G A R Y H I L L





Title:BEACON (Two Versions of the Imaginary)

Date:1990

Media: Mixed media installation

Video Link :

Description:

One aluminum pipe containing two modified 4-inch black-and-white video monitors (cathode ray tubes removed from chassis) with projection lenses, motor, slip rings, piping, relay switch, four

speakers, dual quad voltage-controlled audio panner (two audio inputs, four audio outputs), two-channel synchronizer, two laserdisc players and two laserdiscs (black-and-white; mono sound)

Dimensions of aluminum pipe: 54 long x 6 diameter in. (137 x 15.24 cm.)

Unique

Note: The work was commissioned directly from the artist by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1990 for the exhibition Energieën*.*

Beacon (Two Versions of the Imaginary) consists of an aluminum cylinder, measuring 54 long x 6 diameter inches (137 x 15.24 cm.) and equipped with a 4-inch black-and-white monitor and projection lens at either end, that is suspended from the ceiling and rotates approximately one revolution per six minutes. Images are projected out the ends of the cylinder onto the four walls of the space. Standing figures are seemingly revealed by the "beacon," as if the revolving light illuminated them in the darkness; alternating exchanges by a man and a woman read excerpts from Maurice Blanchot's essays "Essential Solitude" and "Two Versions of the Imaginary." At one point images of a mother and her child gaze across the space, their faces reflective with fascination. The series of projected images ends with images of a stream, in which water flows towards the viewer (i.e., as if into the beam) in one projection and away from the viewer (as if out of the beam) in the other. The projections continually change their shape and clarity from sharp to completely unfocused. Only when the cylinder projects perpendicularly onto the facing walls do the images have a rectangular form. Otherwise, ever-changing trapezoidal forms grow and contract, at times seemingly floating off the walls. It is never possible to view two images at once, because the light coming from the ends of the cylinder is aimed in opposite directions.

Spoken Text:

Sources for the spoken and written texts are from the essays "The Essential Solitude" and "Two Versions of the Imaginary" in *The Gaze of Orpheus* by Maurice Blanchot (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1981) pp. 73 – 77, 79 – 81:

But when we confront things themselves, if we stare at a face, a corner of a room, doesn't it also sometimes happen that we abandon ourselves to what we see, that we are at its mercy, powerless before this presence that is suddenly strangely mute and passive? This is true, but what has happened is that the thing we are staring at has sunk into its image, that the image has returned to that depth of impotence into which everything falls back. The "real" is that with which our relationship is always alive and which always leaves us the initiative, addressing that power we have to begin, that free communication with the beginning that is ourselves; and to the extent that we are in the day, the day is still contemporary with its awakening. ("Two Versions of the Imaginary," p. 80)

According to the usual analysis, the image exists after the object: the image follows from it; we see, then we imagine. After the object comes the image. "After" means that first the thing must move away in order to allow itself to be grasped again. But that distancing is not the simple change of place of a moving object, which nevertheless remains the same. Here the distancing is at the heart of the thing. The thing was there, we grasped it in the living motion of a comprehensive action – and once it has become an image it instantly becomes ungraspable,

noncontemporary, impassive, not the same thing distanced, but that thing as distancing, the present thing in its absence, the thing graspable because ungraspable, appearing as something that has disappeared, the return of what does not come back, the strange heart of the distance as the life and unique heart of the thing. (“Two Versions of the Imaginary,” p. 80)

Seeing implies distance, the decision that causes separation, the power not to be in contact and to avoid the confusion of contact. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter. But what happens when what you see, even though from a distance, seems to touch you with a grasping contact, when the manner of seeing is a sort of touch, when seeing is a *contact* at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself on your gaze, as though the gaze had been seized, touched, put in contact with appearance? Not an active contact, not the initiative and action that might still remain in a true touch; rather, the gaze is drawn, absorbed into an immobile movement and a depth without depth. What is given to us by contact at a distance is the image, and fascination is passion for the image. (“The Essential Solitude,” p. 75)

But what is the image? When there is nothing, that is where the image finds its condition, but disappears into it. The image requires the neutrality and the effacement of the world, it wants everything to return to the indifferent depth where nothing is affirmed, it inclines towards the intimacy of what still continues to exist in the void; its truth lies there. But this truth exceeds it; what makes it possible is the limit where it ceases. Hence its dramatic aspect, the ambiguity it evinces, and the brilliant lie with which it is reproached. (“Two Versions of the Imaginary,” p. 79)

The image speaks to us, and it seems to speak intimately to us about ourselves. But intimately is to say too little; intimately then designates that level where the intimacy of the person breaks off, and in that motion points to the menacing nearness of a vague and empty outside that is the sordid background against which the image continues to affirm things in their disappearance. In this way, in connection with each thing, it speaks to us of less than the thing, but of us, and in connection with us, of less than us, of that less than nothing which remains when there is nothing. (“Two Versions of the Imaginary,” p. 79)

What fascinates us, takes away our power to give it a meaning, abandons its “perceptible” nature, abandons the world, withdraws to the near side of the world and attracts us there, no longer reveals itself to us and yet asserts itself in a presence alien to the present in time and to presence in space. The split, which had been the possibility of seeing, solidifies, right inside the gaze, into impossibility. In this way, in the very thing that makes it possible, the gaze finds the power that neutralizes it – that does not suspend it or arrest it, but on the contrary prevents it from ever finishing, cuts it off from all beginning, makes it into a neutral, wandering glimmer that is not extinguished, that does not illuminate: the circle of the gaze, closed on itself. Here we have an immediate expression of the inversion that is the essence of solitude. Fascination is the gaze of solitude, the gaze of what is incessant and interminable, in which blindness is still vision, vision that is no longer the possibility of seeing, but the impossibility of not seeing, impossibility that turns into seeing, that perseveres – always and always – in a vision that does not end: a dead gaze, a gaze that has become the ghost of an eternal vision. (“The Essential Solitude,” p. 75)

….A superb power, says Pascal, which makes eternity into nothingness and nothingness into an eternity. (“Two Versions of the Imaginary,” p. 79)

Our childhood fascinates us because it is the moment of fascination, it is fascinated itself, and this golden age seems bathed in a light that is splendid because it is unrevealed, but the fact is that this light is alien to revelation, has nothing to reveal, is pure reflection, a ray that is still only the radiance of an image. Perhaps the power of the maternal figure derives its brilliance from the very power of fascination, and one could say that if the Mother exerts this fascinating attraction, it is because she appears when the child lives completely under the gaze of fascination, and so concentrates in herself all the powers of enchantment. It is because the child is fascinated that the mother is fascinating, and this is also why all the impressions of our earliest years have a fixed quality that arises from fascination. When someone who is fascinated sees something, he does not see it, properly speaking, but it touches him in his immediate proximity, it seizes him and monopolizes him, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is tied in a fundamental way to the neutral, impersonal presence, the indeterminate One, the immense and faceless Someone. It is the relationship – one that is itself neutral and impersonal – that the gaze maintains with the depths that have no gaze and no contour, the absence that one sees because it is blinding. (“The Essential Solitude,” p. 76)

The fortunate thing about the image is that it is a limit next to the indefinite. A thin ring, but one which does not keep us at such a remove from things that it saves us from the blind pressure of that remove. Through it, that remove is available to us. Through what there is of inflexibility in a reflection, we believe ourselves to be masters of the absence that has become an interval, and the dense void itself seems to open to the radiation of another day. (“Two Versions of the Imaginary,” p. 79)

The time of the absence of time is not dialectical. What appears in it is the fact that nothing appears, the being that lies deep within the absence of being, the being that is when there is nothing, that is no longer when there is something – as though there were beings only through the loss of being, when being is lacking. The reversal that constantly refers us back, in the absence of time, to the presence of absence, but to this presence as absence, to absence as affirmation of itself, affirmation in which nothing is affirmed, in which nothing ceases to be affirmed, in the aggravation of the indefinite – this movement is not dialectical. Contradictions do not exclude one another there, nor are they reconciled there; only time, for which negation becomes our power, can be the “unity of incompatible things.” In the absence of time, what is new does not renew anything; what is present is not contemporary; what is present presents nothing, represents itself, belongs now and henceforth and at all times to recurrence. This is not, but comes back, comes as already and always past, so that I do not know it, but I recognize it, and this recognition destroys the power in me to know, the right to grasp, makes what cannot be grasped into something that cannot be relinquished, the inaccessible that I cannot cease attaining, what I cannot take but can only take back – and never give up. This time is not the ideal immobility that is glorified under the name of the eternal. In the region we are trying to approach, here is submerged in nowhere, but nowhere is nevertheless here, and dead time is a real time in which death is present, in which it arrives but does not stop arriving, as though by arriving it rendered sterile the time that permits it to arrive. The dead present is the impossibility of realizing a presence – an impossibility that is present, that is there as that which doubles every present, the shadow of the present, which the present carries and hides in itself. When I am alone, in this present, I am not alone, but am already returning to myself in the form of Someone. Someone is there, where I am alone. The fact of being alone is that I belong to this dead time that is not my time, nor yours, nor common time, but the time of Someone. Someone is what is still present when no one is there. In the place where I am alone, I am not there, there is no one there, but the impersonal is there: the outside as what anticipates, precedes,

dissolves all possibility of personal relationship. Someone is the faceless He, the One of which one is a part, but who is a part of it? No one is part of the One. “One” belongs to a region that cannot be brought into the light – not because it conceals a secret alien to all revelation, not even because it is radically dark, but because it transforms everything that has access to it, even light, into anonymous, impersonal being, the Not-true, the Not-real and yet always there. In this sense, the “One” is what appears closest to one when one dies. Where I am alone, day is no longer anything but the loss of an abode, it is an intimacy with the outside, the outside that is placeless and without repose. The act of coming here causes the one who comes to be part of the dispersal, the fissure in which the exterior is a stifling intrusion, the nakedness and cold of that in which one remains exposed, where space is the dizziness of being spaced. Then fascination reigns. (“The Essential Solitude,” p. 73 – 74)

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Exhibition History:

An example of this work was first exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, from April 7 – July 29, 1990 as part of the exhibition "Energieën (1990 – Energies: An Exhibition of Fifteen International Artists)."

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Notes:

Male voice: Lou Hetler

Female voice: Kathryn Mesney

The quad panning of the sound and its syncing to the motorized panning of the image were upgraded for ease of tuning by Dave Jones. He made a "quad panner" that replaced a number of Serge Modular audio components that did the same function albeit with a considerable amount of time needed for adjustment.