

# Whitney Museum of American Art 19

## The New American Filmmakers Series

EXHIBITIONS OF INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO

### Doug Hall

October 30–December 2, 1984

*Machinery for the Re-education of a Delinquent Dictator*, 1983.

Video installation. On view continuously

Gallery Talk, Thursday, November 1, at 2:00  
Doug Hall will be present

#### Credits:

Conceived and directed by Doug Hall

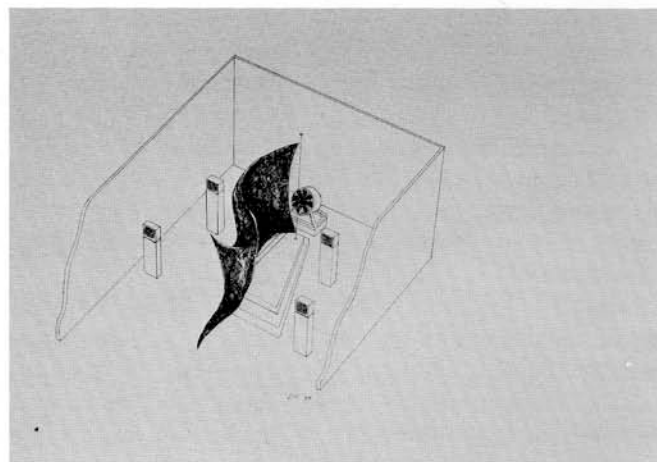
Photographed by Jules Backus

*Machinery for the Re-education of a Delinquent Dictator* was first exhibited in Rochester, New York, at the Visual Studies Workshop in November 1983. The version I am showing at the Whitney Museum has been changed sculpturally in order to take advantage of the new setting. Like most of my installation work, this piece is designed for a specific location, in this case, the Film and Video Gallery of the Whitney Museum.

Doug Hall, a San Francisco-based artist, has long been active in performance and video art. *Machinery for the Re-education of a Delinquent Dictator* (1983) is a vivid commentary on the signs of power as they are articulated through language and image. In this piece, the Film and Video Gallery, painted bright red, is transformed into an environment suggestive of authoritarian power. Four monitors are situated around a stepped glossy-black platform over which a large red flag hangs. Behind the platform is an enormous industrial fan that is activated as the spectator enters the gallery. The fact that nothing occurs until someone enters the space is central to the meaning of the work: just as power is bestowed upon a ruler by those ruled, there can be no spectacle without an observer.

The action of the fan on the flag alternates with the display of two videotapes. In one tape, the artist appears as a demagogue, with a reddened complexion and wearing dark glasses. Seen both in close-up and at a distance, this figure makes a series of pronouncements. But his speech is slowed down and processed through an electronic harmonizer so that the phrases are barely comprehensible. His words are merely a hypnotic vocal sound. Intercut with the images of the speaker are shots of the red flag moving in slow motion. In the other videotape, the flag is intercut with the following words: TYRANNY, CONDEMNED, THE FORBIDDEN, FEAR.

The movement of the air in the gallery, the artist's gestures, and the phrases amplified through the speakers convey a sense of political power—not through the explicit meaning of words or images, but through the connotations such conventions evoke in the spectator. It is style, not content, form rather than substance, that are employed as persuasive devices.



Drawing for *Machinery for the Re-education of a Delinquent Dictator*, 1983. Ink on paper, 20½ × 26 inches. Collection of the artist. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements.

In the videotapes, the speaker is seen from specific points of view: in close-up, from a low angle, and with a clenched fist smashing down on a table top. Each image projects an authoritarian presence. This theme is reiterated in the red color of the walls as well as in the monumentality of the pedestals on which the monitors rest. The installation is an intertextual investigation combining sound, videotapes with words and images, and the deployment of structures in space to reveal the seductive and frightening subtext of political demagoguery and persuasion.

Doug Hall's *Machinery for the Re-education of a Delinquent Dictator* parallels the concerns of many contemporary artists whose work critiques the mass media as it portrays domestic and international politics. The scope of this art ranges from the images of repressive violence vividly interpreted in Leon Golub's paintings, to Jenny Holzer's texts, which explore the hidden meanings within political slogans, to Barbara Kruger's photo-montages, which expose the ideological message within advertising and political rhetoric. Doug Hall's videotapes and installations share with these artists' work a treatment of mass media as a form of spectacle in society, as a discourse on the desire for power and social control.

John G. Hanhardt  
Curator, Film and Video

## Machinery for the Re-education of a Delinquent Dictator

In viewing this work, the spectator will see clearly that the piece plays with highly charged images which have obvious political overtones. The work is a machine, a lair, the soul of the tyrant. It is menacing and aggressive but not without a touch of the comical. The wind is theater, fabricated in the service of the spectacle and illusion. The tyrant himself, roaring from the safety of the television monitor, is an illusion, a fabricated image with no decipherable content to his harangue, his voice having been slowed and electronically distorted beyond recognition. He calls out like a distant voice in a dream, at once there and not there at all.

Of course, the huge red flag is central to this piece. It drapes itself over the black stepped platform like an immense red skirt. It is when one enters the gallery that a switch triggers the wind machine and activates the flag, which stretches out, billowing and snapping with the force of a bull whip. For a minute and a half the flag dominates everything in the room. The wind is overpowering; the roar of the machine unrelenting until the fan stops, the flag becomes still, and the voice of the tyrant once again dominates the room.

Like other work that I have done over the past several years, this piece deals with the symbols of power and how we orient ourselves to them. It is an investigation of what I call the "theory of the spectacle." This idea carries with it the following suggestions: first, it presupposes that culture has a pervasive power and that this power is the sum of the attitudes of the people manifested through their common will via the institutions that culture (the people) has created to express this will. Second, the idea of the spectacle suggests that a society must affirm and reaffirm its values through all the means available to it (through architecture, pomp and ceremony, athletics, the mass media, the visual arts, etc.). The flag is the chauvinist's talisman and is part of this theater of images. We are all forced, one way or another, to take a position in relation to these symbols since they form a significant part of the vocabulary which informs us about ourselves and the world we live in. It is, by the way, the spectator entering the domain of the tyrant which initiates the spectacle of the flag.

Doug Hall

### Biography

Doug Hall was born in San Francisco in 1944 and studied anthropology at Harvard University, where he received his B.A. in 1966. He then attended the Rinehart School of Sculpture of the Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, and received his M.F.A. in 1969. Hall began working in video in 1973, creating single-channel tapes, installations, and performances. Throughout the mid-1970s he worked with T. R. Uthco, an artists' group he founded with Jody Procter and Diane Andrews Hall, as well as with Ant Farm (Chip Lord, Doug Michaels, and Curtis Schreier). Hall has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (1979), among others, and won the James D. Phelan Award in Video Art in 1983. He has taught at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, and currently teaches at the San Francisco Art Institute. Hall lives and works in San Francisco.

### Selected One-Artist Exhibitions

Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1975; Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1975; Long Beach Museum of Art, California, 1976; University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, 1979; Long Beach Museum of Art, California, 1980; Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1981; Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1981; Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York, 1983; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1983; University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley, 1984.

### Selected Group Exhibitions

Kassel, West Germany, "Documenta 6," 1977; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "Two-Channel Video," 1978; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, "Space/Time/Sound—1970's: A Decade in the Bay Area," 1979; The San Francisco Art Institute Annual, 1980; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "1983 Biennial Exhibition"; Kunsthaus Zurich, "New American Video," 1983; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, "Awards in the Visual Arts 2," 1983 (and traveling exhibition); Montbeliard, France, "2nd International Video Festival," 1984; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "Video: Recent Acquisitions," 1984; San Sebastian, Spain, "San Sebastian Film and Video Festival," 1984.

### Videotapes

All videotapes are ¾ inch, with sound, unless otherwise noted.

*I Like My Television*, 1972. ½ inch, black and white; 3 minutes.

*The Real Lone Ranger*, 1972. With Willie Walker. ½ inch, black and white; 4½ minutes.

*I Like Supermarkets*, 1974. ½ inch, black and white; 16 minutes.

*The Eternal Frame*, 1975. T. R. Uthco with Ant Farm. ½ inch, black and white and color; 23 minutes.

*Really, I've Never Done Anything Like That Before, He Said*, 1975.

T. R. Uthco. Two channels, ½ inch, black and white; 15 minutes.

*Game of the Week*, 1977. Color; 17 minutes.

*I Hardly Ever Leave This Room*, 1979. With Diane Andrews Hall.

Three channels, color; 15 minutes.

*The Amarillo News Tapes*, 1980. With Jody Procter and Chip Lord.

Color; 25 minutes.

*The Speech*, 1982. Color; 4½ minutes.

*This Is the Truth*, 1982. Color; 5 minutes.

*Songs of the 80s*, 1983. Color; 17 minutes.

*Almost Like a Dance*, 1984. Color; 5 minutes.

### Installations

*The Eternal Frame*, 1976. T. R. Uthco with Ant Farm. Single channel, black and white and color, sound; 21 minutes.

*The Amarillo News Tapes*, 1980, 1981. With Jody Procter and Chip Lord. Single channel, color, sound; 27 minutes.

*The Tyrant's Last Dream*, 1983. Single channel, color, sound; 4½ minutes.

*The Victims' Regret*, 1984. Four channels, color, sound; 7 minutes.

### Selected Bibliography

Hall, Doug. "Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Image." *Video 80*, 4 (Spring 1982), pp. 28-30.

McGee, Micki. "Artists Making the News, Artists Re-making the News." *Afterimage*, 10 (November 1982), pp. 6-9.

*Video Installation 1983* (exhibition catalogue). Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York. A special supplement to *Afterimage*, 11 (December 1983).

*Video/TV: Humor/Comedy, A Touring Video Exhibition of Media Study/ Buffalo* (exhibition catalogue). Buffalo: Media Study/Buffalo, 1983.

Doug Hall's videotapes are distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York, and Environmental Communications, Venice, California.

### Whitney Museum of American Art

945 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021

Hours: Tuesday 1:00-8:00

Wednesday-Saturday 11:00-5:00

Sunday 12:00-6:00

Film and video information: (212) 570-0537