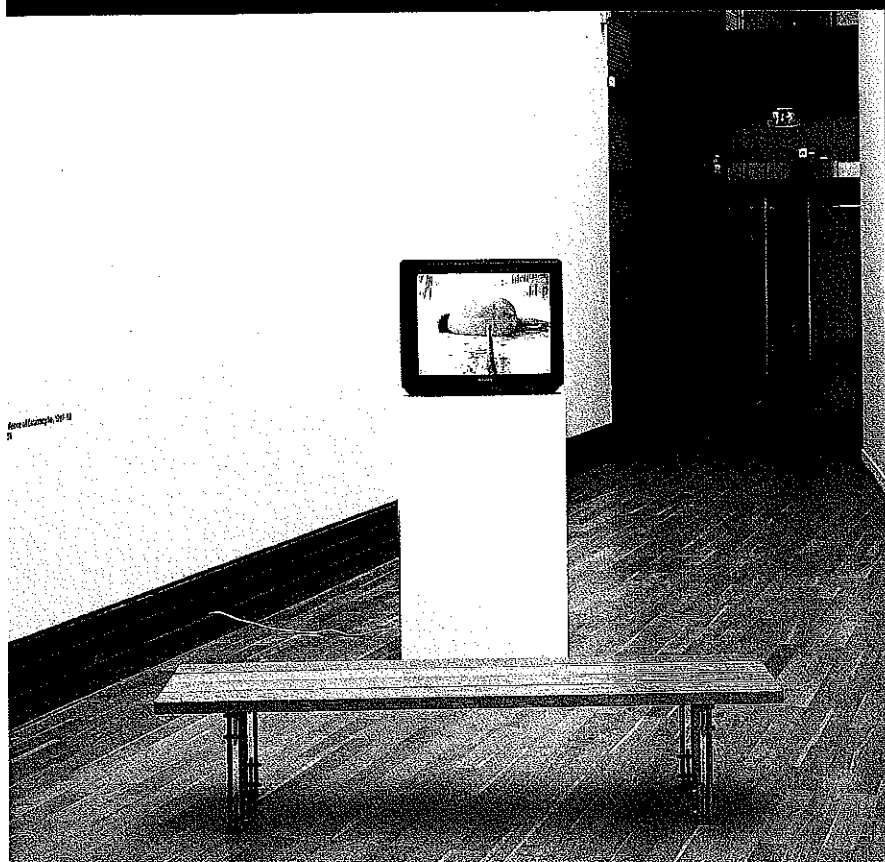
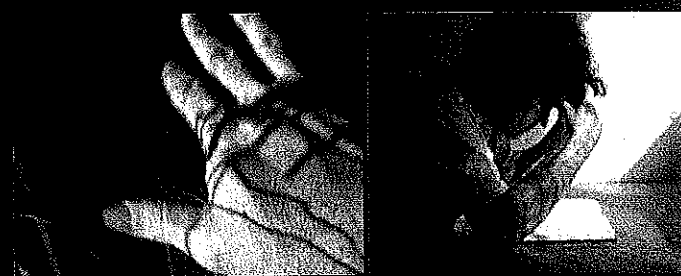
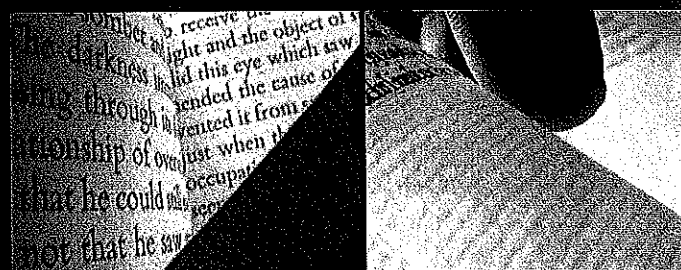
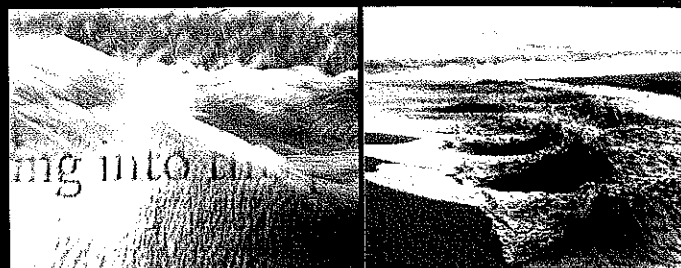




## **The Metaphysician of Media**



idence of Catastrophe, 1987-88 (GHCR 59)



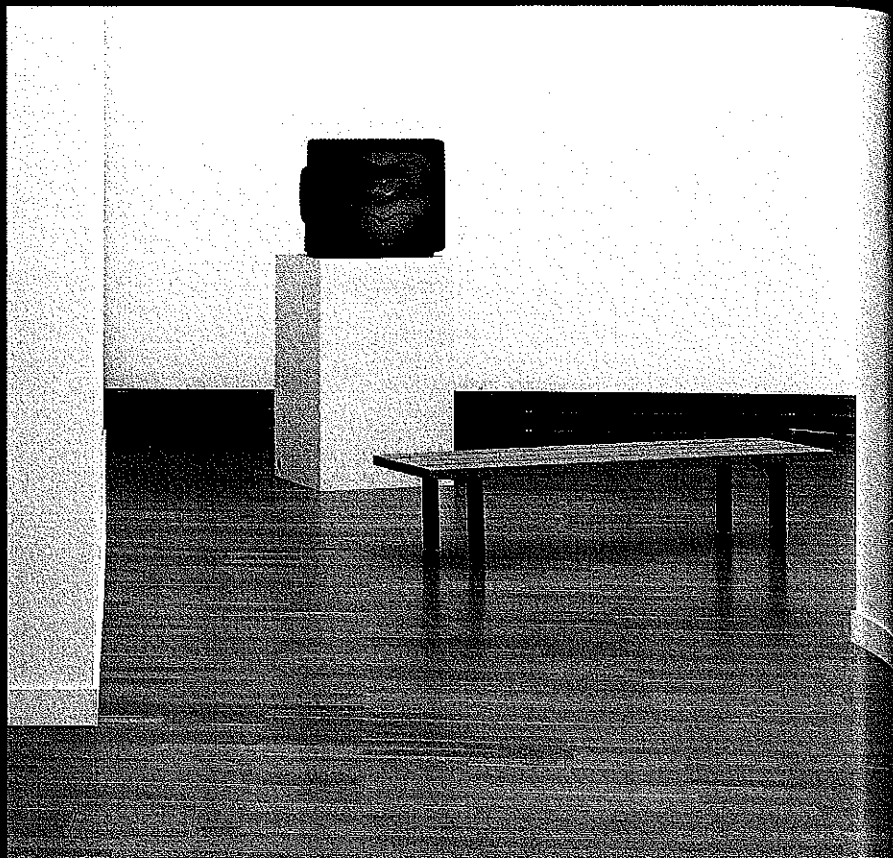
"Marshall McLuhan - a Candid Conversation with the High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media," interview in *Playboy*, March 1969, reprinted in Eric McLuhan and Frank Zigrone, eds., *Essential McLuhan*, London, 1997.

The work of Gary Hill explores the phenomenology of our perception of the world. We perceive the world through the body, which is our locus of communication. The primary tool of that communication is language, by which thinking is made concrete. Language is generated by neural circuitry in the brain. This neural circuitry comprises neurons, axons and synapses, which convey impulses from the brain to various parts of the body.

Marshall McLuhan was the first to recognize the parallels between the stream of electrical and magnetic energy within the body and the constant flow of electronic media. All technology mirrors and extends the functions of the body. But, as McLuhan observed, whereas traditional technology extended a single part of the body (the foot is augmented by the wheel, as is the skin by clothing, and the eye and voice by the alphabet, etc.), electronic media extend our entire nervous system to the point where both become interchangeable, as though by osmosis.<sup>1</sup> Our skin in this sense becomes a kind of permeable screen through which consciousness is filtered.

This increasingly boundary-less state of being induced by the media profoundly alters our understanding of language. The written word in itself is neither sensory nor all-embracing; it is rather visual, distinct, material - characteristics which demand detachment and physical distance for reading and cognition. Since television and other electronic media became dominant in the 1960s, there has been a tendency to close this distance between the eye and the written word, that is, to hold the printed page up close and become absorbed into the text on a printed page in the same way that we are engulfed by the electronic screen.

Gary Hill's installations and videotapes articulate this tension between detachment and absorption, introducing concrete physical elements such as the body, the written word and sculptural surfaces into the closed-circuit, electronic space of video. Within his hybrid structures, he positions language (including silence) as the interface between the material and the immaterial, in other words, between the state of detachment and that of absorption. At certain times in Hill's work, lan-



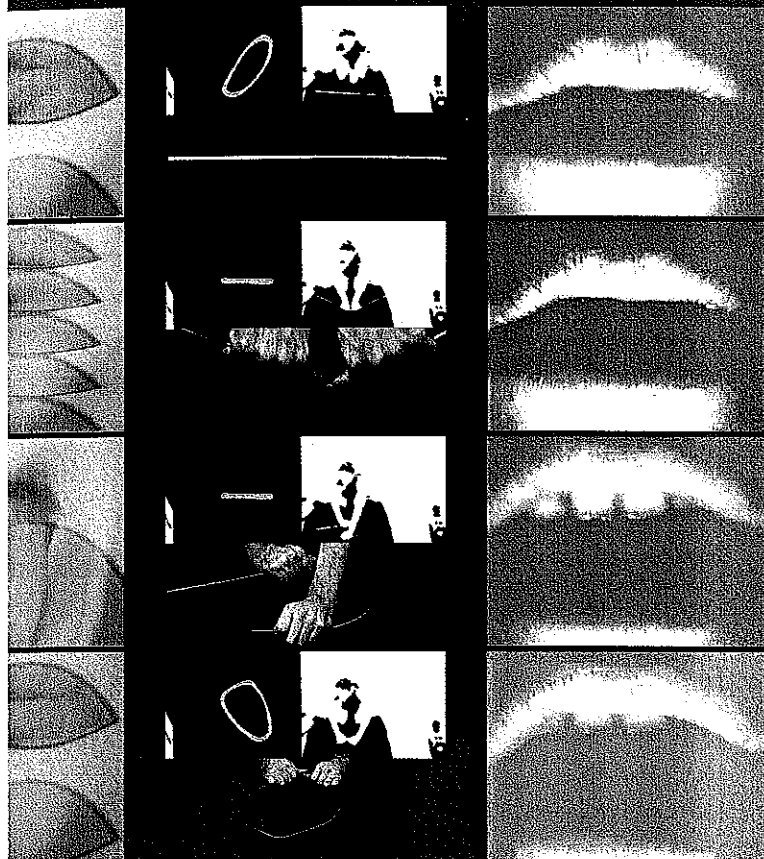
*Mouth Piece*, 1978 (GHCR 26); *Full Circle*, 1978 (GHCR 29); *Primary*, 1978 (GHCR 28)

oted in Lucinda  
Manner of Speaking:  
with Gary Hill,"  
O, 8 (March 1993),  
printed in *Gary Hill*,  
Robert C., Baltimore:  
ne Johns Hopkins  
ess, 2000, p. 185.

guage – whether on the page of a book or the surface of a screen – appears as an intensely physical force, often merging with, or appearing to engulf, the body. At other times it recedes into an invisible presence – a text half-whispered or muttered; a driving force of spoken words which cause images to appear and actions to happen; or, in some cases, a silence, creating a tangible energized space.

Whether rendered visible or invisible, audible or silent, language always emanates from the body. Painting, sculpting, drawing, printing, writing, gestures and actions: all are all forms of language, articulated by the body through a synergy between eye and hand. In Gary Hill's first action involving the medium of video, to which he came as a sculptor in 1973, he applied this synergy to physical technology itself. In exploring the synergistic possibilities between the body and video, one of his first acts in the studio of the Woodstock Community Center was to connect the surface of his body directly to that of the video camera. Lying naked on the floor in the video studio, he

placed video cameras directly on top of his body. "I would make a kind of primal sound with my breathing, raising the camera on my stomach so that it would reveal my head from the bottom, [while] making this sound."<sup>2</sup> This intimate performative act fusing video and body took place during the same period that Dan Graham was creating his series of double-screen film projections in which the film camera was pressed in spiral movements against the first performer's body whilst he/she was filming a second performer. Other artists such as Hannah Wilke, Dennis Oppenheim and Vito Acconci were also using the video camera in a tactile way, examining the body and face in extreme close-up. In Vienna, Valie Export strapped film cameras to her chest and back, transforming both sides of her body into an extended recording device. Similarly, in installations such as *Crux* (1983–87) and *Crossbow* (1999), Hill would shift the locus of recording from the eye to other parts of the body, such as the wrists, feet, chest and forehead. Hill's approach thus emerged during the conceptual and performative context of the early 1970s; unlike his older colleagues,



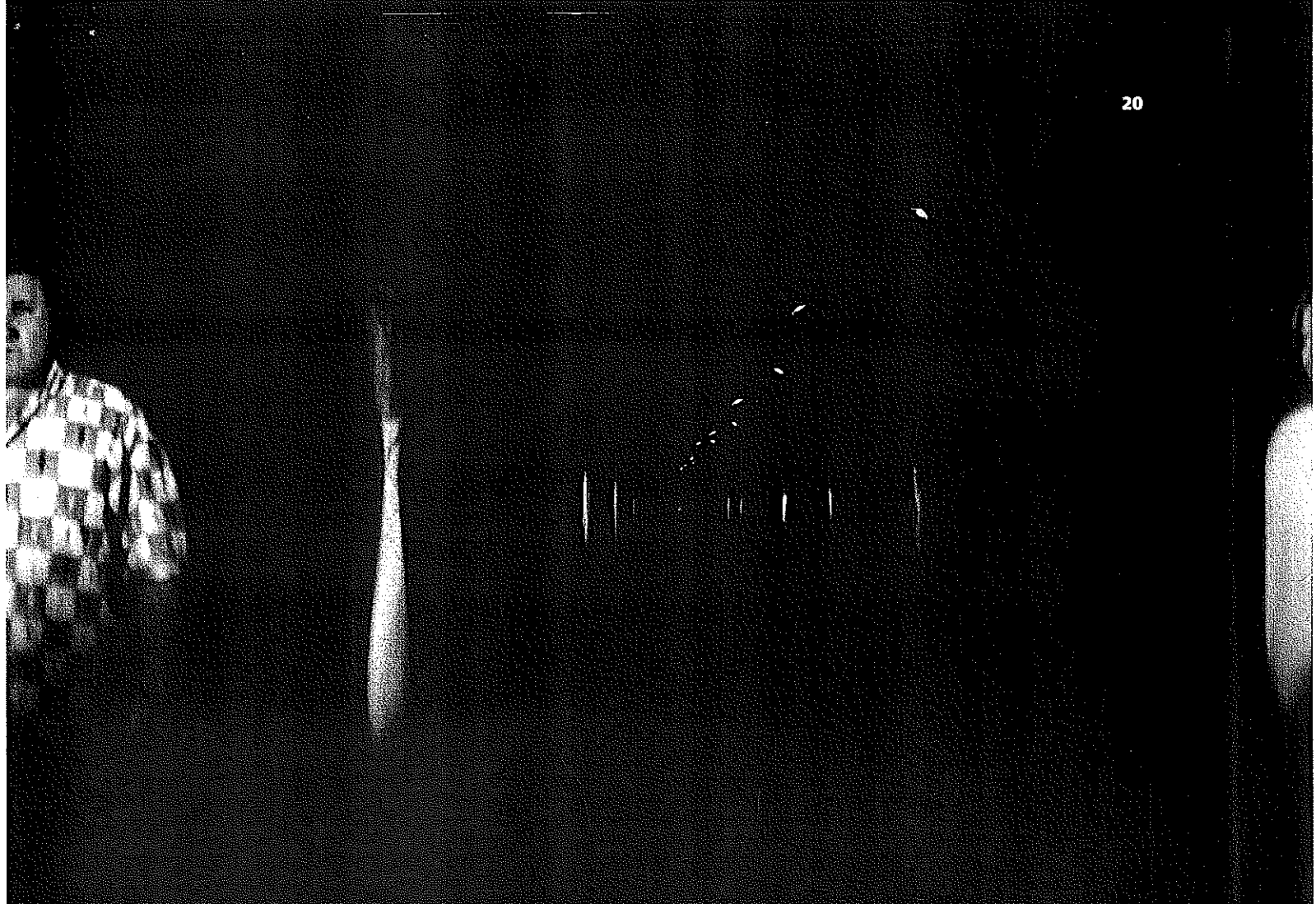
*Tall Ships, 1992 (GHC 73)*

however, who had discovered these contexts much earlier and were soon to abandon them, Hill's initial embrace of video, the body, language and sound constituted the beginning of an ongoing engagement, which continues to the present.

In his early experiments with video equipment and the body, Hill's utterance of primal sounds, indicative of the liberation he felt video had given him, implicates the video camera as intimate witness, catalyst, surrogate lover and confessional tool. These experiments also marked the beginning of the central role occupied by the voice within his work. Nonetheless, four years were to elapse before voice and language were again to appear in Hill's work – this time, however, not in installations, but in a group of single-screen videotapes, whose manipulated images and sounds created a system of what Hill termed "electronic linguistics." During the rest of the 1970s, Hill continued to develop on parallel tracks, creating on the one hand single-channel videotapes, and on the other sculptural installations involving video as only one element. It was not

until the beginning of the 1980s that the artist fused the materiality of his early sculptural installations with his linguistic experiments involving the video image. Anticipating the later fusion of these two tracks, Hill's first video installation, *Hole in the Wall*, appeared in 1974.

In this piece, Hill articulated for the first time the dichotomy between the detachment of the material surface and the absorption of the electronic signal. Training a video camera on an external wall of the Woodstock Artists' Association, the artist marked it up according to the exact dimensions of a video monitor. For over an hour, the camera recorded him cutting through the various layers of wall, using numerous tools (pencil, ruler, hammer, drill, saw, screwdriver) to expose layer after layer of sheet rock, paint, wood, studs and insulation, until he eventually reached the exterior. He then placed the video monitor in the hole, its rear side toward the exterior, while the screen on the other side of the wall in the room now showed the videotape documenting the process of the creation of the work.



The structure of *Hole in the Wall* displays most of the major elements of Hill's subsequent production. The stripping away of layers predicts the dismantling of the monitor's casing in later installations such as *Between Cinema and a Hard Place* and *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place* (1991). The exposed layers of wall resemble layers of the body, which Hill later represents through multiple imagery, as well as the layered seriality of his multiple monitors and projection works. And, as Hill has observed, the layers could also be read as a representation of the concentric rings of art: drawing, painting, sculpture, performance and, finally, video. Hill cut through all these concentric rings, creating another kind of space, or language.

Hill's puncturing of the gallery wall to connect interior and exterior space signaled the beginning of his long enquiry into the relationship between materiality, feedback and conceptual thinking. His interest in "having access and control over the architecture of the frame in real time"<sup>3</sup> shifted from sculptural to electronic form in a series of

single-channel videotapes made in the years immediately following *Hole in the Wall*. In tapes such as *Objects with Destinations* (1979) and *Windows* (1978), made with tools designed by the artist/engineer Dave Jones,<sup>4</sup> the image is unhinged from its static position and manipulated by means of digital deconstruction and the reorganization of the architectural elements that produce a video signal. Just as *Hole in the Wall* had exposed both sides of the video monitor as a volume in physical space, Hill's subsequent work handles the image sculpturally – making it three-dimensional, attempting to show its trajectory across pictorial space, turning it to reveal its reverse side. This three-dimensional approach to the image also recurs later in Hill's installations and in a group of monitor works titled *Liminal Objects* (1995–1999), in which monochrome objects, surreally paired, rotate illusorily around and through each other on the screen.

In early single-screen tapes such as *Electronic Linguistics* (1977), *Picture Story* and *Soundings* (both 1979), as well as *Around and About* (1980),




*Reflex Chamber*, 1996 (GHCR 102)

Hill's focus switched from image processing to the relationship between image and language. Evoking Martin Heidegger's notion of *techne*, the artist created technological synapses between the pair. Soundings demonstrate both the locus of Hill's interest in sound as body and his treatment of video and audio equipment as its electronic surrogates. In a process which metaphorically fuses the surface of the skin with that of a loudspeaker, the inner membrane of the speaker vibrates with the sound of Hill's voice reciting a poetic monologue talking of "imaging the sound/skin space." We watch and hear the loudspeaker's surface and sound metamorphose like the body, as it is changed through image-processing and buried under layers of sand. Hill also hammers a spike through the speaker, sets it on fire, and pours water onto it. Each time, his voice and the speaker continue to hold forth – muffled, scarred, transformed, but still present.

Evoking his earlier cutting of the gallery wall, Hill's sculptural and performative interventions with the speaker produce different aural textures, as

though, in an act of conceptual self-lesion, he is sculpturally manipulating, sanding, scraping and burning his own voice.

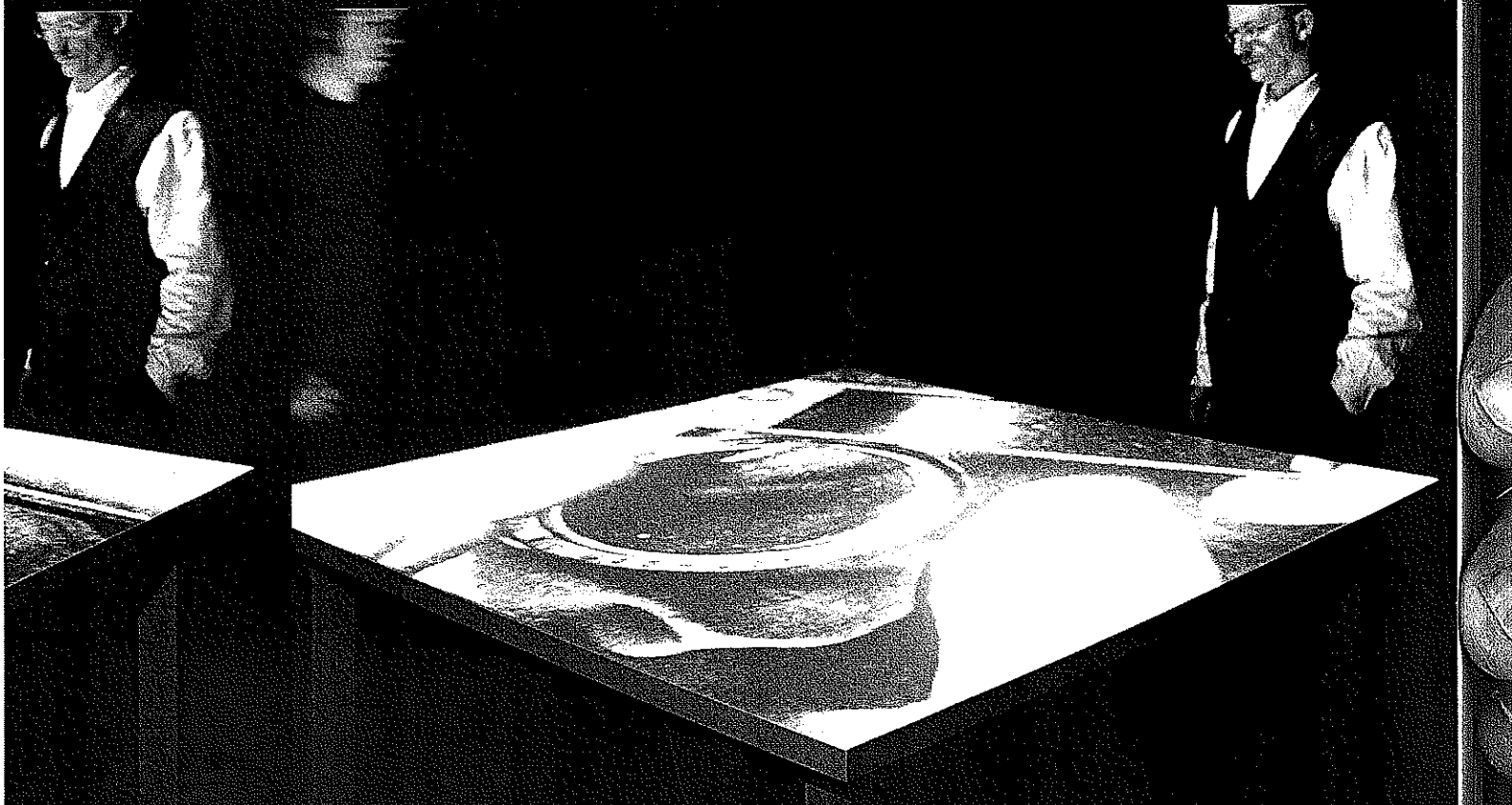
By contrast, in tapes such as *Black/White/Text* (1980), *Around and About*, *Processual Video* (both 1980) and *Primarily Speaking* (1980–1983), the voice asserts itself as an active force exerting itself on the image, rather than the other way round. Hill's work continually shifts between these two poles of assertion and engulfment. In these tapes, phrases spoken by Hill cause highly processed images to pan, fragment, appear and disappear, thus reversing the conventional role of sound and image. As the artist has noted, "[V]ocalization was a way to physically mark the time with the body through utterance ... and every syllable [was] tied to an image; suddenly words seemed quite spatial and the viewer becomes conscious of a single word's time."<sup>5</sup> In *Black/White/Text*, a text becomes a reflexive description of the structure of feedback, evoking the cyclical structure of the systems music of Terry Riley and LaMonte Young.



In a group of eight single-channel videotapes made between 1980 and 1989, this spatialization of words develop into a metalogue, in which the artist examines time, language and the nature of consciousness in a series of constructed debates and narrative dramas. In *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)* (1984), Hill constructs a metalogue based on the theories of Gregory Bateson, in which Alice in Wonderland and her father employ a Batesonian methodology to discuss the order of things and the direction of time. Numerous references to Lewis Carroll's books *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* occur in props, in references to white knights, the White Queen, chess, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, as well as in the notion of speaking backwards. By means of an elaborate structuring, the lines of both characters were originally performed backwards and then recorded in reverse. This reflexive doubling-back of language, mirrored visually through the inversion of images, refutes the linear concept of cause and effect, superimposing forward and backward movement to create a poetic linguistic model of feedback.

Hill's confrontation with the power of language reaches its apogee in his best-known videotape of the period, *Incidence of Catastrophe* (1987-1988), in which the artist, at the time absorbed in the writings of the French philosopher and writer Maurice Blanchot, takes on the role of Thomas in Blanchot's novel *Thomas the Obscure*. By the end of the videotape increasingly enveloped by language, Hill appears naked and abject, curled up in a foetal position on the floor of the bathroom, shivering as text towers above him: disembodied speech has become an all-consuming presence that overcomes the living subject.

As in all Hill's work, language is used to transform the passive act of seeing into an active spatial narrative in which images are propelled into being by the utterance or writing of words. This deconstruction of speech profoundly shifts its role from oration to a mediating presence. This mediating presence occupies a central position for Hill as the interface between the material and the electronic, the image and text, the body and technology, and between acting and thinking. In each work,



cit., p. 295.

influenced by Sol  
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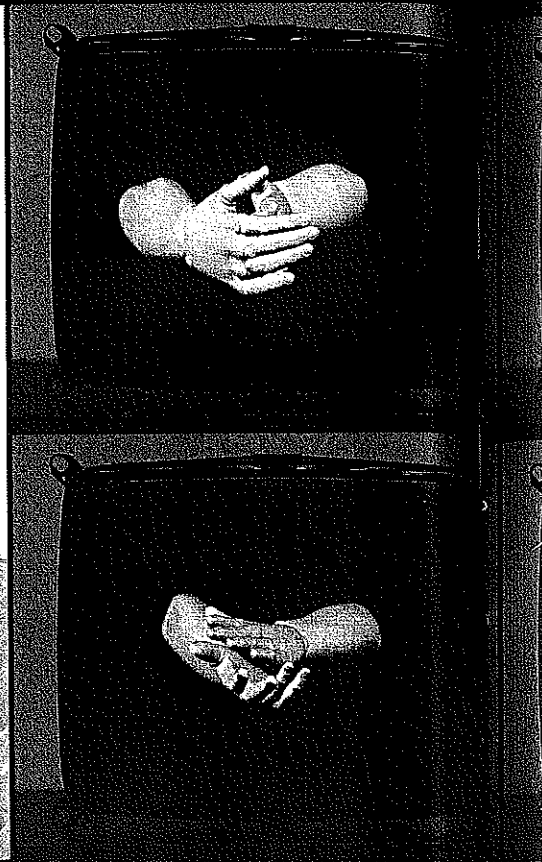
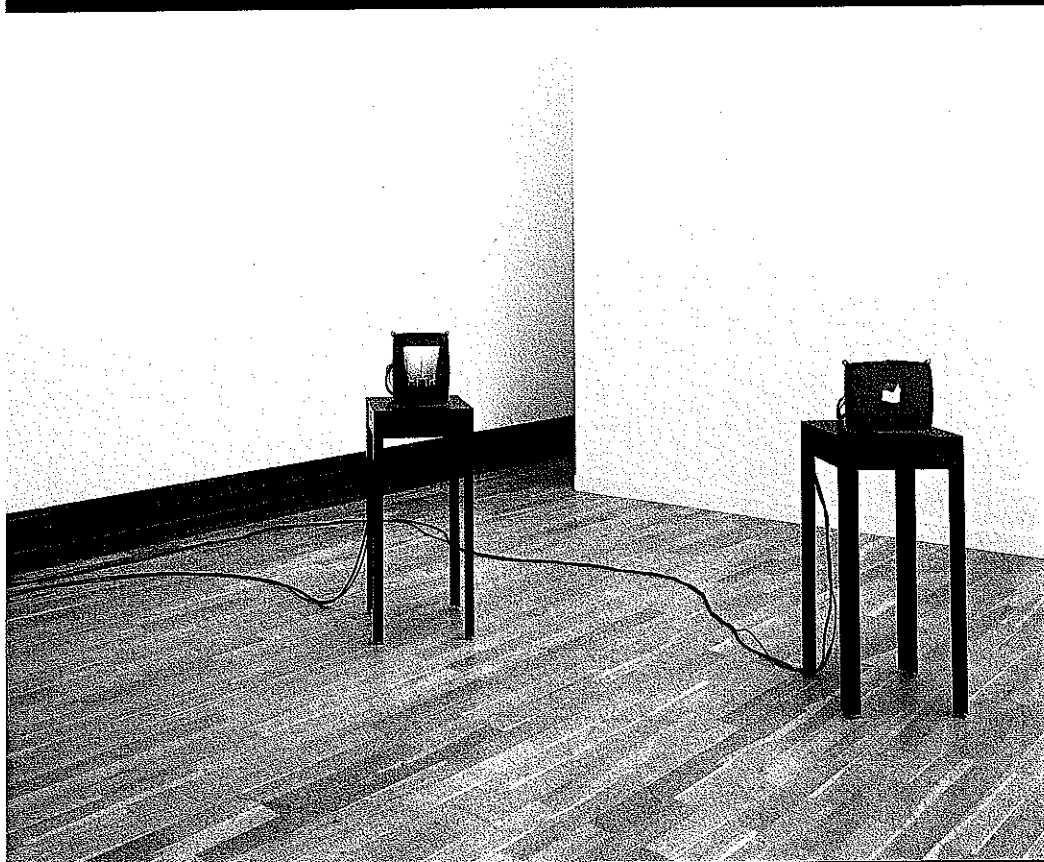
the interface is expressed by a fluid interchange between the body, language and video technology. The page of the book becomes the equivalent of the surface of the body and the video screen. The process of thinking and the perception of images become a synaptic flow paralleling the flow of the electronic signal from computer to monitors, projectors and players. In the early 1960s, McLuhan identified the connection between perception and electronic technology, observing that "circuitry means that every situation must fold back on itself, much as in the pattern of cognition and its playback, which is 'recognition' in the act of human perceiving and knowing,"<sup>6</sup> This equation of electronic feedback with human recognition articulates the core principle around which all Hill's work is constructed.

Hill's work is also a concrete demonstration of McLuhan's argument that the computer gives rise to the possibility "of extending consciousness itself as a technological environment."<sup>7</sup> In all Hill's multiple-channel installations, the movement between different images and screens is created

by directing different signals from a single computer through a switching device to the various screens, much as the brain sends out signals through the nerve fibers to different parts of the body. Read as physical manifestations of the process of thought, Hill's installations construct models of being, or consciousness, realized as a technological event in which the space of the work is activated as a kind of experiential field.

This experiential field, developed out of Hill's early installations and videotapes of the 1980s, laid the ground for a large group of installations created in the early 1990s in which this interest in the relationship between mind, body, text and technology was manifested through a physical response to the philosophical and literary texts by a group of writers and philosophers including Maurice Blanchot, Gregory Bateson, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. In asserting language as an image, however, Hill does not draw solely on philosophical questions regarding the dominance of the retinal over linguistics.<sup>8</sup>





*Liminal Objects #3*, 1996. (GHCR 95)

In some of Hill's installations, the written text appears dismantled, enlarged and fragmented. In others, the spoken text predominates. Alternatively, silence may also become the primary method of communication. In works such as *Disturbance (among the jars)* (1988), *Beacon (Two Versions of the Imaginary)* (1990), *Between Cinema and a Hard Place* (1991) and *I Believe It Is an Image in Light of the Other* (1991–92), thought appears as a fusion of images and spoken or written philosophical and literary texts that are variously contained within monitors, projected onto the blank pages of open books, or projected in slow rotation around a space. In *Disturbance (amongst the jars)*, seven monitors, stripped of their casing, are arranged in three groups on a low white platform. Surrounded by natural forms as well as fragments of text and landscape, nine poets and the philosopher Jacques Derrida can be seen reciting passages from gnostic texts in several languages.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes the narratives are scattered across the row of screens as discrete images; alternatively they appear as part of a single horizontal whole. The narrative's non-linear

structure confounds established forms of language, just as the gnostic scripts challenged the accepted gospels of Christianity and attempted to release language from its traditional forms.

The frontal, horizontal orientation of *Disturbance (among the jars)* is echoed in many of Hill's other installations of the 1990s, from *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place* (1990) and *Between Cinema and a Hard Place* (1991) to *Suspension of Disbelief (for Marine)* (1992) and *Circular Breathing* (1994). In each case, multiple images are strung together as though to create a sentence, linked by electronic synapses across which the images flicker back and forth. McLuhan described the book as being the first instrument of mass culture, and writing as an early form of technology. In Hill's installations, groups of screens often appear like pages of a book opened up and spread across the space of the gallery. In *I Believe It Is an Image in Light of the Other* (1991–92), actual books are scattered across the floor, some closed, others with open pages. Onto some of them extracts from Maurice Blanchot's *The Last Man* are projected,

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*Liminal Objects #8, 1998 (GHCR 112)*

Gary Hill, "Inter-view," *Gary Hill*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1993, p. 9.

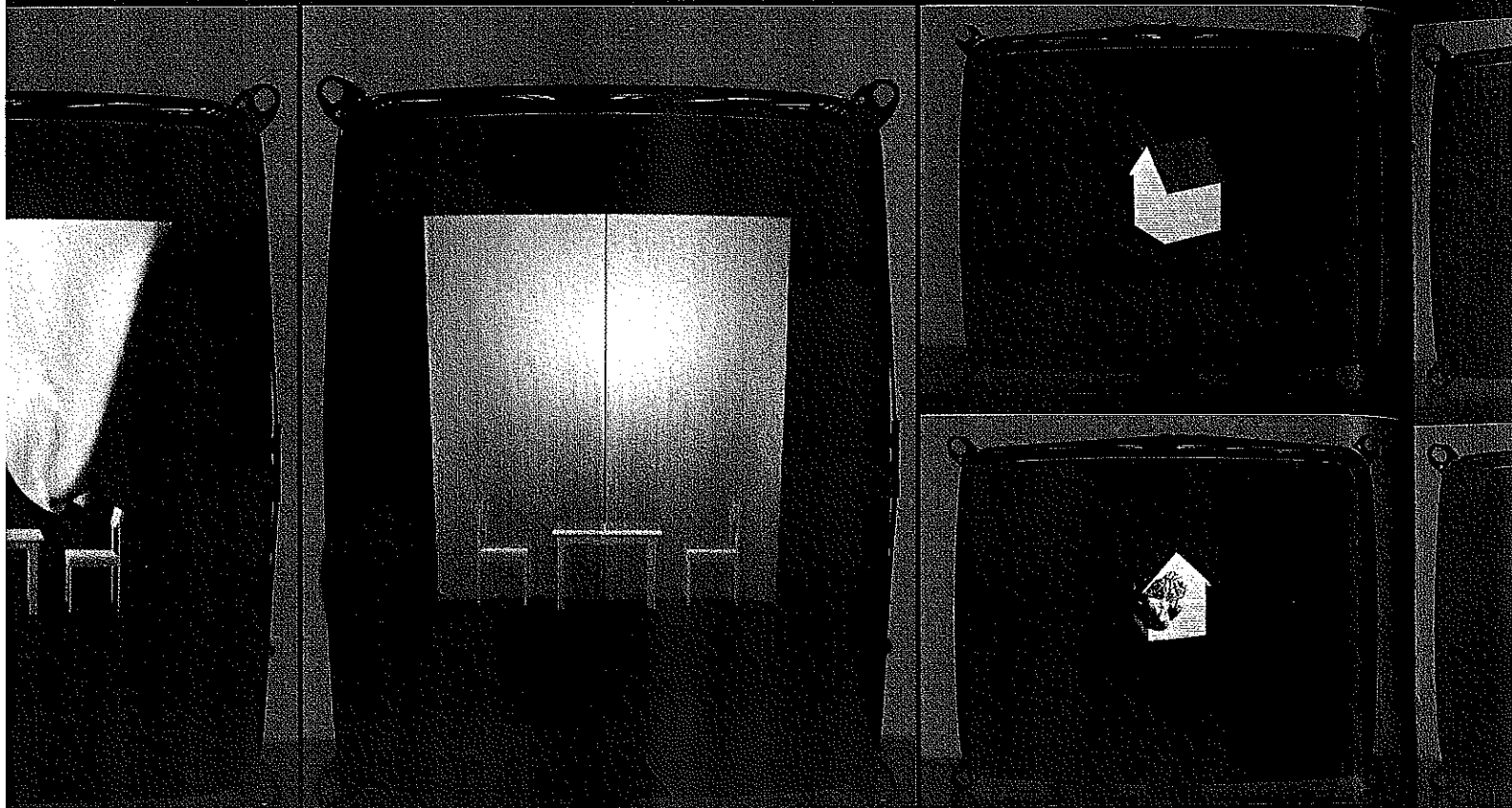
Lynne Cooke, "Gary Hill: Beyond Babel," *Gary Hill*, Stedelijk Museum, op. cit, p. 89.

with superimposed images of Hill's naked body moving restlessly within the frame of the page. The projections are emitted from an invisible source inside seven cylinders hanging from the ceiling like lamps as though illuminating an intimate reading space. The page, the screen, the printed text and the surface of the body become fused into a single entity in which text becomes image, and the body a screen. As Hill stated, "I wanted to confront the text and its body (the book) with another real body (myself)."<sup>10</sup>

The flow between individual units in Hill's installations creates a concrete representation of non-linear time, suggesting a cumulative narrative built from complex patterns of thinking. In *Suspension of Disbelief (for Marine)*, this narrative becomes corporeal. Two bodies, one male and one female, dart backwards and forwards across 30 stripped-down monitors suspended just above the viewer's head, coming together, then breaking apart. The rhythm of these movements contains an erotic charge, as the two bodies continually fuse and separate. Yet, as Lynne Cooke has

observed, the fragments of fleeting imagery linger only as "a trace that never lasts long enough to constitute itself as substance ... Not only connectedness but even immersion in the body is precluded ... for that would require a penetration beneath the surfaces or into the recesses ... That access is granted only to surfaces, to the external and ephemeral."<sup>11</sup>

As Cooke so precisely articulates, *Suspension of Disbelief (for Marine)* underlines what Hill has profoundly understood: the paradox between the engulfing nature of the video image and its inherent elusiveness, distance and intangibility. His treatment of the medium at once makes this intangibility palpable and exploits it to probe video's inner structure. In *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*, another horizontal and frontal work, three channels of imagery are dispersed among 23 monitors of different sizes, stripped of their casing and placed on their sides in two rows directly on the floor. Images of landscape, and slow-motion domestic actions such as the slicing of an apple, folding clothes, and gardening, are frag-



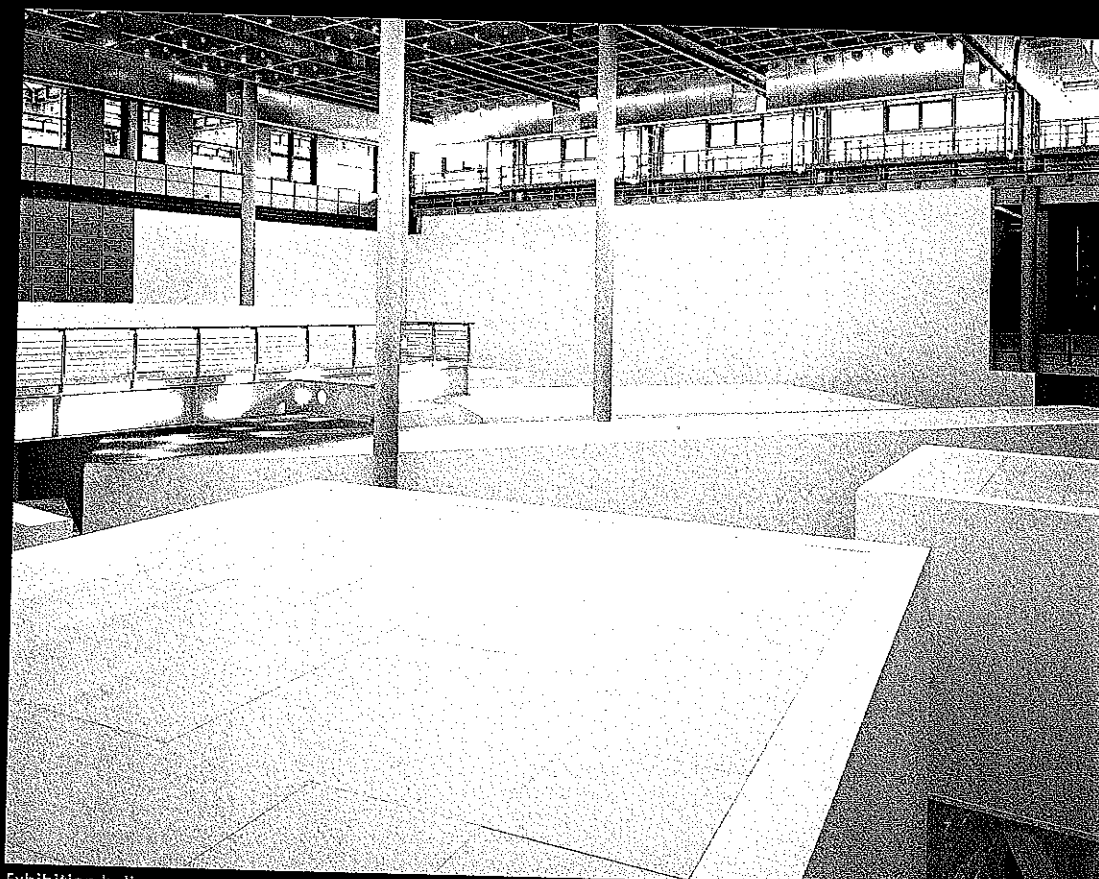
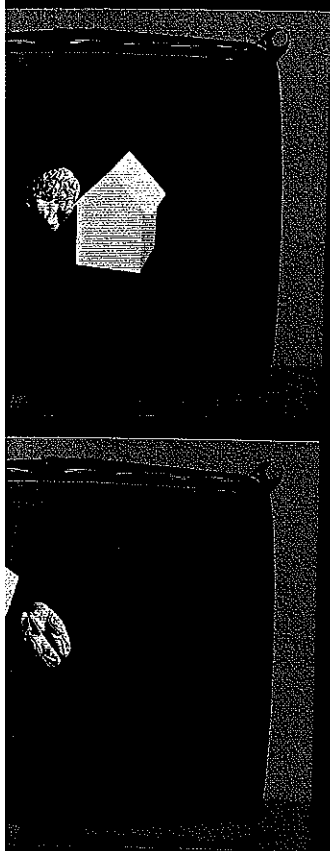
*Liminal Objects #2, 1996 (GHCR 94)*

mented and dispersed across the screens. An extract from the philosopher Martin Heidegger's text *The Nature of Language*, read by a female voice,<sup>12</sup> argues that poetry and language exist in "neighboring nearness." Heidegger's reference to the source of the spoken word as being somewhere beyond the body evokes Hill's enmeshing of the voice within technology. "When the word is called the mouth's flower and its blossom, we hear the sound of language rising like the earth. From whence? ... The sounding of the voice is then no longer only of the order of physical organs ..."<sup>13</sup>

As we attempt to read the complex sequences of images, Heidegger's description of measurement and proximity becomes visible in the placement of the rows of monitors, thus underlining the significance of the spatial and temporal intervals between the images and their locations: "When we intend nearness, remoteness comes to the fore ... The stretches along which and past which we measure nearness and remoteness as distances are the temporal sequence of 'nows', that

is, time; and the spatial, side-by-side (beside, in front, behind, above, below) of the points here and there, that is, space."<sup>14</sup> As in *Hole in the Wall*, the indivisibility of time and space in determining meaning is demonstrated within the piece's physical structure.

A segment of *Between Cinema and a Hard Place* became the template for *Circular Breathing*, an installation from 1994. Both works deal with cinema and the dismantling of the linear sequence of film frames. In *Circular Breathing*, the imagery moves from small contained units to large projections in space. Five large black-and-white images form a single band of projections across a wall; simultaneously the images also appear one after the other in a linear sequence from left to right. As each image appears, it 'borrows' its speed from the previous one, causing a retardation of movement and sound. Thus, with the appearance of all five images, both sound and movement grind almost to a standstill. Each image then disappears, following the original order of appearance and returning to real time. As the last image



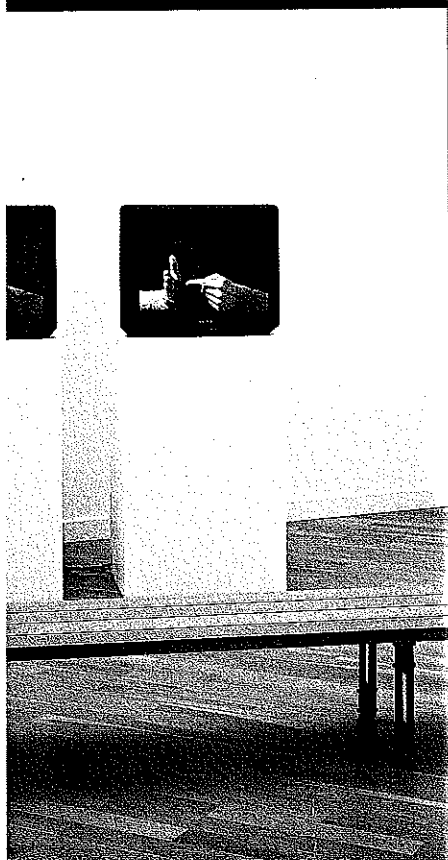
Exhibition hall

Robert Mitterthal, "Presub-  
jective Agency: Outside  
Identity," Gary Hill, *Midnight  
Crossing*, Westfälischer  
Kunstverein, Münster, 1997, p. 6.

slides off the edge of the wall at the right, the first image reappears on the left. This visual and aural circuit evokes the action of breathing, and in particular the technique used by jazz musicians, in which a long outward breath is used to sustain the trajectory of a note while the musician inhales. Language is also invoked in the linear movement of images from left to right, echoing the process of Western reading and writing. In one image, a woman reads a book in silence, while in another a hand writes in graphite on a page, and in a third, a young girl reads a text by Ludwig Wittgenstein aloud. As each sequence is triggered, a rapid flickering occurs, bringing our attention back to the process of our own optical perception.

From the beginning, Hill has used speed to confound our linear reading of the image and to emphasize its basis in cognitive thought. In works such as *Circular Breathing*, *Dervish* (1993–1995), *Reflex Chamber* (1996), *Midnight Crossing* (1997), and *Wall Piece* (2000), Hill intensifies the physiological aspect of vision by incorporating a stroboscopic light, kinetically connected to speech

and images. In *Circular Breathing*, the strobe contradicts the ease of breathing, rendering it an anxious, staccato action. In *Midnight Crossing* and *Reflex Chamber*, the viewer stands in total darkness until the space is lit for a split second by an image and/or a burst of light, which disappears before the viewer has time to grasp it. Hill aligns the elusiveness of the video image with the retinal experience of cinema, interrupting the persistence of vision by isolating a single frame, exposed to the viewer's retina at an impossibly high speed. In Hill's strobed installations, as Robert Mitterthal has observed, "At the point of innervation at which the image reflected in the retina becomes sight, the eye is necessarily blind. It organizes vision around this invisible center — which means that sight is entirely organized in order to prevent you from seeing its own blindness ... Confining us to a dark room and assaulting our vision with flashes of light, Hill forces us literally to see our own blindness."<sup>15</sup> This moment of blindness is profoundly cognitive. Hill's interest in how the mechanics of vision construct consciousness is also cinematic. In this sense it is



(R 126)



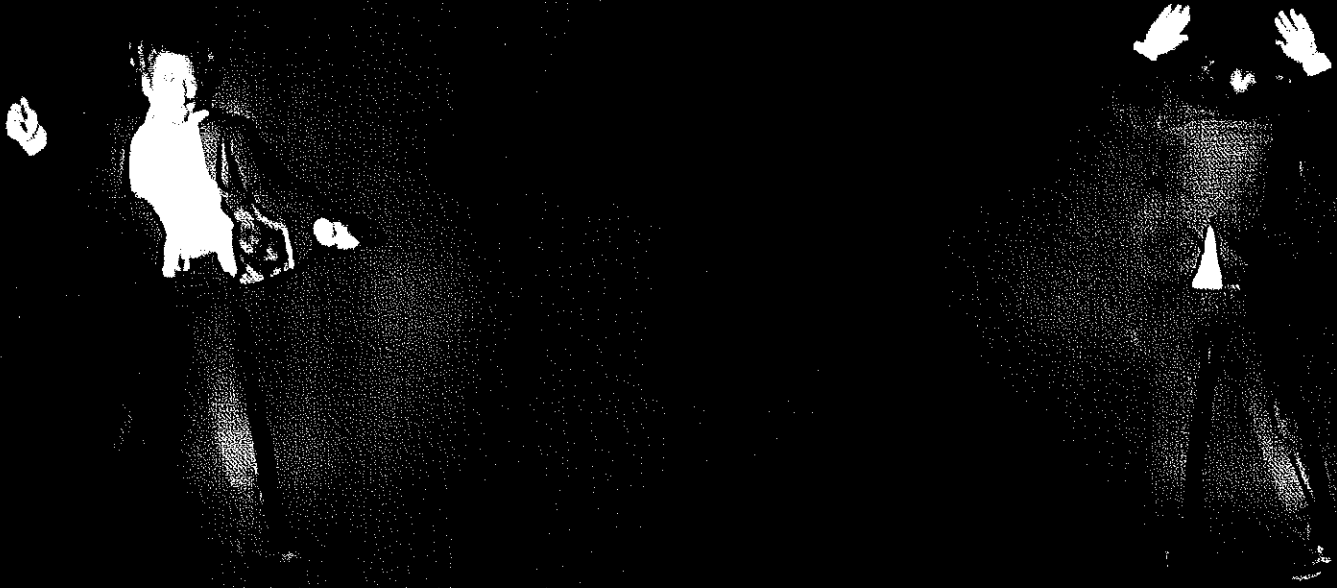
Wall Piece 10 (GHCR 124)

connected to the work of Paul Sharits, especially to his strobing film installation *Shutter Interface* (1977), which addressed the connection between a highly structured sequence of flashing images and the brain, as experienced for example in an epileptic seizure. In his examination of the relationship between the brain, the eye, the body and the moving image, black frames create a split-second, unseen pause between each image. The physiological impact of Hill's own strobing works similarly serves to direct the viewer's perception inwards, suggesting the possibility of a deeper cognitive and perceptual reading of the self. But where Sharits uses film frames to drive the image, Hill uses words, experienced as an electronic, synaptic flow. In *Midnight Crossing* and *Reflex Chamber*, comprehension is articulated by the sensation of having one's neural circuitry touched.

For Hill, the experience of LSD constituted an important early influence by dramatically opening up the perceptual structure of the participant's brain. In *Dervish* (1993-95), the artist creates a kind of

psychotropic chamber, within the center of which a large whirling machine spins and reflects images against a semi-circular wall, momentarily lighting up the pitch darkness. Described by George Quasha and Charles Stein as a "consciousness machine,"<sup>16</sup> the 'dervish' plunges the viewer into a disorientating, whirling vortex of strobed images, chanting voices and machine noise, creating a panorama of refraction. The liminal, almost subliminal, experience of split-second images within what is otherwise total darkness activates a deeper awareness of our perceptual structure, evoking the process of "imagining the brain closer than the eyes."<sup>17</sup>

If the viewer is rendered stationary and passive in the pitch black and flashing blindness of Hill's strobic spaces, *Tall Ships* (1992), one of Hill's key installations, constructs another kind of all-surrounding space, within which the viewer moves from image to image, experiencing a psychological, rather than a retinal, liminality. Inside a long corridor-like interior, the viewer encounters sixteen black-and-white ethereal figures who



George Quasha, "Tall Acts of  
Viewing," Gary Hill, Stedelijk  
Museum, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

Hill, p. 101.

Quasha, George and Charles  
Hill, *Viewer: Gary Hill's  
Spectacle Installations - No. 3*,  
Brooklyn, New York, 1997, p. 8.

stand or sit motionlessly along both walls in darkness. As the viewer approaches each in turn, it comes to life and walks towards the observer, seemingly mirroring the viewer's body language in an uncannily real exchange. Just as the flash of a strobed image makes the observer intensely aware of the mechanism of seeing, the unconscious reactions triggered by the apparently interactive figures make the viewers conscious of their own psychological mindset.

As George Quasha points out, like *Suspension of Disbelief (for Marine)*, *Tall Ships* operates as if at the 'verge' or 'threshold' of exchange.<sup>18</sup> The mirror-like quality of our encounter with each elusive figure confirms the impossibility of a tangible connection. Instead, what we experience is a subtle alteration of our own reactions. The feedback of the 'mirror' encounter "relates to neurological activity, somehow alter[ing] one's self-awareness and, therefore, consciousness itself."<sup>19</sup> And as Quasha further notes, our very presence is linguistic, for we become in effect the text of the work.

This depth of the viewer's participation in the work underlines the importance Hill attaches to the idea of process. Quasha observes that Hill identifies artistic process with the both verbal and non-verbal experience of encountering other people.<sup>20</sup> In *Viewer* (1996), seventeen day laborers of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds stand in a long horizontal row, projected life-size across a 45-foot wall of the gallery space. Each man stands silently, gazing impassively ahead as we stare back, attempting to unravel the meaning of their presence. Viewing, intrinsic to the gallery experience, becomes the subject of the work, as the laborers and viewers stare back at each other, in a circuit of continuous feedback.

One of Hill's most recent works, *Wall Piece* (2000) addresses the space between the self and the external world in more existential terms. Drawing on the same principles on which his earliest videotapes were constructed, Hill once more uses language to drive the appearance of the image. Narrating his own written monologue, Hill throws himself repeatedly against the wall, speaking a



*Bemerkungen über die Farben (German Version of Rem. n Color), 1994*

single word of the gradually building narrative as his body hits the surface of the wall in a heavily strobed rhythmic repetition. As in all Hill's work, the physical wall is a representation of something other: a technological and corporeal impasse. The emotional tenor of *Wall Piece* is distraught, and Hill's enquiry existential. Beyond the anxiety about remaining alive, as Hill's text implies, lies a higher level of consciousness. The struggle to move beyond this impasse onto another plane is articulated by a series of statements and questions: "Where am I? ... I'm synthesized ... I feel abandoned by the real ... Difference exists only through sound ... a wall of sound. Can I go through it? Can I go through with it? Where does it reside? What does it feed on? Why does it flicker? Nothing approximates its speed ... This is that hole which everything must pass through ... Will there be a moment of recognition? Is that when I am it? Waiting is human ... The point wants to show me something inhuman. It wants to bring me to my knees ... It wants me completely at the edge ... It burrows itself in, blows up and begins again. Plural. Points. Cells."<sup>21</sup>

Hill's powerful text articulates the anxiety surrounding the process of becoming, of passing from one plane into another, of waiting at the threshold for some critical moment of transformation – perhaps even at the verge of a nervous breakdown. This state of waiting at the verge is what George Quasha and Charles Stein have identified as a liminal state, the point just before a transition from one level of consciousness to another occurs. *Wall Piece* expresses a recognition of that state: anxiety toward the unknown and perhaps the eventual disintegration of the mortal body at the point of death. What lies beyond this moment is expressed in the unfathomable space of the endless sensation of continuous feedback and interconnectedness opened up by electronic technology. Hill activates this space as an energetic field of exchange, in which the eye, the brain, the ear and the heart all become part of a shared cognitive process.

