



**The Luminous Object:**  
**Video Art and Theory**

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The Luminous Object consists of interviews and essays of various lengths, whose purpose is not to historicize or classify video definitively, but to bring together a sampling of diverse approaches by video artists and critics that enable us to glimpse the scope of video art and the issues which it raises. In the essays and interviews, video is considered from multiple perspectives and disciplines. This reflects the transitive nature of video which crosses numerous borders, among them, broadcast television, computer animation, painting, sculpture, literature, film, autobiography, history, ethnicity and critical theory. interviews and essays of various lengths, whose purpose is not to historicize or classify video definitively, but to bring together a sampling of diverse approaches by video artists and critics that enable us to glimpse the scope of video art and the issues which it raises. In the essays and interviews, video is considered from multiple perspectives and disciplines. This reflects the transitive nature of video which crosses numerous

the more recent, "Video," a special issue of the Canadian journal *Artextes* (1986), *Video Culture* (1986), the "Video" issue of the French journal *Communications* (1988) and *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (1990). Such anthologies have attempted to sketch video histories, though only *Artextes* recognized the need to offer plural histories which traced the development of video art in a number of different countries: the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Belgium, Japan, etc. In Hall and Fifer's *Illuminating Video*, by contrast, a number of the essays are devoted to critiquing the idea of doing video history, maintaining that an official or master narrative would be in and of itself problematic given the spirit of video art. Nevertheless, that anthology is devoted to outlining the various types of genres of video art and contains essays by critics and artists. Exploring the relationship between art and technology, *Video Culture*, edited by John Hanhardt, historicizes and critiques the concept of video in its most expansive sense.

No doubt, the most important single study of video to have appeared so far is Raymond Bellour's *L'Entre Images: Photo, Cinéma, Vidéo* (1990), in which video is defined as a transient medium that crosses or transgresses the border of photography and cinema, the static image and the moving picture. Of the three media, Bellour states that only video can integrate and transform the two others. As such it is a medium of liminal passages across and between images, a figure of passage that impedes us from assigning stable borders to the

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To know the range and scope of video art, however, it is not enough to dub video an international practice that occurs between or in the midst of images. We will not be helped by reducing video art to genres, movement or histories (local or global), approaches which are largely suited for those who want to simplify a difficult and diverse field. The fact is that especially today, video art is undergoing rapid development with the introduction of new electronic technologies and that in large part much of the medium we know as video has as yet to be fully explored, interrogated or experimented with.

It is our belief that video is especially exciting from the standpoint of merging visual practices with visual theories; instead of trying to package video art within already available theories of representation, one should allow the theory to develop from the practice of making video art. This is different from the usual view that to analyze a visual work one doesn't have to know very much about how it

the practice of making video art. This is different from the usual view that to analyze a visual work one doesn't have to know very much about how it is made. However, it ought to be especially evident in the case of video art that the message is entirely mediated by the many diverse practices which make up what we call the medium.

A second belief, which motivates this effort to illuminate video art, is that another, more synchronous critical tactic — one which avoids master narrative — is a site specific approach. In our anthology, all the contributions come from figures who have visited the University of Iowa's Program in Intermedia and Video Art. Founded by Hans Breder in 1968, the program was one of the first to nurture the conceptual and experimental arts within a university setting. Through the Intermedia and Video Art visiting artist's program, supported by the Rockefeller Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts, over the last twenty years numerous conceptual and experimental artists — often early in their careers — found their way to Iowa City. Since the late sixties, performance artists like Robert Wilson, Allan Kaprow, Karen Finley and Mary Beth Edelson as well as critic/curators such as Donald Kuspit, Lucy Lippard, John Hanhardt, Ann-Sargent Wooster, Willoughby Sharp and Nicholas Zurbrugg joined us. Many video artists have also visited, produced and presented work: Nam June Paik, George Kuchar, Vito Acconci, Jaime Davidovich and his Artists' Television Network to name just a few. This anthology brings together aspects of their work and the work of others who have been

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**Hans Breder**, professor of art at the University of Iowa and director of the Intermedia Studios, has been exploring the margins of painting, sculpture, video and performance since he came to this country from Germany in 1964. He has worked in the Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney Museum of American Art and the Roy R. Neuberger Museum, State University of New York at Purchase.

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