

Whitney Museum of American Art 12

The New American Filmmakers Series

EXHIBITIONS OF INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO

Gary Hill

November 8–December 11, 1983

Primarily Speaking, 1981–83. Video installation
On view continuously 12:00–6:00, Tuesdays until 8:00

Gallery Talk, Thursday, November 10, at 2:00
Gary Hill will be present

Credits:

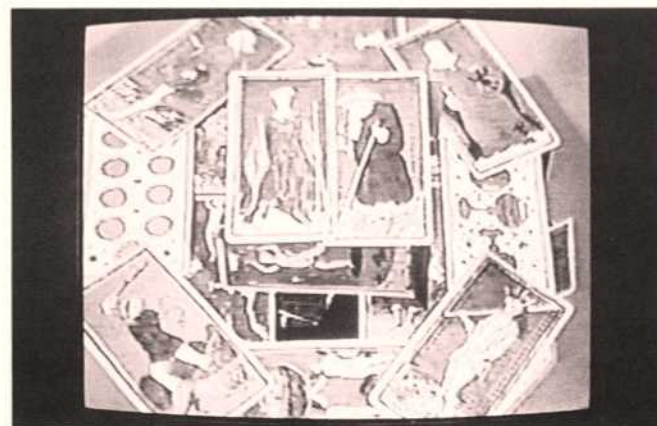
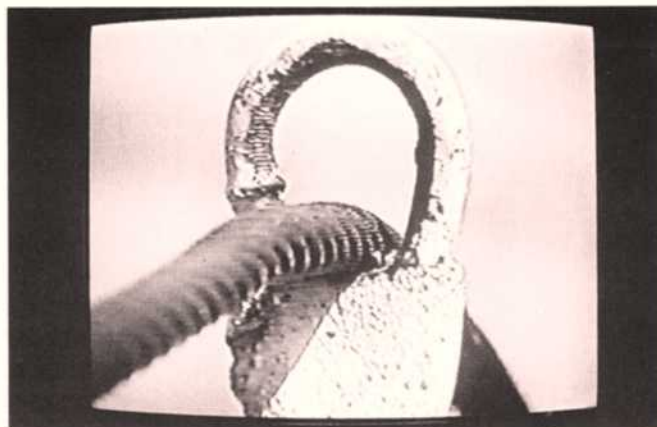
Special thanks for props and objects to Donna Cisan, Brenda Cullom, Richard Gummere, Cindy Hollis, Bruce Lubman, Peggy Lubman, George Quasha, Susan Quasha. Production assistance: Richard Gummere, Greg Hill. Technical assistance: Dave Jones, Bob Pearl, Woody Vasulka.

Primarily Speaking was made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a Rockefeller Video Artist Fellowship, the Television Laboratory at WNET/Thirteen, and Installation Inc.

The television set is traditionally defined by the format of broadcast television as a static receiver of programs. We position ourselves as viewers before the television screen to observe sequences of sounds and images joined together to create a linear unit of meaning with a beginning, middle, and end. Thus the television set is expected to remain in a single position, vis-à-vis the viewer. Moreover, the standardized purposes of the broadcasting industry inhibit the exploration of television's unique expressive potential.

In the hands of the artist, video technology becomes a flexible image-making tool with the capacity to record, transform, and generate imagery, and to question how we perceive its images. The history of the single-channel artist's videotape, created for the single monitor, encompasses an extraordinary range of work that explores abstract and representational images within narrative and non-narrative forms and points of view. In addition, artists have made the placement of video monitors in the exhibition space another creative dimension of the medium. The relationship of multiple channels of video images to the siting of monitors becomes a central aesthetic strategy in the video installation. Here the spectator is no longer a passive viewer but is actively engaged in a mobile interaction with the medium.

Fundamental to Gary Hill's video installation *Primarily Speaking* (1981–83) is language—specifically, words and phrases presented aurally—which are integrated with solid fields of color and images of objects and scenes on videotape. The two channels of videotape and sound are displayed in two wooden structures, each housing four monitors placed in a row at eye level, facing each other in such a manner that they form a corridor. Thus the changes in sequences of the videotapes and soundtracks between both structures forms a choreography of images and sounds in time and space. The temporal dimension unfolds during the twenty-minute playing cycle of the videotapes and audiotapes, while the spatial dimension is shaped by the



Primarily Speaking, 1981–83.

movement of sounds and images between the two banks of monitors as the spectators perceive different combinations of video and sound through their shifting points of view.

The complexity of *Primarily Speaking* resides in its aggressive use of multiple layers of image and sound text modulated not in a linear line of reasoning but as a three-dimensional experience. The work becomes a seen, heard, and spoken meditation on forms of meaning. This refashioning of sights and sounds results from the capacity of video to distribute and control discrete and highly defined moving images in such a way that they can be orchestrated into a complex audio/visual cycle. *Primarily Speaking* weaves different expressions and descriptions, language and images, into a seamless intertextual construct which is both aesthetically engaging and intellectually demanding.

John G. Hanhardt
Curator, *Film and Video*

Primarily Speaking, 1981-83

The title *Primarily Speaking* should pretty much be taken at face value. This is to say that prying into things merely for orientation should be avoided at all costs. Nobody wants to be riding a bicycle, especially at top speed, only to discover that the wheels are spokeless and wonder how they got as far as they did in the first place. The work, consisting of eleven parts segmented by anthemic songs, is founded in a monologue construed from idiomatic phrase units—language at large residing in the public domain. The voice ping-pongs up and down a corridor stacking the idioms, placing linguistic objects in their appropriate places, sometimes answering and sometimes questioning. The given is always reciprocated. An image of a seesaw comes to mind. (I remember playing seesaw and in my neighborhood the object of the game was to leave your partner high and dry by jumping off at the instant your end touched ground, leaving said partner to come crashing down with his/her own weight—in effect sawing off the seeing.)

The text provides the attention span offered as a crossing. Images are signposts syllabicated by the tongue, pushed out and left by the wayside—discards, there is always room for more. The snake sheds its skin. This isn't something new, nor is it a recapitulation, it's a different take on talking pictures—talking pictures breaking the story. (Words and images move together like old roads and their placements sometimes do, and every once in a while they share a stretch of time where the scenario doesn't permit the necessary excavations.)

Really, it all boils down to this: I walked in on a tell a vision set and all the dialogue was provided and there were countless props, props upon props, more than I could ever use in a lifetime and it was all in living color colors colored—everything just as you or I might expect. Eye level and surprised, I found myself staring at arm's length cross-eyed into the palm of a hand. It was a glimpse of actual size which bespeaks my preoccupation with the notion of face value.

Gary Hill

Biography

Gary Hill, born in Santa Monica, California, in 1951, has been living and working in upstate New York since he moved east in 1969. A sculptor, Hill began working in video in the 1970s, and was artist-in-residence at such video centers in New York State as Synapse (Syracuse), Portable Channel (Rochester), and the Experimental TV Center (Owego). He has received several grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, Creative Artists Public Service, Inc., and the National Endowment for the Arts—among the latter, a United States/Japan Exchange Fellowship. Hill was artist-in-residence at WNET/Thirteen's TV Lab and was a Video Artist Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation. He has taught at the Center for Media Study, Buffalo, and now teaches at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York.

Selected One-Artist Exhibitions

South Houston Gallery, New York, 1974; Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1976; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, 1979; The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance, New York, 1979; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "Video Viewpoints," 1980; And/Or, Seattle, 1981; The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance, New York, 1981; Galerie H at ORF, Steirischer Herbst, Graz, Austria, 1982; Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California, 1982.

Selected Group Exhibitions

Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, "New Work in Abstract Video Imagery," 1977, "Video Revue," 1979; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "Projects: Video XXVIII," 1979; Video 80/San Francisco Video Festival, 1980; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "Projects: Video XXXV," 1981; Sydney, Australia, Biennale, 1982; Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York, "Electronic Visions," 1983; University Art Museum, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, "Video as Attitude," 1983; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, "Art Video Retrospectives et Perspectives," 1983; Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Alberta, Canada, "The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties" (traveling exhibition), 1983; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1983 Biennial Exhibition.

Selected Bibliography

Furlong, Lucinda. "A Manner of Speaking: An Interview with Gary Hill," *Afterimage*, 10 (March 1983), pp. 9-16.
Hill, Gary. *Around & About*. Buffalo, New York: Hallwalls Gallery, 1981.
Larson, Kay. "Art: Through a Screen Dimly," *New York*, September 12, 1983, pp. 86-87.
Quasha, George. "Notes on the Feedback Horizon," in *Glass Onion* (program notes). Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1980.

Selected Videography

The Fall, 1973. Black and white, sound; 11 minutes.
Rock City Road, 1974-75. Color, silent; 12 minutes.
Earth Pulse, 1975. Color, sound; 6 minutes.
Improvisation with Bluestone, 1976. Color, sound; 7 minutes.
Ring Modulation, 1978. Color, sound; 3 minutes.
Sums and Differences, 1978. Black and white, sound; 8 minutes.
Windows, 1978. Color, silent; 8 minutes.
Soundings, 1979. Color, sound; 17 minutes.
Around & About, 1980. Color, sound; 5 minutes.
Processual Video, 1980. Black and white, sound; 11½ minutes.
Videograms, 1980-81. Black and white, sound; 13 minutes.
Primarily Speaking, 1981-83. Color, stereo sound; 19 minutes.
Happenstance (part I of many parts), 1982-83. Black and white, stereo sound; 6 minutes.

Gary Hill's videotapes are distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

Whitney Museum of American Art
945 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021

Hours: Tuesday 11:00-8:00
Wednesday-Saturday 11:00-6:00
Sunday 12:00-6:00

Film and video information: (212) 570-0537