Title: Why Do Things Get in a Muddle? (Come on Petunia)

Date: 1984
Media: Video (color, stereo sound); 32:00 min.

Video Link: https://vimeo.com/45472623

Description:

This tape is the first of Hill’s works for which he deliberately wrote a screenplay. The title defines the piece’s starting point: Alice in Wonderland asks her omniscient father why things get in a muddle. They then talk on a metalinguistic level (i.e. about language using language). A glimpse through the looking glass reveals an inversion of the customary order of things. The father ingests the smoke from his pipe, Alice does not so much blink her eyelids momentarily open as stare wide-eyed, and the playing cards fall out of the air in an orderly manner into the girl’s hand. The language of the two protagonists is strangely slurred and partially incomprehensible. Gradually the reason for these phenomena becomes clear. Almost all the passages are being played and spoken backwards, and the tape can likewise be played backwards, with the result that at first sight the action appears plausible. This also explains why at second glance the movements of the protagonists’ bodies look strangely mechanical. Hill made phonetic notes of the texts spoken backwards by Alice and her father. At the end of the tape, when Alice is standing in front of the looking glass, the letters of the subtitle (“Come on Petunia”) logically regroup as “once upon a time.”


Spoken Text:

Bibliography:


National Video Festival. Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1984, p. 64.


Film Video Performance Tage Luzern. Program notes. Luzern: Kulturpanorama am Löwenplatz,
1985, unpaginated.


“Video as Art.” Pia, Japan (February 22, 1985).

Hagen, Charles. "Tube Art (Take Out)." The Village Voice (May 14, 1985), pp. 46, 47.


The Black Maria Film Festival. Program notes. Bloomfield, New Jersey: Thomas A. Edison/Black Maria Film & Video Festival, 1986, unpaginated.


“Video’s New Wave.” Dial Thirteen (May 1986).


The Situated Image. San Diego: Mandeville Gallery, University of California, San Diego, 1987,


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


Campeau, Sylvain. “Epistémologie de la réalité visuelle: Musée d’Art Contemporain, Montréal.” *Vie des Arts,* Montreal 42, 170 (Spring 1998), p. 82.


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


24 – 25.


**Exhibition History:**


National Video Festival, American Film Institute, Los Angeles, California, September 20 – 23, 1984.


Solo exhibition. American Center, Kyoto, Japan, April 1985.

Solo exhibition. American Center, Sapporo, Japan, April 1985.


1985 Athens Video Festival, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, November 6 – 9, 1985.


"Video Discourse: Mediated Narratives,” La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California, February 6 – April 5, 1987.

Athens International Video Festival, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, March 5 – March 7, 1987.


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


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


Japan 92 Video and Television Festival: “Prospectus for a TV Art Channel,” Spiral, Tokyo, 

"Gary Hill," (traveling exhibition organized by the Musée national d’art moderne, Centre 
Georges Pompidou, Paris, France), Musée national d’art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 
Paris, France, November 25, 1992 – January 24, 1993; Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno 
(IVAM), Centre del Carme, Valencia, Spain, February 26 – May 2, 1993; Stedelijk Museum, 
Amsterdam, The Netherlands, August 28 – October 10, 1993; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria, 

Solo screening. Establissements Phonographiques de l’Est, Paris, France, November 25, 


Solo screening, London Film Festival, Museum of the Moving Image, London, England, 
November 5, 1993.


ForumBHZvideo, Festival Internacional de Video, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, November 10 – 15, 
1993.

"Gary Hill: Sites Recited," Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California, December 3, 


June 7 – August 28, 1994.

911 Media Arts Center, Seattle, Washington, July 8, 1994.

“Gary Hill,” Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California, December 19, 1994 – 
March 12, 1995.

“Gary Hill," (travelling exhibition organized by Riksutställningar, Stockholm, Sweden) Moderna


“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.


“Hill(scape),” Extra Microwave Media Art Festival (organized by Videotage), Hong Kong Space


Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, February 28 – March 6, 2002 (entire program February 28 - March 24, 2002).

“Say Hello to Peace and Tranquility,” Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/Time Based Arts, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, March 22 – April 27, 2002. Travelled to: Nicolaj Center for Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark, April 26 – June 2, 2002; hARTware, Dortmund, Germany, early 2003; Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio, March 16 – April 19, 2003.


“Outer Ear Festival of Sound,” Experimental Sound Studio, Chicago, Illinois, December 4 and 8, 2005.


"Why do things get in a muddle?," Fotogalleriet, Oslo, Norway, November 11 — December 17,
Notes:

With Kathy [Katherine] Bourbonais and Charles Stein.

Hill considered making this work the first in a trilogy of metalogues. A second work, titled *Why Do Things Have Outlines (or A Cut Along a Dotted Line)*, was partially realized in a workshop in France. The proposed title for the third work was *Why Do French Men?*