
GARY HILL





Title:BEACON (Two Versions of the Imaginary)

Date:1990

Media:Mixed media installation

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)

Bibliography:

Hill, Gary. "BEACON (Two Versions of the Imaginary)," *ENERGIEEN* Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1990. Reprinted in the catalogue, *Bienal de la Imagen en Movimiento '90* Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1990, pp. 180 – 183.

Le Temps des Machines. Valence: Centre de recherche et d'action culturelle (CRAC), 1990, unpaginated.

Van Assche, Christine. "Video Story." *Galleries Magazine* 38 (August/September 1990), p. 68.

Viñuela, Ana. "La convergencia de los soportes. I Bienal de la Imagen en Movimiento Centro de Arte Reina Sofía." *Cinevideo*, Spain (1990), p. 5.

Van Assche, Christine. "Gary Hill: The Imager of Disaster. Interview with Gary Hill" *Galleries Magazine* (December 1990/January 1991), p. 140.

1991 Biennial Exhibition. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991, pp. 104, 105.

Valiente, Pablo. "Primera Bienal De La Imagen En Movimiento." *RTV Magazine di los Mercados Audiovisuales* 20 (January 1991), pp. 63, 64.

Lageira, Jacinto. "Gary Hill. Une verbalisation du regard." *Parachute* 62 (April/May/June 1991), cover.

Watari, Shizuko. *Gary Hill –I Believe It Is an Image*. Tokyo: WATARI-UM, The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992, unpaginated.

Cooke, Lynne, Bice Curiger and Greg Hilty. *DOUBLETAKE: Collective Memory and Current Art*. London: Hayward Gallery, 1992, pp. 156, 157, 213.

Sarrazin, Stephen. *Chimaera Monographe No. 10 (Gary Hill)*. Montbéliard, France: Centre International de Création Vidéo Montbéliard, Belfort, 1992, pp. 44, 59, 82. (Including an excerpt from an interview with Gary Hill).

Sarrazin, Stephen. "La parole aux objets." *art press* 165, France (January 1992), pp. 22, 23.

Glowen, Ron. "Natural processes of thought: video of the mind." *Artweek* 23 (September 17,

1992), p. 24.

Mignot, Dorine. *Gary Hill*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum; Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 1993, pp. 6, 8, 9, 11, 16, 80 – 89, 112. (Including an excerpt from Gary Hill, "Inter-view").

Van Assche, Christine and Corinne Diserens. *Gary Hill*. Valencia: Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM), Centre del Carme, 1993, pp. 16, 26, 27, 110 – 116, 130, 131, 145. (Including an excerpt from Gary Hill, "Inter-view").

Wooster, Ann-Sargent. "The Heart of Darkness--Film and Video at the Whitney Biennial." *Arts Magazine* (October 1991), pp. 67 – 69.

Montolío, Celia. "Gary Hill," *Lapiz* 91 (February 1993), p. 74.

Durand, Régis. "Gary Hill. Centre Georges-Pompidou Galeries contemporaines." *art press* 177 (February 1993), p. 80.

Barbichon, Jean-Yves. "Gary Hill: maître-mot." *NOV'Art* (February 1993).

"Las creaciones de Guillermo Kuitca y Gary Hill en los espacios de Centre del Carme." *Pais Valencià* (February 26 – March 4, 1993), p. 15.

Von Graevenitz, Antje. "Living Funeral Art--Video Installations by Bill Viola and Gary Hill." *Archis* (July 1993), p. 47, 53.

Den Hartog Jager, Hans. "Droomwereld." *HP de Tijd* (September 3, 1993), pp. 113, 114.

Braet, Jan. "Schepen in de nacht." *KNACK* (September 15, 1993), p. 132.

Perrée, Rob. "Gary Hill: Kijken, Horen, Lezen." *Kunstbeeld* (September 1993), p. 14.

Cornwell, Regina. "Gary Hill Interview." *Art Monthly* 170 (October 1993), pp. 5 – 9.

Murin, Preložil Michal. "Gary Hill." *Profil. Súčasného Výtvarného Umenia* (December 1993), pp. 28, 29.

De Rijcke, Elke. "Dageraad of avondschemer over de video-installaties van Gary Hill." *Metropolis M* 1 (1993), pp. 26 – 29.

Bruce, Chris. *Gary Hill*. Seattle, Washington: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1994, pp. 24 – 31, 97. Including the artist's description of *BEACON (Two Versions of the Imaginary)*.

Múltiplas Dimensões/Multiple dimensions. 2 volumes. Lisbon: Centro de Cultural de Bélem, 1994, vol. 1: pp. 39, 87.

Willis, Holly, ed. *Gary Hill. Spinning the Spur of the Moment*. Irvington, New York: The Voyager Company, 1994, p. 4.

Fredericksen, Eric. "Gary Hill." *The Stranger*, Seattle (June 21 – 27, 1994).

Barcott, Bruce. "I was a camera. Art: Gary Hill straps on his video equipment and takes us for a walk." *Seattle Weekly* (June 22, 1994), p. 30.

Adamson, Loch. "Sculpting sight: Henry Art Gallery, Seattle." *Artweek* 25 (July 7, 1994), pp. 16, 17.

"BEACON (two versions of the imaginary)." *Sculpture*, Washington, D. C. 13 (July/August 1994), p. 33.

Shaviro, Steven. "A Promise of Intimacy: Gary Hill." *Reflex* 8, 4 (August/September 1994), p. 30.

Vischer, Theodora, ed. *Gary Hill: Imagining the Brain Closer than the Eyes*. Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst; Ostfildern: Cantz, 1995, pp. 20, 51 – 58, 113. (In German: *Gary Hill: Arbeit am Video*. Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst; Ostfildern: Cantz, 1995, pp. 21, 55 – 61, 119.)

Nagy, Pál. *Az irodalom úm mufajai*. Budapest: Magyar Muehely, 1995, pp. 350, 351.

Greene, David A. "Gary Hill at Museum of Contemporary Art." *Art Issues* (March/April 1995), p. 39.

Kandel, Susan. "Gary Hill: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles." *Artforum* 33, 8 (April 1995), p. 87.

Duncan, Michael. "In Plato's electronic cave." *Art in America* 83, 6 (June 1995), pp. 72, 73.

Pederson, Victoria. "Photographic memories. Gallery Go 'Round." *Paper*, New York (June 1995).

Beckmann, Angelika. "Gary Hill." *European Photography* 58, 16, 2 (Fall 1995), pp. 63, 67.

Myoda, Paul. "Gary Hill. The Guggenheim Museum, New York." *Frieze* (November/December 1995), p. 70.

Villaseñor, Maria Christina. "Bound Spaces." *Art Journal* 54, 4 (1995), p. 5.

FremdKörper – corps étranger – Foreign Body. Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, 1996, p. 18.

Wohl & Sein. Gemeinsame Ausstellung von Basler Museen und Institutionen. Basel: Editiones Roche, 1996, p. 46.

Lestocart, Louis-José. "Gary Hill: Surfer sur le medium / Surfing the Medium." *art press* 210 (February 1996), p. 20.

Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *Tall Ships*. Gary Hill's Projective Installations 2. Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Arts, 1997, pp. 7, 45 – 47, 51, 54.

Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *Viewer*. Gary Hill's Projective Installations 3. Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Arts, 1997, p. 9.

Petho, Bertalan. *post-postmodernism: The Nineties: Opinions and Philosophical Investigations Concerning Our Change of Era*. Budapest: Platon, 1997, p. vi.

Bélisle, Josée. *Gary Hill*. Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1998, pp. 12, 16, 17.

Stals, José Lebrero. *Gary Hill: HanD HearD – Withershins – Midnight Crossing*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1998, p. 12.

Der elektronische Raum: 15 Positionen zur Medienkunst. Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1998, p. 152.

Kold, Anders, ed. *Gary Hill*. Aarhus: Aarhus Kunstmuseum, 1999, pp. 42 – 47.

Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg Gesammelte Werke 1 Zeitgenössische Kunst seit 1968. Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1999, pp. 220, 221, 224, 225.

Chung, Yong-do. "Gary Hill: New Art Language Marking History of Reason." *Art, Korea* (October 2000), p. 145 (in Korean).

Morgan, Robert C., ed. *Gary Hill*. Baltimore: PAJ Books / The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 87, 221, 227 – 229, 232, 287 – 289, 296.

Gary Hill en Argentina: textos, ensayos, dialogos. Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2000, pp. 14, 43.

Gary Hill: Instalaciones. Córdoba: Ediciones Museo Caraffa, 2000, pp. 16, 22, 54.

Lageira, Jacinto. *Des premiers mots aux derniers silences* in *Gary Hill: Around & About: A Performative View*. Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2001, pp. 14.

Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *La performance elle-même* in *Gary Hill: Around & About: A Performative View*. Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2001, p. 79.

Rowlands, Penelope. "Gary Hill's Hall of Mirrors." *ARTnews* 100, 5 (May 2001), pp. 178, 179.

Gary Hill: Selected Works and catalogue raisonné. Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2002, GHCR 63, pp. 24, 37, 143 – 146, 179.

Israel, Glenis. *Artwise 2: Visual Arts 7 – 10*. Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd., 2002, pp. 20 – 23.

Shaw, Jeffrey and Peter Weibel. *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*. Karlsruhe: ZKM and Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, pp. 307.

Samaniego, Alberto Ruiz de. "Gary Hill and Maurice Blanchot: Dialogues at the Threshold." *Dardo* magazine, 2 (June – September 2006), pp. 146 – 179.

Odin, Paul-Emmanuel. *L'absence de livre [Gary Hill et Maurice Blanchot – Écriture, vidéo]*.

Marseille: La Compagnie, 2007, pp. 131, 157, 185 – 191, 187, 190, 203, 266, 286, 294, 297.

Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *An Art of Limina: Gary Hill's Works and Writings*.
Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2009, pp. 540 – 541, 569.

100 Video Artists. Madrid: EXIT Publicaciones – Rosa Olivares y Asociados S.L., 2010, pp. 30, 218 – 221, 459. Text by George Quasha.

Gary Hill: Viewer. Moscow: GMG Gallery, 2010 (in Russian and English), pp. 34, 35.

Israel, Glenis. *Artwise 2: Visual Arts 9 – 10*. Second Edition. Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd., 2011, pp. 69 – 71.

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)."

"Bienal de la imagen en movimiento '90," Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain, December 12 – 23, 1990.

"Gary Hill," (travelling 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, November 17, 1993 – January 9, 1994.

"Gary Hill," (travelling exhibition organized by the Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., February 17 – May 8, 1994; Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, June 10 – August 14, 1994; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California, December 19, 1994 – March 12, 1995; Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, New York, May 11 – August 20, 1995; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri, October 14, 1995 – January 14, 1996.

"Gary Hill," (travelling exhibition organized by Riksställningar, Stockholm, Sweden), Moderna Museet, Spårvagnshallarna, Stockholm, Sweden, February 4 – April 17, 1995.

Notes:

Male voice: Lou Hetler

Female voice: Kathryn Mesney