

documentary Ken Gay

TIMECHECK is a 45 minute colour film produced by David Hall with the aid of a grant from the British Film Institute. Hall is a sculptor and his work is not a conventional piece of short film-making but is an attempt by a trained working artist to use film as a medium of expression.

Vertical, Hall's previous film, made in 1969 with a grant from the Arts Council, was concerned with visual perception and Hall used devices such as perspective corrected white lines in a landscape to re-orientate the audience's assumed view of what it was seeing, showing that our three dimensional projection into the two dimensional world of the flat cinema screen may be inaccurate.

In *Timecheck* Hall challenges the audience's conventional acceptance of time. In essence he has treated time rather as a sculptor treats the material he has chosen to work with. In using film Hall is not primarily concerned with putting pleasing aesthetic images onto a square screen—art is not primarily concerned with being decorative, argues Hall—but in affecting the audience's awareness of the world. He wants to jolt the audience out of its usual bland acceptance of films and make it aware of them as a manipulated experience of time and space.

So in *Timecheck* there is a good deal of time lapse photography, and an absence of an obvious narrative line. The film starts with a rocket leaving earth and ends with the voice of an astronaut saying 'I think we are going into darkness now'. In between Hall has given us time manipulated shots of both people and elements, in particular aerial shots of sculptural formations of cloud, and views out of the window of a room into a suburban street where the unexpected constantly happens. At times the screen goes deliberately dark to shake the audience out of its acceptance of constant visuals.

Since his first experimental interest in film as a medium Hall has become fascinated by working in it. As a sculptor he felt by comparison confined to a particular art world whereas with film he can reach audiences of a different and wider kind. In his own vocation as a sculptor he has, of course, been successful. Trained first at Leicester College of Art he moved onto the Royal College of Art, and was awarded the sculpture prize at the Young Contemporaries in 1964 and the Prix des Jeunes Artistes at the Paris Biennale in 1965. Since then he has had work in sculpture exhibitions in Europe and America and it is to be found in collections in many countries, including the Tate Gallery. He teaches at Maidstone College of Art and as much of the work being done now by his students takes the

form of transitional events rather than conventional sculptured objects. He is busily making a documentary film record of their activities for demonstration purposes.

Film is all illusion of course: powerful illusion and, as Hall says, we accept it mainly as a theatrical experience, bringing to it a comparatively newly developed perception of seeing two dimensional photographic imagery as three dimensional.

Hall recognises that the history of film making is full of techniques for handling the concepts of time. In our own decade from Godard's *A Bout de Soufle* (1960) onwards we have seen audiences accept quite different concepts of editing with jump cuts et al; *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad* was Resnais's own attempt to play with time; freeze forward editing is accepted in such films as *The Go-Between*, and time lapse photography has an honourable history in science and documentary films at least. So, to challenge an audience's conventional acceptance of films Hall is having to deal with people who are accustomed to photographic trickery. He does so by such effects as suspense of visuals, by abandoning narrative and human reference, by concentrating on both time and space concepts simultaneously so that the work is not a theatrical experience in which time is manipulated but almost an abstract experience the point of which is to demonstrate conventional manipulations.

At last year's Edinburgh Festival Hall got the chance to do something in this line for television audiences. Scottish Television agreed to include in their programmes, unannounced and unexplained some short films by Hall. He made ten and they were broadcast rather like commercials. Each challenged the audiences assumptions, focusing attention on the television set as a box for example by appearing to make it fill up with water from a corner set tap, altering time sequences, and so on. Hall has now selected the seven best of these television films and brought them together as *7 TV Pieces*.

Vertical, *7 TV Pieces* and *Timecheck* were shown in an evening's programme at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in early May and extracts have appeared in a BBC arts programme. Hall, together with Tony Sinden another experimental film maker, is now working on a new project for which he has an Arts Council grant and it will be interesting to see what he evolves.

Hall's work is experimental and he is working in a comparatively new field. Inevitably there will be a limit to what audiences will accept. For in all art forms

there must persist a strong demand for narrative, and for direct human relationship. This is because each human being is self aware, conscious of a time scale in himself, measuring automatically all life and experience by the yardstick of his own personal autobiography. But work like Hall's keeps us aware of what bizarre assumptions we unconsciously use each day to sustain our concept of the world.