

Quality-free imagery

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Frampton, Hollis. *L'Ecliptique du savoir*, Paris : Ed. du Centre Pompidou, 1999. [sous la dir. de Annette Michelson et Jean-Michel Bouhours]

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- 1 Our day and age may well be one of screens and areas where images file past, hence imagery that is dubious, unverifiable and proliferating, but where, today, is there room for all those productions of moving images, be they analog or digital, which lay claim to their status as artworks?
- 2 Video is not so much a medium as a tool, a technology applied to many different uses: television pictures, documentaries, surveillance imagery, personal and travel pictures, records, and, last of all, art images, to the point where, in the thick of the crisis besetting pigeonholing systems, another programme and another discipline are created: «video art», a genre which already no longer exists and which presupposes new codes, another language, and specific places and ways for making its appearance.
- 3 Since the very first breakthroughs made by video imagery in the art arena, from the inaugural activities of Nam June Paik to the more contemporary screens of Douglas Gordon, something still remains of an original notion: the impossibility for everyone of recognizing in each one of these objects the share of art in that of the other (the real, communication, technology).
- 4 This form of resistance and refusal to incorporate an emerging art form--even when these discussions have never ceased, in history, being repeated in cycles and creating theoretical models that are sufficiently adaptable to answer any question about legitimacy--has less to do with the reactionary forces of experts and those fantasized and

real forces of the onlooker, than with a structural, original and fundamental confusion. Video came into being in the 1960s in the place of a non-place, between practices, and areas and zones of activity, and at the same time between art and industry. Video took form in this area of hybridizations, intervals, giving certain artists a chance to extend writing, music, dance, sculpture and film in this image, to work on an absence, a loss of site or point zero (absence of content, matter, and genealogies), to experiment with the boundaries between practices and disciplines, to become further involved in a critical direction to do with the economy and autonomy of the artwork. This unnameable, impure nature thenceforth conditions a large proportion of conspicuous works produced with, on or by video, and still today represents the principal challenges.

- 5 Like computers and TV, video is a place of transitions. This «between-images» place forms the theoretical and make-believe matter of Raymond Bellour's latest publication, a masterful response to the conditions of emergence and existence of imagery, and to art world relations. It is a narrative-like text based on the idea of analogy (perceptual, mental, ontological...), on types of relationship, dependence, displacement, and tension between different zones of representation, between photography, cinema, video, and virtual imagery. Since the exhibition *Passages de l'image* (1990) at the Georges Pompidou Centre, Raymond Bellour has been doggedly pursuing one particular thread: from Chris Marker to Jean-Luc Godard, from Thierry Kuntzel to Gary Hill, including an indiscernible space-time factor, the gap or interval as a production place of imagery and ways of seeing, of swinging between the actual and the virtual, the motionless and the moveable, between images, words and worlds.
- 6 This fleeting, indecisive relationship between words and pictures is, furthermore, the theoretical and poetic hub of the work (films, photographs) and writings recently translated by Hollis Frampton, undoubtedly one of the most important artists of the early 1970s, both on account of his awareness of history, science, and modernity, and because of his structural, aesthetic, and epistemological inventions. The shift here between photograph and word is the shift that leads to the cinema, not as a method of representation and identification, but as an endless tape, an opaque screen on which there is a cartographic inscription fragmented between vision and perception, something invisible, ambiguous, and lost. For Frampton, the issue is not to define what art, and the ontology of photography and cinema are, but to show links and disjunctions, effects of insertion and passing.
- 7 Identifying, defining, classifying, creating typologies, so many objective dynamics which remove us from the object itself, and its enigma. This, though, is Monique Maza's approach in her essay on video installations, which raises all at once the issue of the medium, its specific features, and the assessment process in the art arena. It is a didactic approach based on a doubt (the status of works), which attempts to define an aesthetics of the video installation as well as the conditions for receiving these new forms of arrangements. It is a development that is organized around a modernist, categorizing concept, which partly overlooks what, precisely, goes to make the quality of the relation to art: the impossibility of determining a fixed set of art coefficients in phase with the development of the codes and protocols implicit between art and the onlooker, and of the on-going heterogeneity of artistic activities. The art coefficient tallies, as it happens, with an indescribable discrepancy, at once creative and subjective, a partial object operating like an enigma at several levels, on differing planes of knowledge, which is forever going

beyond the regulatory and modelling machines of science and theory, to create new models and qualifying mutations.