
G A R Y H I L L

Title:The Madness of the Day

Date:circa 1987/1993

Media:

Description:

1987: Gary Hill

1993: In collaboration with George Quasha, Charles Stein and Marine Hugonnier

Intermedia performance for hospital bed (or equivalent), scrim, three video cameras, three video monitors, sound system, gauze, tape, Petri dish, water, glass, concrete or similarly hard surface of at least a square foot, two clipboards, microphones and stand with boom arm, assorted cabling, and printed text

The piece was conjured from a reading of Maurice Blanchot's *The Madness of the Day* as translated by Lydia Davis (Station Hill Press: Barrytown, New York, 1981) from the French, *La Folie du jour*, and was originally performed at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Washington.

A small, intimate space/classroom, reeking of isopropyl alcohol, contained at center stage a table/bed surrounded by scrim. Hill played the part of a hospitalized figure lying on a bed, seen shadowed against the scrim, much as in a hospital room. He improvised "reading" the book/text using a video camera that was monitored by the audience. Two assistants were also behind the scrim and functioned to some degree as the presiding medical staff. At times they adjusted the microphone stand and arm over the "corpse" as if using a medical instrument of some kind, focusing it on the sound of Hill manipulating the book and making various unintelligible utterances. Every once in a while Hill sipped water from a glass at the corner of the bed. The refractions of the water moving within the glass could be seen through the scrim and, together with the shadowy figures, created a kind of slow-motion tableau. Two other monitors displayed the output of two small video cameras bound together with gauze and tape, looking something like a wounded head. Both cameras, set on autofocus, adjusted to changing views independently. Another assistant passed the object to different members of the audience throughout the performance or wiped peoples' eyes with cotton balls dipped in a Petri dish of water. The performance concluded when Hill reached for the glass of water one last time and knocked it over the edge. The moment the glass shattered the power was cut.

The second performance of *The Madness of the Day* was part of a conference on the work of Maurice Blanchot and Gary Hill, held in conjunction with Gary Hill's show at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art in 1993 (curated by Chrissie Iles). A distinguishing feature of this version was that the room where the performance was held was in fact a "medical theater" at Oxford University. Since Blanchot's text is about a medical incident and takes place in part in a hospital, the performance piece itself was site-specific to the room in which it was performed.

Hill lay precisely on the location where, in the traditional use of the room, a cadaver would have been situated for anatomical analysis. His camera was monitored on the permanently installed monitors of the theater.

In contrast to the first performance, the “assistants” were played by George Quasha and Charles Stein who held clipboards with the English translation of the text from which they improvised in relation to what Hill was “reading.” The language dimension related indirectly to the academic context and, more complexly, to the relation between academic and medical practice and discourse. At the end the performance flowed into an extended public conversation between audience and performers.

Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *An Art of Limina: Gary Hill's Works and Writings*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2009, pp. 595 – 596.

Spoken Text:

Bibliography:

Darke, Chris. "Gary Hill: Museum of Modern Art, Oxford." *Frieze* 14 (January/February 1994), 54, 55.

Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *La performance elle-même in Gary Hill: Around & About: A Performative View*. Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2001, pp. 78, 81, 99 – 101, 107 – 108.

Gary Hill: Selected Works and catalogue raisonné. Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2002, GHCR 56, p. 127.

Odin, Paul-Emmanuel. *L'absence de livre [Gary Hill et Maurice Blanchot – Écriture, vidéo]*. Marseille: La Compagnie, 2007, pp. 261, 286.

Quasha, George and Charles Stein. *An Art of Limina: Gary Hill's Works and Writings*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2009, pp. 502, 519, 520, 595 – 596, 605.

Exhibition History:

Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle, Washington, 1987.

Performed on November 7, 1993 as part of the "Gary Hill: Day Seminar," in conjunction with the exhibition entitled “Gary Hill: In Light of the Other” at the Oxford Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, England.

Notes: