

Doug Hall
MATRIX/BERKELEY 158

University Art Museum/
Pacific Film Archive
late April - mid June 1993

UNIVERSITY, 1993 (detail: Bone Storage Room, Department of Paleontology)



Over the past four years, Doug Hall has produced several bodies of work incorporating photographs that in his words, “try to make apparent a structure, or structural way of looking at things.”¹ In the installation *People and Buildings*, 1992, Hall takes this approach to the representation of the contemporary architectural environment, while the series *The G.D.R. Project*, 1992-93, a photographic series documenting former government office buildings in East Berlin, represents, in the artist’s words, “the architectonics of political power.”²

Hall’s *MATRIX* installation, *UNIVERSITY*, produced with Jordan Biren, Mitchell Goodman, and John Rapko, was commissioned by the University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive to mark the 125th anniversary of the University of California. The installation reveals certain structural conditions underlying the modern university system. It consists of twelve large black and white photographs of interior spaces on the Berkeley campus, a video presenting the artists’ comments on aspects of pedagogical processes, and a series of quotations from Aristotle to Foucault concerning the acquisition of knowledge.

Hall focuses in particular on the relationship between architecture and ideology. The spaces he selects to represent, such as lecture halls, laboratories, classrooms, and corridors, typify the modern university. In particular, Hall’s images underscore the compartmentalization of knowledge, the prevailing hierarchical mode of teaching, and the resemblance of teaching and research facilities to bureaucratic

and corporate models. Although offering a critical perspective on university architecture, and by extension, the university as a phenomenon, Hall’s photographs are highly poetic and even alluringly aesthetic. Devoid of any human presence, these pictures suggest the existence of an immensely powerful, self-affirming and self-replicating knowledge machine.

The video component of the exhibition, produced by Hall in collaboration with Jordan Biren and Mitchell Goodman, introduces a human and somewhat comical element. Using environments within the university, several of which also appear in the photographs, the artists have staged situations that foreground some of the ordinary academic activities that take place within the university. In their tape, the university is treated as a stage set—a theater of knowledge in which the activities of amassing, collating, and dispersing knowledge constitute the play. The institutional nature of these activities is suggested by placing the monitor on the wall with the kind of commercial bracket associated with television displays in public buildings such as airports, hospitals, and colleges.

The installation includes a series of twenty-four quotations, selected by John Rapko, a graduate student in the UC Berkeley Department of Rhetoric. Rather than functioning didactically, these quotations instead place the *concept* of the university within an overall context of the philosophical problem of knowledge and knowing per se. The quotations accomplish this by expressing simultaneously contradictory viewpoints: from the idealism of Hegel and Simone Weil

to the anxiety of Kierkegaard and Leo Lowenthal to the social critique of Habermas and Weber.

“All men by nature desire to know.”
—Aristotle

“For ten years now, without repose, I’ve held my erudite recitals and led my pupils by the nose. And round we go, on crooked ways or straight, and well I know that ignorance is our fate. This I hate.”
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“There is the first function of the university: to put students out of circulation. Its second function, however, is one of integration. Once a student has spent six or seven years of his life in this artificial society, he becomes “absorbable”: society can consume him.”
—Michel Foucault

“Academic work is one of those fields containing a pearl so precious that it is worthwhile to sell all our possessions, keeping nothing for ourselves, in order to be able to acquire it.”
—Simone Weil

“Since all desirable work is scarce, education is used as an obstacle course which is lengthened as such work becomes scarcer. Educational credentials serve to solidify the privileges of professions and the stratification of society.”
—Walter Benjamin

The overall experience of these fragments of text, particularly when they are viewed as a group and in relation to the photographs and video, invite the viewer to contemplate various ideologies of knowledge and the social and political implications of knowing.

However, through its exposure of contradictions, ruptures and gaps, Hall’s *UNIVERSITY* presents knowing and not knowing on equal terms, provocatively undermining its own quasi-didactic form. As such, Hall’s installation is related to the investigative, yet poetic and open-ended work of artists such as Zoe Leonard and Richard Prince. Like Hall, these artists seek to expose patterns or structures within social behaviors and institutions while refraining from imposing a single interpretation.

Doug Hall has been working with photography, video, sculpture, and installation since the early 1970s. He is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1979, 1985, 1989), The Fulbright Foundation (1990), The Rockefeller Foundation (1989), The Guggenheim Foundation (1991), and the California Arts Council (1992-93). He is an associate professor at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he has taught in the Department of Performance/Video: New Genres since 1981. Hall lives and works in San Francisco.

Lawrence Rinder

1. Doug Hall, interview with the author, 23 March 1993.
2. Ibid.

This exhibition is dedicated to Leo Lowenthal.

Work in *MATRIX*:

UNIVERSITY, 1993, installation with photographs, text, and video; lent by the artist, courtesy Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica.

