

ART AND HOLOGRAPHY

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1. questions of Subject

Holographic art is at best an ambiguous term, at times synonymous with 'display holography', or valorized as a truly unique and perhaps mystical practice or, conversely, subject to derision by orthodox visual arts critics. Upon the occasion of this and other conferences it is promoted as a 'given' - a given which merits at least some examination as to its meanings.

While I do not plan in this essay to define "holographic art", as term or practice, I will, however, offer some observations as to the more generalized problematic of "holographic art" - a problematic involving history, technology, science and culture. I intend to demonstrate the manner in which science has overdetermined (through insistence on technique) and stifled holographic art; similarly, I plan to critique several trends in holography and critical-art theory that perpetuate a kind of counterfeit and unconscious state of cultural production that allows for much of the key issues, artistic and theoretical-ideological, to remain unresolved.

The 'subjects of holography' vary with intent: the scientific, artistic, personal, critical, educational, historic, etc. Unique to this medium is its ability to articulate qualities of light and dimensionality - qualities which themselves also become subjects when provided with context and meaning. For "light" and "dimension" are hardly anything more than abstractions until they are given meaning through language, formulaic statement or aesthetic gesture and response. The focus of this essay will be two registers of holographic expression the empirical and aesthetic (as representing two interconnected yet distinct cultural forms). I hoped to present my arguments in a semiformal manner - a presentation that may infuriate the poetic impulses in the reader - but I think it necessary for us at one point or another (and let this be one) to engage discourse and criticism from a vantage point that is other than impulsive or careless statement.

1.1 The Empirical and Generic Subject

To say that holography was not developed for the purpose of providing a medium for contemporary art may be to restate the obvious, but this concept requires some examination. We know that the development of optical holography in its first two decades (1947- 67) was directly linked to experimentation in applied optics. Papers were written, patents filed, techniques were improved and by the late sixties we had the CW laser and an assortment of off-axis reflection and transmission techniques, and the soon to be developed integrams and white-light transmissions. The focus of this research was what I will term the "empirical subject" - the subject of scientific knowledge - which was reflected in the various developments in geometric optics, isolation tables, laser hardware and recording and processing techniques. Missing from this early stage of development was any clear aesthetic of viewing or interpreting holography. There was much shop talk concerning the free wheeling 'marriage' of science and technology but much of this was rhetorical and revealed the inability of critics to articulate what could be termed an "aesthetic subject".

Early image making was obsessed by technique, that is, how to make the holographic image bigger, brighter and noise-free. The objects to be rendered were important only in terms of their empirical and generic qualities: size, stability, colour and brightness, etc. The aesthetics of 'subject matter', its design and interpretation was largely irrelevant to our early 'pioneers' whose visual vocabulary was dominated by small generic objects (chess pieces, toys, lenses, watches, figurines, etc.) of empirical and idiosyncratic proportions.

What was ordinary in terms of geometric optics (that is, virtual and pseudoscopic images) seemed to be 'paradoxical' for art holographers, and for reasons which will be explored later in this essay. These early paradoxes supported an early aesthetic. Artists in the 60's and early 70's were obsessed with showing off holography's unique place by constantly comparing it to photography - a comparison that always placed holography as the "'future medium" and trivialized the relationship between holography and photography by displaying holograms, framed and hung on a wall, as 'real thing' photographs. This of course was also the age of the 'imageplane' - almost every showing dominated by the redundancy of trivial images bisected by the plate. The circus side-show atmosphere of early shows was ample evidence of technological fetishism and idiosyncrasy substituting, as surrogate, for aesthetic debate. Many of the early holographers were instantly catapulted to "star status" on the basis of their abilities to crank out a few technically acceptable holograms and to exhibit them quickly and with great fanfare.

Those showing off the new image technology to naive audiences (analogous to natives of New Guinea being treated to their first Polaroid snap) were encouraged to make extravagant claims as to holograms being "bigger", "brighter", "motion - picture" (recall the hype surrounding Logan's Run and Superman?), and suited for "TV". For the premise, in holography, as in the jungle, was 'get in fast', capitalize on sensational tricks, and get out; and those who thought that this medium would revolutionize the culture were sadly disappointed.

This essay then, is dedicated to those who stuck it out, asked questions, and for the large part only became 'successful' when the circus left town.

2. The Development of Aesthetic Subjects: Necessary Questions

Many will argue that mimeticism, the imitation of reality, is an aesthetic undertaking and that beauty (to use the cliché) is in

the subjective "eye of the beholder". Every holographer, I suspect, is fascinated with the beauty of the mimetic- representational holographic image, and all of us - from a scientist in love with his/her turbine interferograms to an eccentric obsessed with "E.T." holograms to 'artists' struggling with 'aesthetics' have our subjectivities in terms of what is beautiful. But such questions of subjectivity are moot issues when one considers the larger context of 20th century which does not rely any longer on subjectivity to lead the way.

In 1979, in an essay entitled NOTES TOWARDS THE ART OF HOLOGRAPHY (Franklin Institute Press) I argued that mimetic holography merely restates what 20th century public already knows in terms of aesthetic-formal concerns: dimension, perspective, proportion, proximity, size and form and that exhibitions of mimetic works are usually received by the question "how was it done?". While this was not an outright condemnation of mimetic works, it was highly critical of

those who could neither see beyond mimeticism nor appreciate its limited context within current art issues. A question such as "how was it done?" further reveals the limitations of mimetic holography, since this question is not directed at issues of meaning (what is it? what does it mean?) but rather towards childlike curiosity to possess the imaginary means of creation through some form of rudimentary understanding. The "it" in this case is the general, the generic, the nonspecific and without substance 'image' of empirical or technical holography.

But there is an inherent weakness in mimeticism: the inability to articulate an aesthetic subject and precisely at the level of holographic imagery. For we all know or suspect that holography is not defined by 3-D objects but "wavefronts" which can be generated by objects or non-objects. This weakness was most evident at the very beginning of the rise of public holographic art shows. In the early mid-70's, after an initial love affair with representational- subject holograms and a patient reading of the usual

technical preamble that accompanied the exhibitions, the public remained intrigued only with novelty, and the critics, representing and responding to the deep divisions and many pluralities of post-modernist art were generally hostile. We might recall the comments of Hilton Kramer, art critic for the New York Times, who wrote in 1975 and on the occasion of the New York exhibition "Holography 75: The First Decade":

"There is always something disconcerting in the spectacle of immensely sophisticated technology - which artists sometimes call "science" - serving as a vehicle for some perfectly trivial conception... The aesthetic naivete of this show must really be seen to be believed. No mere description could begin to do it justice. Images of a stupefying innocuousness, ranging from peepshow porn and low grade beer commercials to the even more ludicrous parodies of so-called "serious" art, are unrelieved by the slightest trace of esthetic intelligence."

And later in the article he concluded:

"It will be said, of course, that holography is still, both technically and aesthetically, in its infancy - an argument that brooks no quarrel. But the place for such Infancy is the nursery, not a place of public exhibition..."

It is fair to say that Kramer was both unimpressed with the largely mimetic works and generally hostile to claims of importance and cultural accomplishment that circulated at that time. A girl blowing a kiss or winking her eye in a cylinder integral (courtesy Multiplex) just didn't 'cut it' on the international marketplace of art and neither did early experiments in transmission or reflection formats. For some of us in the "nursery", those who had not jumped on the multiplex integral or other bandwagon for instant stardom in the 70's, Kramer's statements seemed to deliver 'poetic justice' to the New York based hype that preceded this and other shows. (But there was also S.F. hype, LA. hype, etc. - I am not being regional).

This 'poetic justice' was also born of a terrible irony: how could one on the one hand, take pride in creating 3-D images, a 'unique' labour to say the least, and also account to critics who were unimpressed and ignorant of the processes? Similarly, how could one adequately deal with scientific-empirical demands for quality even while aesthetes could be satisfied by the most technically imperfect hologram? The irony here was there was no real poetic justice possible in any sphere of holographic art or display holography in the 70's because holography remained inaccessible to most critics and viewers at

the level of critical dialogue and aesthetic vocabulary.

3. Hybrid Holography: Compound questions

By the mid-70's, works which challenged the relationship between holography and other medias (painting, photography, sculpture, installation and performance) became more prevalent. These works, discussed also in my '79 essay, I termed "hybrids" (sculptural or graphic). Basically, they integrated sculptural or graphic motifs (and aesthetics) with holographic concerns. The resulting holographic pieces articulated relationships between traditional art forms (cubism, constructivism, etc.) and the unique status of holography as a medium capable of synthesizing and expressing spatial forms through ! the exclusive use of light.

Ten years later in 1985 we may wonder why these hybrids, now a rather commonplace concern among art holographers, were of such importance then. The answer is contained in the twin origins of hybrids: a visual didacticism - one that educates the viewer as to the contexts of holography amongst the arts and within art history - as an impulse deprived from the earlier interests to 'convert' an audience to the importance of a new medium - and secondly, the poetic impulse (which hybrids generally exhibit) to 'transform' the relationship between holography and the other arts via visual metaphor and fusion of forms.

Along with hybrid forms came works which incorporated art, historical and political concerns, works which functioned as installation pieces, and presented experiments with presentation models. (I cannot list even a representative number of these works in this essay but will implicate them and the artists in future essays). It was also in the late '70's that Images drawing on abstraction and wavefront properties of interference, 'light images', became more accepted. The 'vocabulary' and 'syntax' of the developing aesthetic was transformational and antithetical to grammatical rule around notions emanating from science. This 'second wave' of hybrid holographic activity, was supported by experimental curators such as Eve Ritscher (London, U.K.) who sought to develop a holographic art from the diversity, quality and a sense of future that they recognized in the medium. Indicative of Ritscher's optimism towards the future of holography is the following passage contained in a 1983 introduction to the "Light Dimensions" exhibition catalogue:

"The holography that is presented here at Light Dimensions is perhaps not that which will be remembered and known by our children. What we see in this show will change and mutate, as did photography before it. It has only come this far thanks to the courage, tenacity and sheer guts of its proponents, and, despite the very wide differences of approach, interests and ambitions within it, they share a common bond of vision."

If, as Ritscher proposed, we might applaud holographic art achievements as a contribution towards a future culture, we might equally ask questions directed towards the substance of this new, diverse and futuristic cultural form. We might ask questions which have posed from the very beginning and which still remain unanswered: what is the subject of holography, what is it about, and why is there so much talk of its 'form' rather than 'content'? For much of the pluralities and experimentations in the 70's seemed to reflect a near exclusive interest in formal developments, and while no one would propose that form and content be separated (or made exclusive of one another) there seems to be a great deal of ambiguity as to what the subjects of holography are and why they have remained subsidiary to formal interests in representation and composition.

3.1 Future Aesthetics

This problem, the ambiguity of the aesthetic subject, seems also to continue in the current interest in computer generated holography. Caulfield, writing in the Winter '84 Hologosphere contends that there is a special future for computer holography:

"Holography, originally conceived as a way of recording physical wavefronts without a lens, is now evolving to the point of recording nonphysical - if you will, imaginary - wavefronts."

His paper concerns itself with computer generated holograms, a process which will allow artists as well as scientists the option of creating images that have never, or could never, exist in "real" space - a kind of image synthesis that is independent of real objects and 'reality'. As exciting as this new field seems to be in terms of visual potential (paradoxical images, novel displays), there is still the problem concerning content that lingers: computer generated holograms of what?

We might reflect a moment on what has happened in computer graphics (on film or video) when faced with the same aesthetic task of revolutionizing art. In film video graphics-, the computer has become an accessory (a very sophisticated one) in the process of restating what a contemporary public already knows: geometric solids, dimensional and perspective mappings, landscapes, kinetics, and a visual vocabulary of icons that repeats experiments in modern art already hanging in galleries around the world. Is this the future for computer generated holograms? If it is, then we will shortly see in computational holography the same tendency towards empirical subjects, generic objects, and idiosyncratic value systems common to earlier optical holography. The result will tend also towards the generation of spectacular and mystifying aesthetic redundancies of a very short cultural life span.

4. Formal Holography and Problems of Syntax and Sign Production

Before I turn to issues more properly of a 'content' oriented nature, I wish to engage the 'beast' by the horns - the beast of aesthetic and formal cancel. predisposition to 'law and order' in holography. Several historical examples that deal with similar issues in other medias may be useful to reflect on.

The concept that art should develop in resistance to fixed laws of nature and logic, in resistance to cultural and social institutions of the past, was posed by the Soviet Futurists as early as 1910. In their declared ambitions to "shake loose the syntax" of written and visual forms, to incorporate the "cacophony of wars and revolution" and to reject all forms of "Ultimate Truth" and mystical "Logos" they proposed to destroy the notion that art requires ordered processes and logic to convey its meaning. "Art is not a copy of nature" they said, "but the determination to distort nature in accordance with its reflections in the individual consciousness." Thus, they would disfigure and make objects, images, words, and expression "strange", In so doing, the Futurists (and the Formalists that followed them) attempted to recreate a world of aesthetic and perceptual possibilities that directly challenged the viewer's notions of reality and nature. The Futurists were vigorously agitating against 'law and order', (aesthetic, cultural, and political), and they were dead set against complacency in producing or viewing art.

In our migration across years of holographic art development, a

recurring problem surfaces amongst the many different issues: holography is afflicted by a predisposition to order, symmetry and to laws of 'nature' (hence 'reality'), an affliction that it may symptomatically cure through optical-illusion games or abstraction of representational qualities, but an affliction that remains nevertheless.

This brief historical overview is useful for our purposes when we consider that rejection of 'Ultimate Truth' and 'Logos' is analogous to rejection of 'scientific truth' and 'reason'. The Futurist motto of shaking 'loose the syntax' is also a logous to a potential call for holographers to free their work from the confines of both scientific precedent and technique and mimetic traditions of representation. Implicit in these stratagems is the notion of transformational properties/processes as central to a work of art.

The problem for the holographic artist is at once obvious: how does he/she deal with a medium that is overdetermined by science and physical laws, whose history is largely a chronology of technical discoveries and whose critics are largely (currently) technicians? The traditional method would be to accommodate the 'rules of the medium', thereby making the technical 'display' hologram. The Futurist method would be to bend, break and disfigure conventions and rules, the habits of presenting and viewing holography, the very habits of being a "holographic artist" with a place in history to protect.

This last proposition may not guarantee mass markets, instant critical success or scientific [audits, but I believe it is of chief importance in the development of holographic art and its critical-aesthetic vocabulary. In fact, in the last few years, and especially at the level of formal development, all hell has broken loose in holography (and many of my criticisms may seem 'dated'). We have an abundance of strangeness and "shaking loose" of the syntax. We also have, which is more important, aesthetic streams in holography - holographic cubism, constructivism, expressionism, etc. that must be read as a departure from its painterly and modernist equivalents.

But do we have a critical vocabulary to deal with this current work; do we understand this new "problematic? And what of politics and content?

--The essay will conclude in issue #2 of Wavefront with a discussion of the semiotics of holography, criticism and content in an age of crisis.

The reader is invited to comment and/or challenge issues raised by the author.

HOLOGRAPHY - WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THE EFFECT

John Brooke 21 January 1985

The "Artist-In-Residence-Project 1984" show at the Interference Hologram Gallery in Toronto offers a selection of the pieces from the "Canadian Holography Now" exhibition which toured Britain and Europe in the summer and autumn of last year. Twelve pieces by eight artists are presented, a diverse enough range of examples of the new medium to give the viewer an opportunity of comparing, contrasting, and affording some personal consideration to the question of the artistic validity of holography. This question is an intriguing one, if not for the critics who have passed their various judgments and now ignore the medium, then at least for the general public and the artists involved.

The experience of "viewing" a hologram offers the individual a set of parameters that is unique from those inherent in the experiencing of the other visual arts. To this member of the general public holography seems to be mainly about the shaping of spaces: "metaphysical spaces" to be more specific... environments that are directly related to the ordering and description of feelings. This shaping is achieved, to a more or a less successful degree, by the placing of a figure, called the CONTENT, within a FORM, the primary quality of which is the illusion of three-dimensional space.

The content of the hologram has to be the catalyst to any imaginative conjecture, and this is perhaps where the "problem" with holography begins. The holographic process requires that the figure to be represented be placed in motionless, vacuum-like isolation. Regardless of lighting, colour effects, or the nature of the figure itself, the image that comes back in the finished hologram is informed by a basic sense of motionless, vacuum-like isolation, and all connotations vis-a-vis the figure, be it a solitary object, collage, tableau, or colour-plane, stem from that so apparently life-less point.

The imagination thrives on two basic essentials: motion, and/or inter-action with environment. Ostensibly, the content of the hologram offers neither.

The other element of the hologram is the form - the effect of three dimensional space that is achieved, and this is where the imagination of the viewer seems to focus after failing to make contact with the figure, so literal and dead within. But this, in turn, begs the consideration that while the three-dimensional effect may in itself be a neat trick, with no perceptual bias attending it, "space" is empty.

Yet the illusion presented by this form is so real; you can do more than see this space, you can feel it. And if you can feel it, this seems to suggest that you are in it. And if you are in it, then the figure, although perhaps still motionless, is no longer isolated; and neither is that part of the imagination which is sparked by inter-action with environment lacking for stimulation.

When you step in front of the holograms and "realize" that you are a participant in it because of the effect of the form, then the content is re-vivified and can work as a catalyst to an idea that can contribute to understanding. Since form and content are connected in any display of meaning, as you consider the content of the hologram, which is the figure, you also, perforce, begin to deal with the form by ascribing connotations to the "space" you feel yourself a part of. As you order these connotations into a description you begin to address the question, "what is the effect of the effect?", and it is within this context that the "art" of the hologram can be sensed and evaluated.

Claudette Abrams' "Untitled" piece, which depicts a revolver seeming to hover in front of you suspended in a red-orange sphere, evokes the sense of what could be called "theatrical space". A theatrical space is built around theatrics - artifice that is acoutrement for the senses. In the theatre there is usually an element of action and speech to go with the strictly visual element which the hologram offers, and the sense of being in that particular place of exaggerated encounter. With the hologram you are not experiencing a complete play, but rather, only one prop or character in a moment of exaggerated encounter. And where the prop or character at the theatre has specific reference to the content of the play which you feel and participate in as a member of the audience, within the isolated spatial moment of the hologram, you become the "player" and the figure

in the hologram becomes a metaphor for whatever connotations your experience and/or imagination might bring to it.

The same basic effect of theatrical space surrounds and defines two other pieces in the show. Michael Sowdon's "Zombie Study #3 and #5" depicts a comic book-like visage. The holographic effect makes him "empty-headed" save for the two red sparks which glow malevolently out from the space behind his non-eyes. The effect evokes another exaggerated encounter as you are drawn into the very human reaction of meeting those empty eyes and looking past them, attempting to fathom the space behind.

Chris MacGee's "Fragment 17" is framed by a colourful, splintered sculpture of a shattered window frame and section of a ruined wall: an interior. Stepping up to it you enter a specific setting. Then you peer through the window and "out" via the holographic effect to the image, a model which is the depiction of more shattered living space...the house across the street, perhaps. The design of the piece compels the viewer to inside this environment of cataclysmic destruction and so consider it in an intensely subjective manner.

With these three holograms as examples it is apparent that the shaping of a "theatrical space" is contingent upon a catalyst that holds the potential for intense and specific connotation: the revolver, the zombie's face, the apocalyptic scene. In terms of theme, each of these risk falling into complete cliché. Success depends on the artful handling of form, the creation of a clearly defined environment, the entering of which sparks fresh inter-action and conjecture.

Other holograms in the show deal with more subtle themes and the spaces they create vary accordingly. "Stress Topography," the three colour fields by AL Razutis, offers an effect that is akin to the one you feel when you look at a landscape on a wall, or, better, stand on the boundary of a real one. It has to do with looking to the farthest visible point and then sensing beyond. These three holograms are, in a way, truer in their evocation of that feeling than landscape art because the darkness surrounding the planes of colour give a natural sense of the interior where psyche hides, and the holographic effect puts you just inside the edge of a dark, unlimited distance. Being in a place where you sense the ineffable: the effect is one of a "religious space".

Sydney Dinsmore's trio of holograms collectively entitled "Dance" create the effect of a space with joyful, communal connotations. Each of the pieces depicts two figures - dancers - rendered in the abstract, caught in a blur of motion. (This in itself gives the figure imaginative life, and is an interesting and encouraging departure from the literal objects and models generally used in holographic representation.) Two glass rods placed vertically in the scene, and at different places relative to the dancers with each piece, become, within the holographic effect a part of the architectural apparatus inside a large room or hall. The spatial involvement, as you move by the three pieces, is similar to that of a POV shot, always observing the dancers, moving "through" this party environment.

The most demanding of the works in the show are the three pieces by Therese Bolliger, jointly entitled "Access". Bolliger's theme is architecture. Each piece depicts a wooden toy-like figure of a "building" placed on a burlap based "landscape" that resembles the landscapes which surround architectural models. Like architectural models, these pieces are clearly miniatures in all their aspects, and the viewer comes to them sensing that he is caught between possession and anticipation between entering into the miniature space or remaining

outside. The final implication of the piece seems to be concerned with the manipulation inherent in the creative activity, or, more to the point, the creative perspective; the poetics of Bolliger's piece seem to say that although there is always "access" to space, its parameters cannot really be known until it is entered - and to enter it, you cannot be bigger than it.

Three pieces in the show are not effective. Eldon Garnet's piece entitled "Luit" is apparently an "allegorical photo work". It depicts a tableau with three figures in silhouette and the word "Lust" hanging in the air above them. The theme is obvious, as it usually is in an allegory, and a thematic statement can be inferred from the visuals. But the spatial connotations are vague. The holographic effect, as it works in the piece, does not display much space, and what little is there to be "felt" is caught between the theme of lust and the concept of allegory. The form is not clearly defined with regard to the content.

FROM THE EDITORS

Wavefront with its associated North West Coast Holography Society was spontaneously born out of the vested interests of a small group of established holographers in Vancouver. This group of holographers (described in the article on founding of the society) establishes a solid base for a successful center. As well as corporate support from within, holography will help provide funding, giving a nondependence from other sources, such as government. This may be a hindrance to future government support as it may appear as support to commercial sectors as opposed to a nonprofit organization (note though, it was entirely the private sector that made this society and journal possible). I hope this is enough of a base from which Wavefront can grow into an international journal, complementing HoloSphere with a different perspective on holography.

We have in Vancouver a unique combination of a highly developed and successful commercial group and a highly respected and recognized artistic group. This society and journal formally brings these groups together to support each other in building up holography.

My part will be in editing the commercial and technical sections (while AL Razutis does the arts). Articles slated for future issues will include where to get surplus equipment and parts, new holograms in the consumer marketplace, custom works being done, patent problems, who's who with companies and holography in the major centers. Regular sections will include techniscope, pseudoscope and newsbriefs - these being short paragraphs on information we catch wind of at Wavefront (if you have something, simply phone or write it in). Pseudoscopes we hope would become a more casual reporting - perhaps the news before it becomes news.

I will be very sensitive to corporate issues and news, with particular regard to patrons. Patron support and sponsorship is one of the major sources of funding for Wavefront and the society. To encourage this much needed support, I will publish patron profiles and publicize patron works. Beware though, the journal's independence can not be bought - we will report negative as well as the positive news. Sponsors of this inaugural issue were Holocrafts, Global Images, Light Impressions and General Holographics.

What makes a newsletter is the input of its membership. I hope we can create an 'easy to publish in' newsletter. Work need not be perfect to publish here - we can and will edit your contributions. The importance is to send us the news, articles and other contributions -

don't wait. Regarding gallery, exhibition and commercial news, we will be depending on you to send or phone us information - the publicity is yours if you want it. You need not be a member to get the publicity.

The emergence of this journal comes at a time when holography in the arts is again put to a test: either it must carve out a space for itself in the contemporary arts (now dominated by what is termed "neo-expressionism", a painterly romanticism that combines kitch and psychopathology) or wait yet another decade to be 'discovered' in the wasteland of post-modernism. While holography may be a legitimate art within itself (that is to say, outside of the usual fine arts museums and gallery interests) this is nothing more than according it the status of orphan of the arts. For it has yet to be acknowledged (like performance or 'video') as being part of the arts 'scene'. Well, like it or not, it's time for holography to go "big time".

Commercial holography is already flourishing; wild rumours are circulating as to embossed megaprojects; the military is wild about 'heads up'; some at Lake Forest say that fiber optics will revolutionize it all; and copyright-patent battles ensue. A few articles appear from time to time in arts publications, a feeble yet welcome sign that there is some hope in merging with the arts. HOLOSHERE continues to be a single voice attempting to cover all of the areas - technology, education, arts, history - and yet it can cover none of these areas adequately. We hope to emerge as an ally to HOLOSHERE and others in providing a forum for discussion and/or debate in arts and technology of holography and more importantly to provide concrete support for the growth of this medium/art.

Many of us have been starved for critical and aesthetic material containing more than just 'who is doing what' in exhibitions. Holographic art has always contained rhetoric and didacticism - the first attempting to 'convert' the viewer/reader to the medium's future importance with near religious fanaticism, the second attempting to constantly re-educate the viewer/reader in geometric optics, photochemistry, laser physics etc. Since 1976, when Hilton Kramer summarily trashed both the art form and its various pretences in the N.Y. Times, the medium and art has been both insular and guilty of perpetuating its own artificial 'star' system in terms of a created 'history' orbiting around a few satellites of holographic art activity. It is obvious to all of us now that these strategies have done little else than perpetuate a few select careers; holographic art is in as precarious a position now as it was in 1976 or as it was in the late '60's when there was even fewer interested artists. And curatorial subjectivism, a value system based on the personal tastes of a few curators, is what we have standing in for aesthetic theory - a subjectivism that is also guaranteed to result in a "history" of holography.

As co-founder and co-editor of WAVEFRONT, I see a need to engage the arts within the broader spectrum of human activity (to include epistemology and philosophy, perceptual science, political and economic studies). If that desire to broaden may at times tend toward the polemic. It is only symptomatic of a fierce commitment to the survival and growth, without compromise, of this art. And while I may be outraged at the economic and political conditions affecting artists in this field - artists whose work is largely outside of the institutions, universities, and research and development centers tied to commerce and military interests - I am not proposing to valorize poverty as some kind of misplaced heroism. The rising and escalating costs of materials make complacency a ridiculous proposition. If material (optics, plates, lasers) costs continue to escalate, then the only "artists" practicing holography will be corporate-commercial or university (research) types.

or those who have finally decided to do "heads up display" for the military or Walt Disney. The others will be long gone, along with their sandboxes and promises of fiber optic redemption. These difficulties affecting us all make for a political and agit-prop climate, a climate that avant-garde interests in the arts have long known. ;. a climate that will be supported in this publication as well.

There are theories to be developed, accomplishments to be identified, histories to be added and a relentless self-examination to be conducted. We welcome your contributions and support.