

Site Re:cite  
Gary Hill

*Site*, The place where something was, is or is to be located. *Recite*, from Latin *recitare*, to read out, cite again: *re-*, back, again + *citare*, to set in motion, summon. From the Indo-European root, *kei*; Suffixed form, *ki-neu-* in Greek, *kinein*, to move: (-KINESIS), . . . , CINEMATOGRAPH, . . . TELEKINESIS [*kei-*: from *Pokorny's Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 538]

Herein: bracketed off, framed, safe from incision, a verified moment akin to a photograph, however cropped, of the life (and "little deaths") of a text—a transcription from a videotape entitled, *Site Recite (a prologue)*.<sup>1</sup> Why not the epilogue to *Incidence of Catastrophe*?<sup>2</sup> What might it be a prologue to? Is this writing a prologue to it? What am I prolonging? Am I logging on to the text?

The image folded in the double bind of frame and context. Permanence of the act was marginal with a perforated edge of light heartedness. The hand reciprocated with one swift movement. Damage was negligible to the remaining back to back facades.<sup>3</sup>

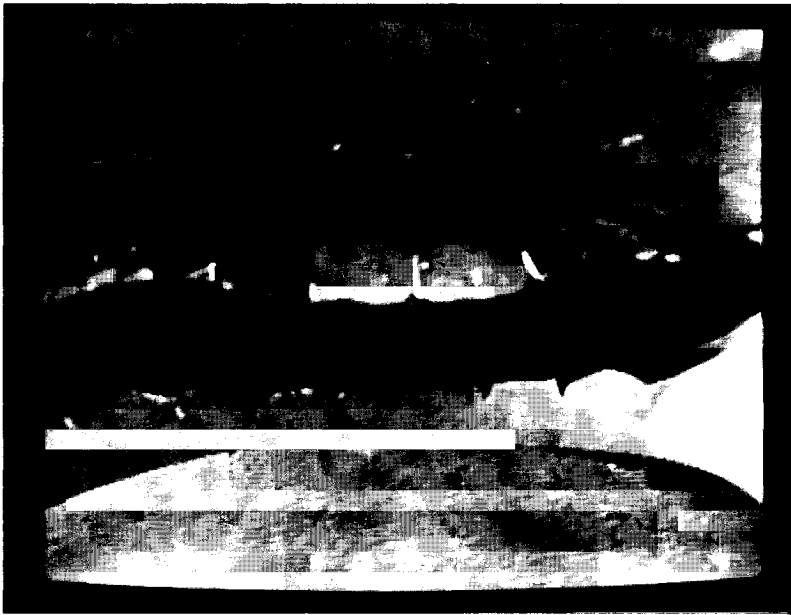
The transcription (a text in question) is only but a fragment among fragments from a larger textual weave. Perhaps it could be said that it is holographic—any "fragment" contains the whole (the same but not identical).

Moving back words to the text (in) question, *Site Recite* has been seen, heard, recorded, erased, coded, transcribed and published. These "versions" will have existed for reasons other than varied dissemination. They are in fact uneasy outside the hybrid media spaces from which they arose. (Surely there are others in hiding.) The question here becomes how to mark the differences, if there are any, between writing and what I have come to refer to as an *electronic linguistic*.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding the play of the seen/unseen, the traces and (re)remarkings of beginnings & ends, and other intertextual modalities, the scoring here will be along the *transtextual*—how the text is intimately entwined in a process of overwriting itself as it passes between

media. Rather than being a referential body for mapping out the evolutionary progression of a “script”—notations of amendments, insertions, deletions, or simply bedded down for a closed reading, the transcription is a momentary flashing, or perhaps, an epistle from a text (in question). One more of however many more re-presentations surfacing in the wake of video. What follows then is a tale of the text, the threads of which are entangled in a briar patch of picture, *The Evil Demon of Images* (Baudrillard). It shall be a reconnaissance to situate the debris, the textual shrapnel in the aftermath of brisance within the garden of inscription. Here then will be a writing work of excavation; pourings at an archeological site later to be overturned. What kind of cracks and fissures will appear as text and cast separate?

The outline separating the mouth and words was prerecorded.<sup>5</sup>



I could say that the progenitor, the mythic seeding of *Site Recite* took place in the midst of writing *Primarily Speaking*<sup>6</sup> . . . sometime in 1981 or was it 80? Could there have been a specific day, an exact time, a moment, a pause between the sewing of idioms, a burr in the twine . . .

think it over      rattle off a list if that's all that's left

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never mind the images      they always return      if not

new ones will replace the old ones      it's their destiny

even those permanently lodged      sooner or later

lose their grasp      it's the nature of the beast

. . . a phrase set aside, a single word that resonated in the margins—  
a verbal cocoon, a pinpoint (no-body, not even I heard the needle  
drop).

The mind can't help but mince and suddenly you're beside yourself enter-  
taining a party of two only to fall back a few steps, a few words gone by,  
a few instructions on how to get from point A to point B [points known  
only by the needle that records everything]<sup>7</sup>

From a catalogue statement excerpted from what was then the (text  
in) question. A marginal thought for the screening of *Why Do Things  
Get in a Muddle? (Come On Petunia)*, wherein an exception to a  
slippery entropic dialogue comes to mind. After having heard her father  
explain by enumerated examples why things tend towards chaos rather  
than towards tidiness, the daughter cites the examples in the exact  
reverse order from the way she had heard them during the course of  
the dialogue: "Then Daddy, are you saying the same thing about  
pennies, and about Come on Petunia, and about sugar and sand, and  
about my paint box?"<sup>8</sup>

What happens with these recitations, historicities, circuitous extra-  
texts that (dis)figure the (con)text? There is a kind of pile up; an  
exquisite corpse leading a procession of dancing, flip-flopping paren-  
theses (Greek: "a putting in beside"). They begin to take on something  
other than abstract grammatical marks—pliers with unseen handles  
wiring the syntax with shifting -vexes and -caves tripping the gait of  
the eye; amassing pairs of upright bows diking the script. Brute meta-  
phors somehow won't do. The heap of language still seeps. The par-  
enthetical is but a meandering line that whispers what one hears, which  
side is (a)side and which is (be)side?

Site Recite  
(a prologue)

Nothing seems to have ever been moved. There is something of every description which can only be a trap. Maybe it all moves proportionately cancelling out change and the estrangement of judgement. No, an other order pervades. It's happening all at once. I'm just a disturbance wrapped up in myself, a kind of ghost vampirically passing through the forest passing through the trees.

The sun will rise and I won't know what to do with it. Its beak will torture me as will its slow movement, the movement it invented that I can only reiterate. Too much time goes by to take it by surprise. Bodily sustenance is no longer an excuse. The quieter and stiller I become, the livelier everything else seems to get. The longer I wait, the more the little deaths pile up.

A vague language drapes everything but the walls—what walls? The very walls that never vary—my enclosure, so glorious from a distance, stands on the brink of nothing like a four-legged table. What is it? An island with a never ending approach? A stopgap from when to where? Something to huddle over with my elbows like trestles without tracks, the bases of which are scattered with evidence of unsolved crimes? The overallness of it all soaks through, runs through the holes in my hands and continues to run amok, overturning rocks that should not be overturned, breaking bread that should not be broken.

So much remains. No doubt it can all be counted. Starting with any one, continuing on with any other one until all is accounted for, a consensus is reached. That it can all be shelved in all its quantized splendor, this then is the turf.

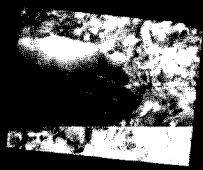
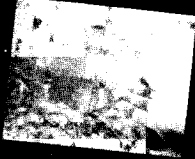
These sightings. This scene before me made up of just so many *just* views (nature's constituency) sits with indifference to the centripetal vanishing point that mentality posits so falsely. Brain, minding business, incessantly constructs an infinite series of makeshifts designed to perpetuate the picture—the one like all others that holds its breath for a thousand words, conversely exhales point zero zero one pictures. This insidious wraparound, tied to the notion “I have eyes in the back of my head,” binds me to my double, implodes my being to a mere word as it winds the world around my mouth. A seamless scroll weaves my view back into place—back to back with itself—the boomerang effect, decapitates any and all hallucinations leaving (lo and behold) the naked eye, stalking each and every utterance that breaks and enters the dormitories of perception.

I must become a warrior of self-consciousness and move my body to move my mind to move the words to move my mouth to spin the spur of the moment.

Imagining the brain closer than the eyes.









*It's Time to Turn the record Over*, was the title of a proposed work,<sup>9</sup> a five channel/screen video installation that would display synchronous recordings of my feet and hands, made by attaching four cameras to my limbs, and my head, recorded with a fifth camera attached to my trunk and positioned out in front of my body looking back at my head. The screens were to be configured as a cross.

In effect, [my] body films its own absence, metaphorically pinning or nailing its extremities to the cross with the camera's "objective" view, (dis)embod[ying] the "video". . . . Only the extremities of the body are seen, a body crucified and impassioned by the cameras that have entered it.<sup>10</sup>

These parts, versions, shards, titles, de-scriptions, sutures, occlusions, excerptual reverberances, quotations and all the other generic simulacra of text cited above, bled into *Crux*.<sup>11</sup> During that time, the text developed metaphorically *with* the location and process of making the work: the topology of the site, a river island laden with castle ruins; labyrinthine paths, stairways and rooms through which the body might gain passage; perceptual discovery; moments of abandonment and physical pain were all to bear upon "scripting" the walk. Even the anecdotal seemed to ripple the text:

It was nearing dusk. Having completed the last walk, we were preparing to leave the island when a late fall storm came in from nowhere. We were left with an either/or decision: to leave at that moment in hopes of reaching the mainland before the storm worsened, or wait it out, hedging it would only be a squall. We took our chances with movement and packed the canoe with our gear and all the tape we had recorded. By the time we entered the water, the wind had worked up a menacing brew of cross-currents and choppy water. Taking the drift into account, we headed for the single lacuna in the moat surrounding the island. If we missed it (which felt like a given), there was the risk of shipwreck—the hull would be torn open by the dead heads hidden by the tide. Needless to say, we made it; bodies, equipment, tape, sediment intact.

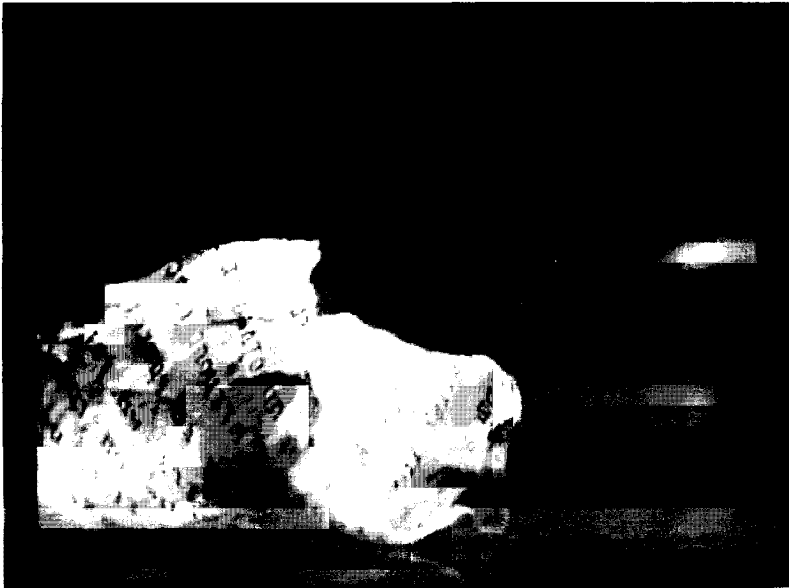
*Crux* was premiered at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles with what was at that point the most fabricated version of the (text in) question. It was foregrounded in the work as a spoken monologue. In describing *Crux*, Raymond Bellour wrote, "The text that accompanies the gait of this disconnected body is itself a 'blank' text . . . it is a text of desperation and of wandering, close to some of the writings of the nouveau roman, and in particular to those of Blanchot, whose dislocating and decentering force is [witnessed]. . . . From this solitary destiny, that in fact isn't a destiny at all because it has neither beginning nor end, the hero bears the cross, alone."<sup>12</sup> It

is not only the *neither beginning nor end* that rears here, but in a strangely prescient way, the “blank” text. Bellour wrote this not knowing that the text (in) question had been re-moved from the work prior to his writing. Had he known, how would Bellour have treated this erasure? Or, as it seems, hadn’t he divulged the site? Was the text a temporary tool, a scribe, used to dislodge the image (of flesh); to excavate the site (of absence); to break the spine of the book? Is the absent body the word/image crux? Is it Freud’s mystic writing pad, everyone’s desire, every ones’ death, zEros’ wait state?<sup>13</sup>

The crux of the matter . . . A talismanic depression left over from *Primarily Speaking?* (My mouth couldn’t quite fit around the words?)

So far, the traces of historicity have only referred to the public domain of the text (in question). What of that which has been left behind; the sediment that accumulates in folds, files, discs and onion skin. In the margins of one such scrap, I had counted syllables from selected parts. Each part had the same number of syllables. What was this numerological encrypting about?

Decoding my own code, the idea was a kind of möbius interlocutor of speech and writing for videotape. A similar notion was applied, though sparingly, in *Happenstance* (*part one of many parts*).<sup>14</sup> The text is folded on itself (textual rorschach); one part is spoken, the utterance of which dictates the other part on the screen, syllabically



corresponding one to one. Each part minding the other—logosfrog and leapscript fraying the play of meaning.

And then there's the forthcoming, where the (text in question), entitled, "And If the Right Hand Did Not Know What the Left Hand is Doing" is the left side of a double sided text and the column between is a meandering crack.<sup>15</sup> Left with these unrelenting beginnings and ends—the unravelings of disembodied text(s)—its "prologue," *Site Recite* paronomastically disturbed, there is little recourse but to enter the current work. *Site Recite* (the videotape) can be seen as a single reading/writing from an "interactive" videodisc entitled *Which tree*.<sup>16</sup> I mark this word interactive with its tendency to attract an optimism of infinite possibilities, contrary to the fact that it is not only delimited by if/then scenarios, but thoroughly collapses when the viewer finds his/her self forced to make decisions inscribed by "multiple choice."

To subvert this technocratic illusion prescribed by interactive media, *Which tree* is an attempt to create a field of play wherein the modus operandi is one of wandering, where one makes way through a metaphorical wood entangled in a web of reflexivity. Description: a single line scribbled on a page makes points of intersection where the line overlaps itself. These labyrinthine intersections (points of "interactivity") the viewer wanders "through" are embedded in the "paths" rather than announced by signposts. Neither image nor text (the scribbled line) break up into multiple plots, stories or non-sequiturs (collage, montage, juxtapositions, cut-ups, etc.). Rather, by continuous passage through said intersections, the viewer/writer unfolds a scenario in real time. No matter which way one turns (wanders), the camera obscura and (spoken) text continue seamlessly, uninterrupted by edits or syntactical quirks.

The viewer/reader's primary impetus to engage the work is atypically other than seeing. She/he conjoins with a voice<sup>17</sup> to (dis)cover "their" text (tracks) within a self-reflexive mental terrain of (th)ree-(de)construction. Is a phenomenological experience of thinking possible? Traversing the fold between consciousness and self-consciousness, the viewer reads as he/she writes in the shadows of presence. Here, the linear (author)ity of text, meaning, origin and sight begins to implode. The viewer/reader/writer is continually thrown back (to) incite the text.

## NOTES

All Videoworks by Gary Hill. Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

1. *Site Recite (a prologue)*, color videotape, stereo, 1989 (4 minutes).
2. *Incidence of Catastrophe*, color videotape, stereo, 1987–88 (43:51 minutes).
3. *Videograms*, excerpts from *Videogram 2*, b/w videotape, 1980–81 (13:27 minutes).
4. Gary Hill, "Processual Video," program notes, *Video Viewpoints*, Museum of Modern Art, 26 February 1980.
5. Excerpt from *Processual Video*, b/w videotape, 1980 (11:13 minutes).
6. *Primarily Speaking*, exists as both a single-channel videotape and eight-channel video installation. The text was closer to being "constructed" than "written." I literally surrounded myself with the cinerama-like scroll of hundreds of idiomatic expressions and "watched" them fall together, 1981–83.
7. Gary Hill, *Focus*, Scan Program notes, Video Gallery Scan (Tokyo), April–May 85.
8. *Why do Things Get in a Muddle? (Come On Petunia)*, color videotape, 1984 (33:09 minutes). This work was based on the metalogue by Gregory Bateson published in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972) 3–8. Curiously, now, in comparing my script notes with the original text, it was I who had performed this mirroring of the text. The original has an additional "pennies" at the end. (Also, *Come on Petunia* replaced Donald in the original text. The daughter used anagrams, Once Upon a Time and Old Dan, respectively, to mix up the father's logic.)
9. "Video Installations 1983," *Afterimage* 11.8 (Dec. 83). Also, the "same" work for a time had the working title, "The Writing's on the Wall and I Can't Stop Reading It."
10. Robert Mitterthal, "Video's Event: Gary Hill's Catastrophe," *Reflex* 3.6 (1989).
11. *Crux*, five-channel video installation, collection of the artist, 1983–87.
12. Raymond Bellour, "Video Writing," trans. Alison Rowe. Included in *Illuminating Video* (New York: Aperture Press, 1990) and originally in a separate article, "Le dernier homme en croix," *Cinq pièces avec vue*, exhibition catalogue (Geneva: Centre Genevois de Gravure Contemporaine, 1987).
13. The wait state of a computer works in conjunction with its speed (in megahertz). The lower the number the faster the CPU computes. A zero wait state suggests the hypothetical ideal of no waiting.
14. *Happenstance (part one of many parts)*, b/w videotape, stereo sound, 1982–83 (6:47 minutes).
15. One of a collection of essays in *Illuminating Video*.

16. Although the images appear continuous (real time), all directional changes—left and right movements, “in” and “out” focusing—are edit points that join separately recorded images. All the segments were recorded for an interactive videodisc project, *Which Tree* (work-in-progress, 1986–??).
17. The spoken text of *Which Tree* will be an electronic combine of a male and female voice. Unlike a simple mix (chorus) of the two, the sound will be a harmonic weave of the two sources that can be dynamically weighted one way or the other at different points in the labyrinthine text.



