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## Adventures in Sound and Image

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### The hypnotic art of Doug Fishbone

Yesterday I had an interesting interactive experience.

I had been watching over and over some of Doug Fishbone's video works, such as *The Ugly American*(2003), *It's not you, its me*(2006), and *Hypno Project*(2008). In these, he has developed a usage of image and words that has lead the [Rockeby gallery](#) to introduce him as a 'conceptual stand up comedian'. He usually uses imagery - often taken from the internet- in a slide-show format that he accompanies by a voice over, or by live spoken words in the case of live performances. During a phone interview, he explained to me that he found this narrative style interesting because "it's a kind of format that lends itself to a sense of authority, because it is something that we are used with interacting, whether it is at school or elsewhere, and I thought it was a very interesting kind of platform for investigating how imagery operates and how information is delivered".

With outstanding wit, a cunning satirical insight and biting comments on society's nonsense, Doug's aforementioned narrative style made me laugh and think continuously. And sometime later, I found myself listening to his voice again, on the same headphones I had been using to isolate the noisy environment around me when I had been watching the videos. This time the difference was that he was reacting to my questions, but offering the same consistent eloquence and sense of humor that characterizes his video work's narrative. When I thanked him, at the end of the interview, for providing me with this rare interactive pleasure, he laughed and said "I didn't hypnotize you, though". Which was his last remark on the things he had been telling me about: hypnosis and manipulation. On one of his latest works, *HypnoProject*, which will be shown at the Impakt festival this year, extends his investigation of the slide-show format in a peculiar way. Originally conceived as a double screen installation, *HypnoProject* shows the images used during one of his 'lectures' on one screen, and a hypnotized audience reacting to it on the other. For Fishbone, using the hypnotized audience was a natural consequence of his interest in "the notion of manipulation of the audience as a performer and as an image maker", as he likes to put it. He artfully explores this manipulation as a "push and pull with the audience, like trying to win their confidence and then maybe violate it, just as a way to explore the way that information interacts between the artist and the audience. And with the concept of the hypnosis, I thought it was a very interesting way to push that further... because it's basically an open act of manipulation, taking people's sensibilities, taking their states of consciousness and putting them in a position where I was really controlling them, and it also just seemed an exciting opportunity to see if it would work."

The hypnotist he worked with was not sure this would be the case, due to the fast pace of the images and the large amount of information delivered during the talk. Therefore, Doug Fishbone took several variations during the filming, such as having half of the audience hypnotized and half not, but decided to use the take where everyone was under hypnosis because "there was a strange energy to the people in that film, in that take, which was unlike anything else. There was an almost kind of magic to it, to see how fixated they are when they are watching ... they really are in a different zone". Doug confesses he was thrilled by this reaction, as well as by that experienced by the people who are confronted by his work under a 'normal' state of consciousness. When installed in a gallery context, with the two screens facing each other, it aims at recreating "the original perceptual experience" undergone by the people in the film. So, "when you come in as a viewer you really enter into a zone of consciousness that's other than your own", points out Doug, "and that's quite exciting, specially in a piece that deals with questions of relativity and how we perceive things". Indeed, *Hypno Project* is a profound mockery of the way people have had incorrect and preposterous ideas about the past, the future, or the threats posed by other people.

As a part of the *On the shoulders of giants* compilation of the Panorama program, Doug Fishbone's *Hypno Project*, is definitely a must see of this year's Impakt festival.

Posted by [Miguel Escobar](#)



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