Title: Withershins

Date: 1995

Media: Mixed media installation

Description:
Floor maze constructed from 2-inch x 4-inch (5 x 10 cm.) aluminum rectangular tubing, pressure-sensitive switch mats, two video projectors, four speakers, carpet, two computers with multi-channel interface and sound cards and controlling software written in DOS, two computer-controlled quad audio panners, two-channel synchronizer, two laserdisc players and two laserdiscs (color; mono sound)

Dimensions of floor maze: 25 x 35 ft. (7.62 x 10.67 m.)

Edition of two and one artist’s proof

*Withershins* is an interactive work based on a highly self-reflexive text about left and right handedness and bicameralism in relation to movement, symmetry and asymmetry. The text is structured with overlapping, enfolding, mirroring and word play. It is continuous with acceptable syntax (as opposed to a series of non-sequiturs) no matter where the viewer goes in the maze. In some places the text is as many as six layers deep, so even if the persons being tracked go back and forth along the same section of the maze, their steps will continue to unfold new spoken passages. The triggered phrases are spoken by a man and/or a woman, depending upon which side of a large maze the viewer enters. The maze structure is built from 2 x 4-inch (5 x 10 cm.) aluminum rectangular tubing and covers an area of 25 x 35 feet (7.62 x 10.67 m.). As one moves within the labyrinth spoken phrases are triggered every 30 inches (76 cm.) along the way. Two people can be tracked at any given time, simultaneously generating two texts that suggest the possibility of interchange between the participants. Occasionally, one person will end up controlling both texts, and one will hear the voices going in and out of unison creating subtle delays. Two independent quad panning systems track the two active viewers amplifying the sound wherever they go. Additionally, two video projections on opposing walls show the front of a man’s torso and back of his head as he signs a specific text (or “path” through the maze) selected/written by the artist – a text or “path” which is only one of an infinite number of possibilities.

**Spoken Text:**

The text below is the signed text that is seen in the two video projections. Whenever a viewer enters either side of the maze, the signing begins. If the maze is left entirely, the images reset to the beginning and wait for the next entrant. The signed text is one of “infinite” possibilities derived from a list of 420 phrases that are accessed via computer that tracks the viewers’ location. The spoken text is generated in real time from the same list depending on their movement in the maze.

And if

The right hand

was ingrown

backhandedly

and what if
The left hand knows that the right hand knows what the right hand is doing? is the left undone and what if The left hand was ingrown deep in the mind speaking in many handed ways growing old in a maze from one word to the next questions arise and eyes inflict words and right inflects left from one word to the next left inflects right and this inflicts that hand back and forth and that inflicts this and words reflect back from one word to the next
questions arise
in many handed ways
Is the left hand?
and so the logos goes
And if
The left hand
knows
what the right hand
is doing?
thrown as it is
the right
wrote the left
a hand written hand
blown
across the flesh
and if
a hand written hand
folded inside
hand held thoughts
a number of instructions
lost between hemispheres
left for dead
the other
mind
beside yourself
and if the left hand
has a hole
would the right hand
then know?
when a hand
is the other hand
which hand is back and forth
two nodal hemispheres
play havoc
in your skull
the mind can’t
help but mince
and suddenly you are
beside yourself
entertaining a party of two
only to fall back
a few words
a few steps gone by
a number of instructions
on the way language moves
from point A to point B
proceed accordingly
inside a book
outside a hand
swept mind
laid bare

and if

the written word

left the last word

in the palm

of one hand clapping back

and the right hand

was an ear

out of the other’s mind

the left hand spoke

and the right hand

opens the books

laid bare

the left hand does not know

what the right hand

did not know

hands divide

and word by word

language moves

begins to circle

over the book

he writing is

on the wall

and the left is not

reading it
to its next
reflexive moment
to its next
reading
in a way
side ways
way inside
positioned in prayer
the right hand
swallows its palm
and the left hand
swims back
and forth and back
for everything
which is visible
is a copy
of that which is hidden
in every step
and the left hand
is a copy
of that which is hidden
positioned in prayer
way inside
the right hand
stops writing
the left hand
stops to write
the first hand
for the last time
the hand unhands itself
beheads its double
and the left hand is
not the right

the hand unhands itself
and left reflects back
the right hand
the hand left
the right hand
going mad
a house of hands
plays havoc
shaking Matthew's mind
for the last time
the hand unhands itself
beheads its double
and the left hand is
in the root
reflected back
way inside
its handness
that is to say
reflects upon
what the right hand is
and will be done
on earth as it is
what then?
when the word
“hand” moves
happens to skip
walks on water
that is to say
meets its own reflection
in a way
that propels it
to its next
reflexive moment
between hands
out of hand
the mind eats
reflexive moments
echoing thought
across the abyss
and word by word
hands divide
the prong of duality
impales the mind
to unhand itself a logic
and if
parity
folded in the word play
of parity
and if
laid bare
the left hand does not know
what the right hand
is doing
and the lamb said:
be passerby
reflect
between hands
the misgivings of two
hand apprehends hand
right within the mirror
out of hand
as the right reflects
left within the mirror
quickening the eye
ahead
of one hand clapping
bleeding

and the right hand

left a sound

in a hole

that bleeds the left hand

back into the sound

of a hole

in a hole

that bleeds the left hand

back and forth

the logos moves

back into the sound

and left to die

where hands are tied

behind the mind

hidden within

a few steps

into asymmetry

of mind

and the left hand

of the right hand

the mind can’t know

what hand is left

passes through

a hand
that goaded the gods about
what hand
did what
before hand
and if
the right mind
did not know
what the left hand brings forth
and back to
doubling its reflection
of differences
and if left
in a symmetry
and if left
did not know
the left hand
cannot know
the left hand
and if
the left hand
did not know
what the right hand
held out
in the mind of Matthew
who goaded the gods about
a hand
passes through
what hand is left
sided handedness
and one remains roaming
between hands
and forth and back
dividing
two nodal hemispheres
that play havoc
in your skull
are only copies of
two hands
that play havoc
in your skull
the mind can’t help
and suddenly you are
reminded
of the right hand
the mind can’t know
and suddenly you are
left beside yourself
entertaining a party of two
only to fall back
words into hands
laying upon hands
speaking in many ways
right beside yourself
entertaining a party of two
only to fall back
a few steps
a few words
instructions on how to move
thoughts in the body
behind the mind
where hands are tied
and left to die
by the hand that feeds
and if the left hand
has a hole
would the right hand
then know? when a hand
is the other hand
which hand is back and forth
two nodal hemispheres
play havoc
in your skull
the mind can’t
help but mince
and suddenly you are
beside yourself
left hidden
and the right hand
left a sound
of one hand clapping
ahead
quickening the eye
left within the mirror
as the right reflects
back-words
right within the mirror
hand apprehends hand
the misgivings of two
escaping handedness
and the lamb said:
to become someone else
proceed accordingly
from point A to point B
hand held thoughts
folded inside
a hand written hand
blown
minds
folded inside
a hand written hand
blown
across the flesh
of symmetries
a hand unhands itself
hands itself back
words into
The left hand
was ingrown

Bibliography:


Suchère, Eric. “Gary Hill Le Trafiquant d’ Images.” Beaux Arts 142 (February 1996), pp. 69, 70.


Rowlands, Penelope. “Gary Hill’s Hall of Mirrors.” *ARTnews* 100, 5 (May 2001), pp. 176.


Upchurch, Michael. “*A stroll with sound/video artist Gary Hill through his new show,*” The Seattle Times (May 6, 2012)

Exhibition History:
An example of this work was first exhibited at the Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy from June 8 – October 15, 1995 as part of the exhibition “Identità e Alterità.”


Notes:

Winner of the Leone d’Oro, Prize for Sculpture at the Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy, 1995.