⁰⁵). Here he discovered parallels with Marcel Duchamp posing as his female alter-ego, Rose Selavy.³⁰⁶

Tosi Lee writes, “Duchamp’s cross dressing appears less like a symptom of an androgynous personality than a conscious and deliberate role-playing of a particular character from a story that characteristically he chose not to reveal.”³⁰⁷

He claims that the character Duchamp was acting out was a so-called Bodhisattva in female form. Lee’s Buddhist angle allows the work of Marcel Duchamp to be seen from a new perspective. It demands a rethinking of this most seminal twentieth-century artist while at the same time it could serve to explain why Duchamp constantly emphasized the pivotal importance of inner and ‘secret’ intentions in the process of art/life.

Duchamp was famously evasive about his own intentions his whole life, even about his own sources. At times, he deliberately promoted confusion about the possible meanings of his works and actions. Yet, Duchamp’s methodology for creating ‘conceptual’ art seems initially via some super conscious motivation and transposing it into active productions of certain mythologies and further kinds of extensions, up to and including material manifestations such as new words, material designs, even the manufacture of certain objects or artifacts, but not necessarily (i.e. see his use of many ready-made objects simply imbued with entirely new ‘conscious’ meanings).

³⁰⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manga> best site for overview accessed 05.04.2008

³⁰⁶ Rose Sélavy is considered a pun on the well known French phrase ‘Eros c'est la vie’ (‘love is life’).

³⁰⁷ Lee, Tosi *Fire Down Below and Watering, That’s Life: A Buddhist’s Readers. Response to Marcel Duchamp in Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Baas, Jacqueline and Jacob, Mary Jane (ed.), UCLA -Ahmanson-Murphy Collection, Los Angeles, 2004.

Duchamp was one of the first public artists to be acknowledged for practicing this newly expanded view of art inspiring another equally famous practitioner, Joseph Beuys, to deliberately and openly mythologize himself into the history art. They both consciously created reality effects based on a certain awareness using mainly stories and some props ('conventional' art works) which at times must have still been a necessary medium to achieve their intended art (=public actualization). Beuys admitted publicly that he saw his conceptual approach to art as the most effective strategy to affect the world around him positively, through intentionally lifting and expanding the consciousness of himself and of those whom he came in contact with now or later, directly or indirectly.

Duchamp proposed conscious life/art for every one as intention became the new focus together with an entirely different appreciation of the role of the audience. Duchamp popularized the idea that intention is always the original cause and the very source of a chain-reaction that finally results in certain (desired) effects including any possible psychological and physical manifestations.

Duchamp's work reveals to us a higher, yet practical conceptual overview of cause, condition, and effect making it possible for anyone to consciously create on different levels and in new dimensions. The understanding that all phenomena, including art, are dependent on one's perception and that art and illusion are cognitively equivalent has made reality a more flexible and workable medium for all of us. In short, the concept of immateriality acknowledges art's immaterial nature -opening up more subtle dimensions to operate in more and more consciously.

Like Beuys, Duchamp used his own art/life together with his ‘life’s story’ as the ultimate artwork wherein to express innermost desires, ideas and intentions as art. Any actual art works including physical pieces were seen as mere symbols, pointers, or directional beacons, while sometimes they also became a kind of book keeping record (i.e. for monetary income). As Beuys took on the mantle of a shaman, Duchamp decided to don a dress and become Rose Selavy. And since nothing about Duchamp is ever easy or shallow his cross-dressing might be less a symptom of an androgynous personality than the conscious and deliberate role-playing of a particular character. In fact, Duchamp once told an interviewer that in creating Rose Selavy he wanted to make a change, so as “to go from one religion to another.”³⁰⁸

According to Tosi Lee, Duchamp’s famous ‘cosplay’ might well have something to do with Buddhism since Eastern religions were well known to Duchamp and his intellectual contemporaries. The Dadaists had already quoted Taoist philosophy in their official writings. Daimonides quotes lines from the *Tao Te Ching* in his essay “*Zur Theorie des Dadaismus*”,³⁰⁹ and Walter Mehring referred to Lao Tzu and the Buddha in his essay “*Enthüllungen*” (Unveilings).³¹⁰ Both essays were published in the 1920 *Dada Almanach* edited by Richard Huelsenbeck, writing: “Dada is the American side of Buddhism,” and that “it raves because it knows how to be silent, it acts because it is in a state of

³⁰⁸ Lee, Tosi *Fire Down Below and Watering, That’s Life: A Buddhist’s Readers. Response to Marcel Duchamp in Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Baas, Jacqueline and Jacob, Mary Jane (ed.), UCLA -Ahmanson-Murphy Collection, Los Angeles, 2004.

³⁰⁹ Daimonides in *Zur Theorie des Dadaismus*, Neue Revue, Berlin 1920.

³¹⁰ Walter Mehring, *Enthüllungen*, DADA Almanach, Richard Huelsenbeck (ed), Zentralamts der deutschen DADA Bewegung, Berlin, 1920.

conscious meditation.”³¹¹ While the leader of the Surrealists André Breton,³¹² one of Duchamp’s earliest commentators and who characterized Duchamp as impenetrable. He said, “Anything one can say to the man is shattered against a polished glass that discloses nothing of what takes place in the depth.” Duchamp answered such accusations in typical Mahdyamika Buddhist form aspiring to a ‘viewless view’ of extremelessness: “You see, I don’t want to be pinned down to any position. My position is the lack of position, but of course, you can’t even talk about it, the minute you talk, you spoil the whole game”.³¹³

As a young boy in Paris, Duchamp had the well-known Czech painter Frantisek Kupka as his neighbor and personal mentor. Kupka practiced meditation and developed an extensive knowledge of the history of world religions. Moreover it seems to scholars today that in Duchamp’s early life, a stay in Munich in 1912 was perhaps the seminal event. He never told anyone where he went or what he did during his three months away. Duchamp kept this a mystery all his life, disclosing only that “I never spoke to a soul, but I had a great time”. It was after returning from Munich, according to his close friends, that Duchamp “lived quietly, seeing few people and often spent two weeks or more closeted in his studio.”³¹⁴ His friends noted that it was a huge turning point, yet they were never offered any explanation.³¹⁵

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² http://www.surrealist.com/what_is_surrealism.aspx accessed 04.05.2008

³¹³ Tomkins, Calvin *Duchamp: A Biography*, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., New York, 1996.

³¹⁴ Ibid, Tomkins further writes: “The drastic shift that became apparent in Duchamp’s work after his 1912 trip to Munich is a central element in the Duchamp legend. Up until then he had been a painter working within the recognized tradition of Western art since the Renaissance. In spite of his disdain for “retinal” painting and the impatience that had led him to assimilate and then quickly discard each new vanguard style, from Post-Impressionism to Cubism, Duchamp had stayed within the medium of oil on canvas and within the general concepts of art and the art

The young Duchamp arrived in Munich when there was a large exhibition at the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde of Professor Lucien Scherman's³¹⁶ immense new collection of objects illustrating daily life of ordinary people in parts of India, Burma, and Thailand. It contained numerous examples of various household items and tools, along with many Buddhist images and important original Buddhist scriptures. Following his Munich visit, Duchamp's work began incorporating a wide variety of readymade objects ranging from household implements, tools, and clothing. In the last year of his life, Duchamp admitted that Munich was the scene of his "complete liberation".³¹⁷

Tosi Lee specifically proposes that Duchamp used his Rose Selavy character to cosplay the female Bodhisattva of Compassion known as *Tara* (Indo-Tibetan) or *Kuan Yin* (Chinese) and that he consciously intended particular meanings for certain objects. The bottle brush in *Tu m'* and the perfume bottle in *Belle Haleine/Eau de Voilette* could be seen as representing the Bodhisattva's traditional attributes since watering, for example is regarded as a symbol of the compassionate ideal of providing nourishing wisdom and water for life which became Duchamp's vocation - "Arroser, c'est la vie." Even in his last years,

process that were shared by his colleagues and contemporaries. After 1912 this was no longer the case. Not only traditional methods and materials but the whole notion of the artist's sensibility as the guiding creative principle simply disappeared from his approach, to be replaced by mechanical drawing, written notations, the spirit of irony, and experiments with chance as a substitute for the artist's conscious control."

³¹⁵ Ibid

³¹⁶ Famous German Indologist and ethnographer Scherman traveled to Ceylon, South India, Burma and North India where he acquired ethnographica for the Munich Museum. He taught Sanskrit but also numerous seminars in anthropology, mainly on Indic religions, peoples, and on Buddhism. <http://www.anthropology-online.de/Aga05/0131.html> accessed 22.04.2008

³¹⁷ Lee, Tosi *Fire Down Below and Watering, That's Life: A Buddhist's Readers. Response to Marcel Duchamp in Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, Baas, Jacqueline and Jacob, Mary Jane (ed.), UCLA -Ahmanson-Murphy Collection, Los Angeles, 2004.

Duchamp was still committed to providing everyone, every household, with his water of wisdom. Hence, his *Water and Gas on Every Floor* (1958) and his farewell masterpiece, *Etant donnees: 1. la chute d'eau; 2. le gaz d'eclairage* ("Having given: 1. the waterfall; 2. the illuminating gas") from 1946-66.³¹⁸

Tosi Lee's reading of Duchamp's 1922 letter to Tristan Tzara as a sign of Duchamp's desire to act as an artist with a Bodhisattva's motivation seems plausible since Duchamp proposed there to make Dada amulets that, "would protect against certain maladies, against life's multiple troubles, something like those little pink pills, which cure everything.... We would recommend that the insignia be worn as a bracelet, badge, cuff links, or tiepin...." He emphasized to Tzara, "You get my idea. Nothing of the 'artistic' literature about it, just straight medicine, a universal panacea."³¹⁹ Duchamp's proposed amulets were similar to traditional Buddhist protection cords offered in various forms to worshippers in different Buddhist traditions to guard against danger and misfortune.

An original Sanskrit text describes 'One who confers the gift of fearlessness is *Abhayamdada*'.³²⁰ *Abhayam* means "fearless" while *dada* means "giver". Tosi Lee's view of Duchamp as Bodhisattva artist could explain Duchamp's advice, "If you have a toothache, go to your dentist and ask him if he is a Dada."³²¹

Lee believes Duchamp deliberately used terms that interlinked with certain Mahayana Buddhist concepts particularly as they contained both philosophical

³¹⁸ Ibid

³¹⁹ Ibid

³²⁰ Abhayamdada:—Giving of fearlessness—Giving assurance of safety—Fearless charity.
<http://www.phatgiao.com/dict/tp-pv/pv-01.htm> accessed 16.06.2008

³²¹ Ibid.

ideas as well as spiritual methods. The Mahayana path itself is entirely based upon and defined by a specific and self-conscious intention, the 'Bodhisattva's motivation'. A Bodhisattva is simply someone who deliberately generates the Bodhisattva's motivation whereby all actions, as much as possible, are determined by a deep desire and an active decision (intention) to help all sentient beings (oneself included) to gain complete liberation from pain and suffering.

In 1967, his eightieth year, Duchamp personally designed a poster for the great Paris 'Duchamp Retrospective' showing a montage of his own right hand, palm facing us with a cigar between his fingers. In Buddhist iconography the image of the right hand, palm out, is the hand gesture (Sanskrit *mudra*) of granting fearlessness, originally the *Abhayamdada mudra*. This hand sign is also one of the identifying gestures of *Kuan Yin/Tara*, the compassionate Bodhisattva of fearlessness with whom, according to Lee, Marcel Duchamp identified. As mentioned, a Bodhisattva's actions are defined by his or her innermost ('secret') intention to help all living beings - a motivation which no one else needs to be conscious of in order for it to be effective. In fact the ancient texts claim that the less a Bodhisattva's motivation is advertised or even suspected the more productive and effective the actions thus performed.³²² Duchamp might well have made use of these ancient wisdoms as a ready-made philosophy fitting well

³²² The term 'Bodhisatta', (Pali language) is attributed to the Buddha in the original Pali Canon as referring to himself both in his previous lives and as a young man in his current life, prior to his enlightenment, The term, therefore, connotes a being who is 'bound for enlightenment'. In Mahayana Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is one who aspires to become Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. A Bodhisattva is the one who has determination to free sentient beings from *samsara*, the cycle of death, rebirth and suffering. This type of motivation (mind) is known as *bodhicitta*; Sanskrit for the mind of awakening.
<http://www.buddhanet.net/budsas/ebud/ebdha238.htm> accessed 02.08.2007

with his own desire of trying to raise the general spiritual milieu and practical intelligence in order for us to become more aware and free and hence suffer less.

Tosi Lee is convinced that Marcel Duchamp saw his own life's work as that of an artist performing Bodhisattva deeds. He strongly believes that Duchamp wanted to heal and soothe all kinds of gross and subtle sufferings of others as well as for himself through the practical compassion of raising our collective consciousness. Lee suggests that Duchamp used his own life as his greatest artistic example together with certain material artworks serving as pointers or markers – showing rather than prescribing the way. Duchamp's was a strategy of encouraging and inspiring our own inner natural urges to grow in love and realizations in order that each of us would consciously start striving to become truly free and truly connected.

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Melbourne, 2012

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Conclusion

*Could the knowledge of immateriality enhance
one's enjoyment of abstract art (for example)?*

Yes, I believe it can. Painting or viewing abstract paintings could well be used as a program of attentiveness toward where 'freedom' might lie.

Painterly expressions can be a kind of exploration combining seemingly opposite ideas concerning rational thought on the one hand and intuitive imagination on the other - especially in the purely abstract mode. The rectangular proportions of a picture already creates the 'either/or dilemma' of landscape versus portrait. With a pure abstract rectangular canvas hung horizontally for example one seems to struggle not to have preconceived ideas of landscape while hung vertically we seem to automatically tend to see the phenomena of 'figure on ground' always relying on some *given* force of gravity at least. Our many such preconceived (subconscious) views have to do with our day-to-day struggles and experiences, something art (on the whole) wishes to lift us up from.

Not falling into all kinds of perceptual traps appears to be the artistic wrestle for artist and audiences alike. I believe this also to be the problem most researching scientists, inventors and all innovators have to deal with. Succeeding in overcoming perceptual traditions and outpacing one's own inner and outer critics while at the same time being open to entirely new connections is the crux of any

research that might eventually contribute in a small way toward evolutionary progress.

Yet, creativity, like evolution appears to happen mostly by ‘lucky accident’ (=meaning evolution happens mainly through multiple repetition -causing sequence mutation).

Thus success seems achieved through a combination of intention, courage, and bone headed persistence and not least through some auspicious and fortuitous convergence of multiple factors that mostly remain a mystery.

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Melbourne, 2012

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Attachment 1

The Chelsea Hotel Manifesto

by Yves Klein³²³

Due to the fact that I have painted monochromes for fifteen years,

Due to the fact that I have created pictorial immaterial states,

Due to the fact that I have manipulated the forces of the void,

Due to the fact that I have sculpted with fire and with water painted with fire and with water,

Due to the fact that I have painted with living brushes - in other words, the nude body of live models covered with paint: these living brushes were under the constant direction of my commands, such as "a little to the right; over to the left now: to the right again, etc.. By maintaining myself at a specific and obligatory distance from the surface to be painted, I am able to resolve the problem of detachment.

³²³ Yves Klein, "*Chelsea Hotel Manifesto*," originally written in English in New York in 1961 with the collaboration of Neil Levine and John Archambault for a solo show at Leo Castelli's.

Due to the fact that I have invented the architecture and the urbanism of air - of course, this new conception transcends the traditional meaning of the terms "architecture and urbanism" - my goal from the beginning was to reunite with the legend of Paradise Lost. This project was directed toward the habitable surface of the Earth by the climatization of the great geographical expanses through an absolute control over the thermal and atmospheric situation in their relation to our morphological and psυχical conditions.

Due to the fact that I have proposed a new conception of music with my "monotone - silence - symphony"

Due to the fact that I have presented a theatre of the void, among countless other adventures...

I would never have believed, fifteen years ago at the time of my earliest efforts, that I would suddenly feel the need to explain myself - to satisfy the desire to know the reason of all that has occurred and the even still more dangerous effect, in other words - the influence my art has had on the young generation of artists throughout the world today.

It dismays me to hear that a certain number of them think that I represent a danger to the future of art - that I am one of those disastrous and noxious results of our time that must be crushed and destroyed before the propagation of my evil completely takes over.

I regret to reveal that this was not my intention; and to happily proclaim to those who evince faith in the multiplicity of new possibilities in the path that I prescribe - Take care! Nothing has crystallized as yet; nor can I say what will happen after this. I can only say that today I am no longer as afraid as I was yesterday in the face of the souvenir of the future.

An artist always feels uneasy when called upon to speak of his own work. It should speak for itself, particularly when it is valid.

What can I do? Stop now?

No, what I call "the indefinable pictorial sensibility" absolutely escapes this very personal solution.

So...

I think of those words I was once inspired to write. "Would not the future artist be he who expressed through an eternal silence an immense painting possessing no dimension?"

Gallery-goers, like any other public, would carry this immense painting in their memory (a remembrance which does not derive at all from the past, but is solely cognizant of the indefinable sensibility of man).

It is necessary to create and recreate a constant physical fluidity in order to receive the grace which allows a positive creativity of the the void.

Just as I created a "monotone - silence - symphony" in 1947, composed in two parts, - one broad continuous sound followed by an equally broad and extended silence, endowed with a limitless dimension - in the same way, I attempt to set before you a written painting of the short history of my art, followed naturally by a pure and effective silence.

My account will close with the creation of a compelling a posteriori silence whose existence in our communal space, after all - the space of a single being - is immune to the destructive qualities of physical noise.

Much depends upon the success of my written painting in its initial technical and audible phase. Only then will the extraordinary a posteriori silence, in the midst of noise as well as in the cell of physical silence, operate in a new and unique zone of pictorial immaterial sensibility.

Having reached today this point in space and knowledge, I propose to gird my loins, then to draw back in retrospection of the diving board of my evolution. In the manner of an Olympic diver, in the most classic technique of the sport, I must prepare for my leap into the future of today by prudently moving backward,

without ever losing sight of the edge, today consciously attained - the immaterialization of art.

What is the purpose of the retrospective journey in time?

Simply, I wish to avoid that you or I fall under the power of that phenomenon of dreams, which describes the feelings and landscapes provoked by our brusque landing in the past. This psychological past is precisely the anti-space that I put behind me during the adventures of these past fifteen years.

At present, I am particularly excited by "bad taste". I have the deep feeling that there exists in the very essence of bad taste a power capable of creating those things situated far beyond what is traditionally termed "The Work of Art". I wish to play with human feeling, with its "morbidity" in a cold and ferocious manner. Only very recently I have become a sort of grave digger of art (oddly enough, I am using the very terms of my enemies). Some of my latest works have been coffins and tombs. During the same time I succeeded in painting with fire, using particularly powerful and searing gas flames, some of them measuring three to four meters high. I use these to bathe the surface of the painting in such a way that it registered the spontaneous trace of fire.

In sum, my goal is twofold: first of all, to register the trace of human sentimentality in present-day civilization; and then, to register the trace of fire, which has engendered this very same civilization - that of the fire itself. And all

of this because the void has always been my constant preoccupation; and I believe that fires burn in the heart of the void as well as in the heart of man.

All facts that are contradictory are authentic principles of an explanation of the universe. Truly, fire is one of these principles, essentially contradictory, one from the other, since it is both the sweetness and torture that lies at the heart and origin of our civilization. But what stirs this search for feeling in me through the making of super-graves and super coffins? What stirs this search in me for the imprint of fire? Why search for the Trace itself?

Because every work of creation, regardless of its cosmic place, is the representation of a pure phenomenology - all that is phenomena manifests itself. This manifestation is always distinct from form and it is the essence of the Immediate, the Trace of the Immediate.

A few months ago, for example, I felt the urge to register the signs of atmospheric behaviour by recording the instantaneous traces of spring showers on a canvas, of south winds, and of lightning (needless to say, the last-mentioned ended in a catastrophe). For instance, a trip from Paris to Nice might have been a waste of time had I not spent it profitably by recording the wind. I placed a canvas, freshly coated with paint, on the roof of my white Citron. As I drove down Route National 7 at 100 kilometres an hour, the heat, the cold, the light, the wind, and the rain all combined to age my canvas prematurely. At least thirty to forty years were condensed into a single day. The only annoying thing about

this project is that for the entire trip I was unable to separate myself from my painting.

My atmospheric imprints of a few months ago were preceded by vegetal imprints. After all, my air is to extract and obtain the trace of the immediate from all natural objects, whatever their origin - be the circumstance human, animal, vegetable, or atmospheric.

I would like now, with your permission and close attention, to divulge to you possibly the most important and certainly the most secret phase of my art. I do not know if you are going to believe me - it is cannibalism. After all, is it not preferable to be eaten than to be bombed to death? I can hardly develop this idea that has tormented me for years. I leave it up to you to draw your own conclusions with regard to the future of art.

If we step back again, following the lines of my evolution, we arrive at the moment when I conceived of painting with the aid of living brushes. That was two years ago. The purpose of this was to be able to attain a defined and constant distance between myself and the painting during the time of creation.

Many critics claimed that by this method of painting I was doing nothing more than recreating the method that has been called "action painting". But now, I would like to make it clear that this endeavor is distinct from "action painting" in

so far as I am completely detached from all physical work during the time of creation.

Just to cite one example of the anthropometric errors found within the deformed ideas spread by the international press - I speak of that group of Japanese painters who with great refinement used my method in a strange way. In fact, these painters actually transformed themselves into living brushes. By diving themselves in colour and then rolling on their canvases, they became representative of ultra-action-painters! Personally, I would never attempt to smear paint over my body and thus to become a living brush; to the contrary, I would rather put on my tuxedo and don white gloves.

It would never cross my mind to soil my hands with paint. Detached and distant, the work of art must be completed under my eyes and under my command. As the work begins its completion, I stand there - present at the ceremony, immaculate, calm, relaxed, perfectly aware of what is taking place and ready to receive the art being born into the tangible world.

What directed me towards anthropometry? The answer can be bound in the work that I make during the years 1956 to 1957 while I took part in the giant adventure, the creation of pictorial immaterial sensibility.

I had just removed from my studio all earlier works. The result - an empty studio. All that I could physically do was to remain in my empty studio and the

pictorial immaterial states of creation marvellously unfolded. However, little by little, I became mistrustful of myself, but never of the immaterial. From that moment, following the example of all painters, I hired models. But unlike the other, I merely wanted to work in their company rather than have them pose for me. I had been spending too much time alone in the empty studio; I no longer wanted to remain alone with the marvellous blue void which was in the process of opening.

Though seemingly strange, remember that I was perfectly aware of the fact that I experienced none of that vertigo, felt by all my predecessors, when they found themselves face to face with the absolute void that is, quite naturally, true pictorial space.

But how long could my security in this awareness endure?

Years ago, the artist went directly to his subject, worked outdoors in the country, had his feet firmly planted on the ground - it was healthy.

Today, easel-painters have become academics and have reached the point of shutting themselves in their studios in order to confront the terrifying mirrors of their canvases. Now the reason I was pushed to use nude models is all but evident: it was a way of preventing the danger of secluding myself in the overly spiritual spheres of creation, thus breaking with the most basic common sense repeatedly affirmed by our incarnate condition.

The shape of the body, its lines, its strange colours hovering between life and death, hold no interest for me. Only the essential, pure affective climate of the flesh is valid.

Having rejected nothingness, I discovered the void. The meaning of the immaterial pictorial zones, extracted from the depth of the void which by that time was of a very material order. Finding it unacceptable to sell these immaterial zones for money, I insisted in exchange for the highest quality of the immaterial, the highest quality of material payment - a bar of pure gold. Incredible as it may seem, I have actually sold a number of these pictorial immaterial states.

So much could be said about my adventure in the immaterial and the void that the result would be an overly extended pause while steeped in the present elaboration of a written painting.

Painting no longer appeared to me to be functionally related to the gaze, since during the blue monochrome period of 1957 I became aware of what I called the pictorial sensibility. This pictorial sensibility exists beyond our being and yet belongs in our sphere. We hold no right of possession over life itself. It is only by the intermediary of our taking possession of sensibility that we are able to purchase life. Sensibility enables us to pursue life to the level of its base material

manifestations, in the exchange and barter that are the universe of space, the immense totality of nature.

Imagination is the vehicle of sensibility!

Transported by (effective) imagination we attain life, that very life which is absolute art itself.

Absolute art, what mortal men call with a sensation of vertigo the summum of art, materializes instantaneously. It makes its appearance in the tangible world, even as I remain at a geometrically fixed point, in the wake of extraordinary volumetric displacements with a static and vertiginous speed.

The explanation of the conditions that led me to pictorial sensibility, is to be found in the intrinsic power of the monochromes of my blue period of 1957. This period of blue monochromes was the fruit of my quest for the indefinable in painting which Delacroix the master could already intimate in his time.

From 1956 to 1946, my monochrome experiments, tried with various other colors than blue, never allowed me to lose sight of the fundamental truth of our time - namely that form, henceforth, would no longer be a simple linear value, but rather a value of impregnation. Once, in 1946, while still an adolescent, I was to sign my name on the other side of the sky during a fantastic "realistico-imaginary" journey. That day, as I lay stretched upon the beach of Nice, I began

to feel hatred for birds which flew back and forth across my blue, cloudless sky, because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work.

Birds must be eliminated.

Thus, we humans will have acquired the right to evolve in full liberty without any physical and spiritual constraint.

Neither missiles nor rockets nor sputniks will render man the "conquistador" of space.

Those means derive only from the phantom of today's scientists who still live in the romantic and sentimental spirit of the XIX century.

Man will only be able to take possession of space through the terrifying forces, the ones imprinted with peace and sensibility. He will be able to conquer space - truly his greatest desire - only after having realized the impregnation of space by his own sensibility. His sensibility can even read into the memory of nature, be it of the past, of the present, and of the future!

It is our true extra-dimensional capacity for action!

If proofs, precedents or predecessors are needed, let me then cite Dante, who in the Divine Comedy, described with absolute precision what no traveller of his

time could reasonably have discovered, the invisible constellation of the Northern Hemisphere known as the Southern Cross;

Jonathan Swift, in his Voyage to Laputa, gave the distances and periods of rotation of two satellites of Mars though they were unknown at the time;

When American astronomer, Asaph Hall, discovered them in 1877, he realized that his measurements were the same as those of Swift. Seized by panic, he named them Phobos and Deimos, Fear and Terror! With these two words - Fear and Terror - I find myself before you in the year 1946, ready to dive into the void.

Long Live the Immaterial!

And now,

Thank you for your kind attention.

Yves Klein

Attachment 2

The Heart Sutra

(Translation by Ken McLeod)³²⁴

I bow to Lady Perfection of Wisdom.

Thus I heard at one time. Lord Buddha was sitting at Vulture Peak Mountain in Rajagriha, with a great gathering of the sangha of monks and the sangha of bodhisattvas. At that time, Lord Buddha entered an absorption, called Profound Radiance, that examines experience. At the same time, noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, while practicing the profound perfection of wisdom, looked in this way: he saw the five heaps to be empty of nature.

Then, through the power of the Buddha, venerable Shariputra said to noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, "How does a son or daughter of the noble family, who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom, train?"

³²⁴ McLeod, Ken, translator, Website: *Unfettered Mind, Pragmatic Buddhism*. Translation taken from <http://www.unfetteredmind.com/translations/heart.php>, accessed 27 April 2008. Ken McLeod (born 1948) is a Buddhist teacher and writer who lives in Los Angeles, California. He was born in England and grew up in Ontario, Canada. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_McLeod and <http://www.unfetteredmind.com/translations/heart.php> accessed 08.06.2008

Addressed in this way, noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, said to venerable Shariputra, "Shariputra, a son or daughter of the noble family who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom looks in this way: see the five heaps to be empty of nature.

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, concept, mental formation, and consciousness are emptiness.

Therefore, Shariputra, all experience is emptiness. It is not defined. It is not born or destroyed, impure or free from impurity, nor incomplete or complete.

Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness, there is no form, no feelings, no concepts, no mental formations, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no appearance, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no mind object; no eye element up to no mind element, no mind object element, no mind consciousness element; no ignorance, no end of ignorance up to no old age and death, no end of old age and death; no suffering, no origin, no cessation, no path; no pristine awareness, no attainment, and no non-attainment.

Therefore, Shariputra, with nothing to attain, bodhisattvas rely on and rest in the perfection of wisdom. Their minds are not clouded and they have no fear. They go completely beyond error and come to the end of nirvana. All the buddhas of

the three times, by means of the perfection of wisdom, fully awoken to unsurpassable, true, complete awakening.

Therefore, know the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, a mantra of great understanding, an unsurpassed mantra, a mantra equal to the unequalled, a mantra that completely calms all suffering, to be true because it is not false. Thus, to voice the mantra of the perfection of wisdom:

om gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha

Thus, Shariputra, do all bodhisattva mahasattvas train in the profound perfection of wisdom."

Then Lord Buddha arose from that absorption and confirmed noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, with these words, "Yes, yes, o son of noble family; that's it, that's it. One practices the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have taught: all those who have gone there will be filled with joy."

Then venerable Shariputra and noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, that whole assembly and the world with its gods, humans, demigods, and sky spirits, rejoiced and praised the words of Lord Buddha.

