Title: Incidence of Catastrophe

Date: 1987-88

Media: Video (color, stereo sound); 43:51 min.

Video Link: https://vimeo.com/5580721

Description:

Inspired by the novel *Thomas the Obscure* by Maurice Blanchot wherein the protagonist of the novel is the reader of the novel he is in (who may well be Blanchot himself). In the video, Thomas the protagonist is played by Hill which confounds the self-reflexive nature of the book’s relationships all the more, making the video something of a “transcreation.” The “reader” begins in the liquidity of the text almost as if he were waking from drowning. Images of the sea ravishing the shore – small cliffs of sand eroding and collapsing – are inter-cut with extreme close-ups of text and the texture of the page and book itself being flooded with ocean waves. In scene after scene the reader attempts to re-enter the book only to find himself a part of intense dreams and hallucinations. Thomas/Hill reads the book, when, suddenly, he feels he is being watched by the words. The character then experiences the book as a forest of words he is fighting through. Another “chapter” finds him alone in his room at night, overcome by a strange illness, in which the vision of the text has him vomiting violently. The text infiltrates the reader’s entire experience. Thinking he is still capable of functioning socially, the character finds himself at dinner with a group of hotel guests. Their conversation turns into isolated words that, like the sand, erode and wash away with seemingly all possibilities of meaning. The final scene shows
the reader in the form of Hill physically and mentally destroyed. Cowering naked in the fetal position, he lies in his own excrement on a white-tiled floor, babbling unintelligible sounds. The pages of the book have grown into monumental walls with colossal letters that menacingly surround and imprison the naked body.


**Spoken Text:**

*Incidence of Catastrophe* includes a dinner party scene in which the actors improvised a dialogue incorporating single words specifically selected by the artist from Maurice Blanchot’s *Thomas the Obscure*. Following the dinner party scene, various manipulated words and phrases (including "similar," "just," "it went," "learned," "vague," "swum," "here," "obstacle," "this and that") become audible and are at times repeated.

**Bibliography:**


*Gary Hill: DISTURBANCE (among the jars)*. Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Musée d’Art Moderne, 1988, unpaginated.


*The Thirteenth Atlanta Film & Video Festival.* Program notes. Atlanta: IMAGE Film/Video Center and High Museum of Art, 1989, unpaginated.


Romano, Gianni. “Inasmuch as it is always already taking place.” *Lapiz* 80 (October 1991), pp. 36 – 41.


Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *Gary Hill: HanD HearD/liminal objects*. Paris: Galerie des
Archives; Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Arts, 1996, unpaginated.


"And if the Right Hand Did not Know What the Left Hand is Doing." (German translation). *Noëma Art Journal* 49 (October-November 1998), pp. 86, 87.


Rowlands, Penelope. “Gary Hill’s Hall of Mirrors.” ARTnews 100, 5 (May 2001), p. 178.


Exhibition History:


Solo screening. Espace lyonnais d’art contemporain (ELAC), Lyon, France, July 26 and September 27, 1988.


Festival International du Nouveau Cinema et de Vidéo Montréal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, October 20 – 30, 1988.


“Between the Silences: The Videoworks of Gary Hill,” Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley, California, February 19, 1989.


Athens International Film and Video Retrospective, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, April 28 – May 6, 1989.

Atlanta Film and Video Festival, Woodruff Arts Center, Atlanta, Georgia, May 9 – 14, 1989.


"Les Cent jours d’art contemporain de Montréal 1989," Centre international d’art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, September 1 – December 3, 1989.


Scan 90 Videoart Spring Festival, Heineken Village Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, March 10 – 18.
1990.


“Gary Hill: O lugar do outro/where the other takes place,” Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, July 1 – 6, 1997 (not the full run of the exhibition); Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, October 3 – November 2, 1997.


“Gary Hill,” Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, January 30 – May 3, 1998.


Solo exhibition. Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Aarhus, Denmark, January 17 – April 5, 1999.

Group exhibition. TV Gallery, Moscow, Russia, January 27, 1999.


“Hill(scape),” Extra Microwave Media Art Festival (organized by Videotage), Hong Kong Space Museum Lecture Hall, Hong Kong, January 14 – 31, 2001 (January 20 screening).


Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, March 14 - 24, 2002 (entire program February 28 - March 24, 2002).


“30 Year – 30 Voices: A retrospective celebrating the 30th anniversary of Videonale Bonn,” Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany, August 24 - October 5, 2014.

"Gary Hill," 37 Moscow International Film Festival/Media Forum, Cinema October, June 21, 2015.

Notes:

Camera / Lighting: Rex Barker

With Ramone Cyrus McLane, Lou Hetler, George Catalano, Joy Cohen, Diane Wagner, Phyllis Bannister, Ed Boyd, and Maria Lodahl