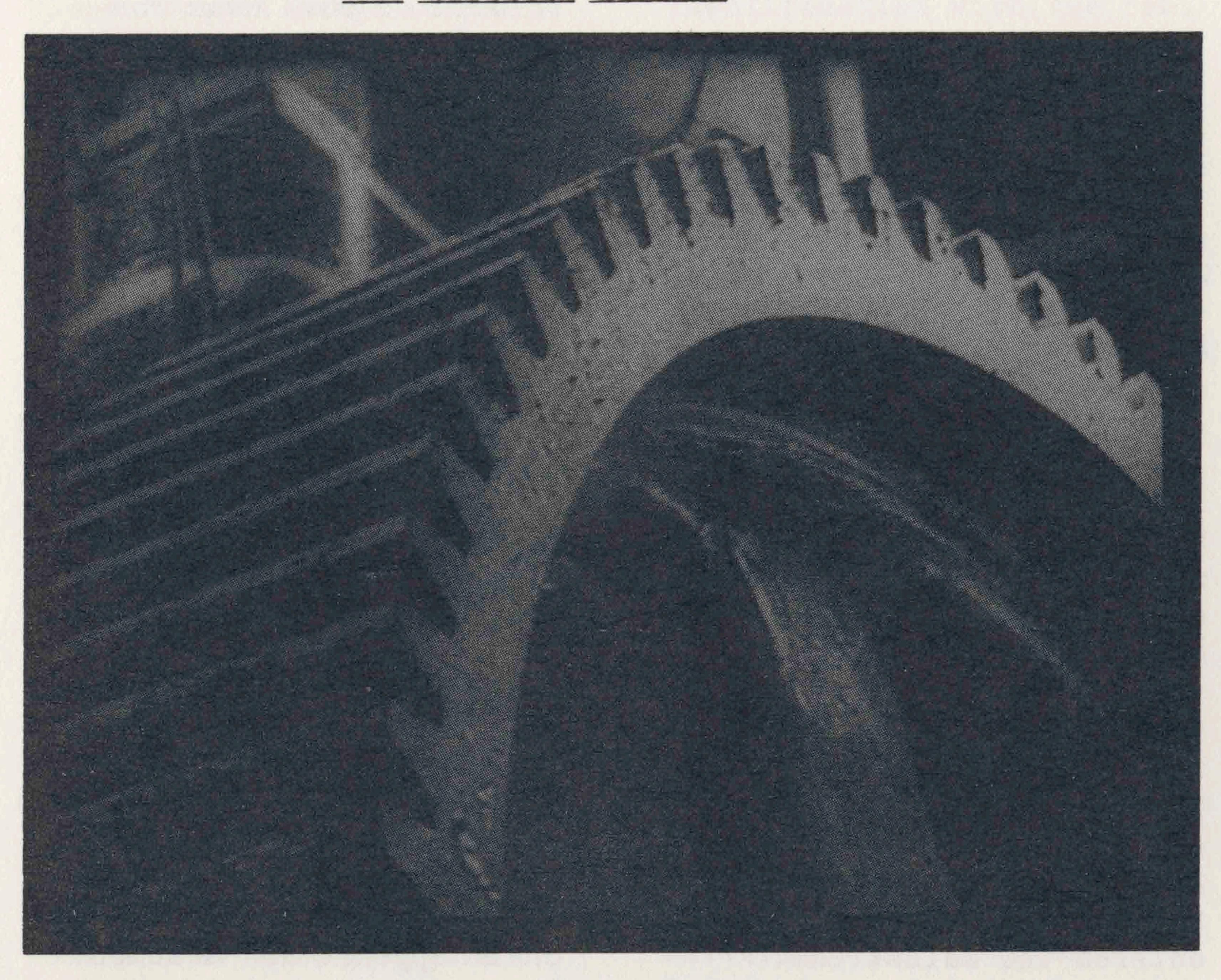
Video still from The Victims' Revenge, 1984



Power, politics and the manipulation of information by the electronic media have been consistent themes in Doug Hall's work. First as a member of the performance group, T.R. Uthco (with Jody Proctor and Diane Andrews Hall) from 1973 to 1978, and then in his independent performances, installations and videotapes, Hall has expanded and refined these subjects.

In the 1976 videotape, The Eternal Frame, T.R. Uthco, together with another Bay Area artists' collective, Ant Farm, went to Dallas to reenact the assassination of John F. Kennedy. In the tape, they act out the final minutes of the motorcade over and over again in a cathartic attempt to demystify the tragedy. The piece explores both the formation of what Hall terms an "assassination myth," and, by playing with media archetypes, sets out to assassinate the myth.

In this postmodern era in which content and figuration in art are not only acceptable but commonplace, artists long involved with social themes have finally entered the mainstream. Witness the current popularity of such veteran political artists as Leon Golub (MATRIX 59) and Nancy Spero (MATRIX 72). Younger artists have also entered the political art arena. Many, like Hall, analyze the effect of mass-media processed information and imagery on our lives (for example, the billboards of Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel, MATRIX 61, and the photographic works of Barbara Kruger).

Moving away from topical subject matter, Hall's works of the last several years,

including The Speech (videotape), These Are the Rules (a segment from the multi-part videotape Songs of the 80s) and The Tyrant's Last Dream (video installation), have dealt with signifiers of authority. His protagonists project the attributes of power through various media strategies such as gestures, timing and props. The result is, as Hall says, "the insidious triumph of form over content." In These Are the Rules, a male figure whose eyes are masked by black, opaque glasses, shouts out trivial societal rules in the form of commands ("take a shower at least once a day, obey the rules"). The man's tense body movements, his strained voice and the periodic pounding of a gloved fist on a table combine to intimidate the audience. Hall borrows the methods despots use to exercise control over their subjects.

Through the Room (from Songs of the 80s) is a direct precursor to The Victims' Revenge. In the videotape, a shot of an empty room dissolves slowly into a view of a desert landscape. A white chair appears and a moment later is gone. A man in a grey business suit (Hall) opens his mouth as if to shout, but instead emits a chorus of vocal sounds that have been filtered and distorted through a synthesizer. The haunting and poetic piece ends with the chair in flames. Here, for the first time, Hall assumes the role of the victim rather than that of the oppressor.

The Victims' Revenge, created by Hall for the MATRIX program, is a theatrical environment including imagery, sound and color.

confronted by three pairs of video monitors, each with a similar tape loop portraying the red, green and/or blue illuminated head of a man (Hall again). The sound track (as in Through the Room) consists of electronically altered vocal sounds, at times harmonious like a medieval chant, at others, discordant. The close-cropped image of the head alternates with intense red, green or blue filling the screen. On the wall behind and above the three graduated tiers of monitors is a large video projection. Tranquil landscape images--a mountain and a river--in which dawn to dusk is condensed into a 3-1/2 minute period, dissolve into shorter sequences of clanging, heavy industrial stamping machinery. The scenes of untouched landscape contrast with both the factory segments and with the anxious, screaming man on the monitors. The din of the machines and the eerie screams compete with each other for the viewer's attention. Rare interludes of wind and rippling water sounds that accompany the landscape sequences are a calming counterpart to the aural assault.

Viewers enter a darkened room

and are immediately

Hall uses color in The

Victims' Revenge as a signifier of emotion, restricting
his electronic palette to
those colors--red, green and
blue--that are the components
of all television color.

High-impact imagery, as in
the immense red flag of The

Tyrant's Last Dream and the
burning roses of Songs of the
80s, is characteristic of
Hall's work. In most earlier
works Hall used words in
connection with the images to

convey his message. In the current installation, Hall omits words and combines ambiguous imagery (landscape, factory machinery) in unexpected ways. Coupled with the aggressive sound, the effect is both powerful and unsettling. Hall is striving for universality in this work. He realizes that the impact of The Eternal Frame, for example, is partially dependent on the viewer's identification with the real and media-interpreted assassination of President Kennedy. Though Hall's work is becoming increasingly abstract, it is still critical of society. Hall says, however, that he "draws no conclusions and suggests no remedies. I am an imagist not a social worker."

Hall teaches in the video/performance department of the San Francisco Art Institute along with other leading Bay Area artists in the field, Paul Kos (MATRIX 36) and Howard Fried (whose work was the subject of a 1983 exhibition at the University Art Museum). Born in San Francisco in 1944, Hall received a B.A. in anthropology from Harvard University in 1966 and an M.F.A. in sculpture from the Maryland Institute of Art in 1969. Among the grants Hall has received are an Individual Artist's Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts (1979); an Award in the Visual Arts (1983); the Phelan Award in Video (1983); and a video production grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (1984). His video installation Machinery for the Reeducation of a Delinquent Dictator will be seen at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, this fall.

Jules Backus was the director of photography for The Victims' Revenge, and the Videotapes were post-produced at the Bay area Video Coalition in San Francisco.

Constance Lewallen

'79, catalogue; Museum of
Contemporary Art, Chicago,
Video Art: The Electronic
Medium, '80; Centre Americain
Culturel, Paris, Independent
Vision, '81; Whitney Museum
of American Art, NY, Biennial, '83, catalogue; Museum
of Modern Art, NY, Video:
Recent Acquisitions, '84.

Work in MATRIX:

The Victims' Revenge, four channel video installation, 1984.

Selected one-person exhibitions (* signifies with T.R. Uthco):

The Detroit Institute of Arts, MI, '75*; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX, '75*; Long Beach Museum of Art, CA, '76,* '80 (with Chip Lord and Jody Proctor); University Art Museum, UC Berkeley, Sunday Video Screenings, '79; 80 Langton St., S.F., '80, '84, catalogues; Anthology Film Archives, NY, '81*; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Prime Time: Doug Hall, '83, brochure.

Selected group exhibitions:

San Francisco Museum of
Modern Art, Video Art: An
Overview, '76, brochure;
Kassel, W. Germany, Documenta 6, '77, catalogue; San
Francisco Museum of Modern
Art, Space/Time/Sound-1970s:
A Decade in the Bay Area,

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Loeffler, Carl E., ed. and Darlene Tong, assoc. ed. Performance Anthology (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1979).

Stoflett, Mary. "Doug
Hall," Artforum, Mar. '80.
London, Barbara. "A
Chronology of Video Activity
in the United States: 19651980," Artforum, Sept. '80.

McGee, Micki. "Artists
Making the News, Artists
Remaking the News,"
Afterimage (Rochester, NY),
Nov. '82.

French, Christopher.
"Forcing Hard Choices,"

Artweek (Oakland, CA), Dec.

24, '83.

MATRIX is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency.

We are grateful to California Video Sales, Inc., San Francisco, for their support of the project.