Disegno

Aims and Scope

Disegno publishes original research papers, essays, and reviews on all aspects of design cultures. We understand the notion of design culture as resolutely broad: our aim is to freely discuss the designed environment as mutually intertwined strands of sociocultural products, practices, and discourses. This attitude traverses the disciplinary boundaries between art, design, and visual culture and is therefore open to all themes related to sociocultural creativity and innovation. Our post-disciplinary endeavour welcomes intellectual contributions from all members of different design cultures. Besides providing a lively platform for debating issues of design culture, our specific aim is to consolidate and enhance the emerging field of design culture studies in the Central European academia by providing criticism of fundamental biases and misleading cultural imprinting with respect to the field of design.

MOME
MOHOLY-NAGY
művészeti egyetem
university of art and
design budapest

Contents

REMANENCES AND FUTURITIES

JONATHAN ROZENKRANTZ: VIDEOGRAPHIC CINEMA

Ervin Török

Jonathan Rozenkrantz: Videographic Cinema. An Archaeology of Electronic Images and Imaginaries. *London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 228 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-501-36931-5*

Jonathan Rozenkrantz's book, *Videographic Cinema* analyses the now obsolete medium of video from a refreshing and exciting perspective. The book focuses primarily on the emergence of analogue video images in theatrically released feature films. Rozenkrantz's approach to the archaeology of video images is carefully balanced between the refusal of ontological idealism on the one hand (exemplified by works of André Bazin and D. N. Rodowick, among others), and on the other, the refusal of the reduction of video images to mere textual signifiers.

Videographic Cinema elaborates the problem of videography as a medium through the mediation of theatrical screenings. The "expressive capital" (54) of video images can be turned into another medium, namely cinema. In this process of mediation, the ever-changing discursive assumptions and the specific qualities of perception are exposed, which frame the rise of electronic images and the process through which video became obsolete. The expectations and fears that accompanied the rise of video technology have a decisive contribution to the perception of video images. Focusing on connotations which surround the electronic image, Rozenkrantz nevertheless emphasises that "the material differences between videographic and photochemical images condition the expressive capacities of each medium" (9), and that the technical conditions, even the know-how of their use delimits the hermeneutic activity of the interpreter.

In *Videographic Cinema,* video is viewed from the vantage point of "media imaginaries." The book focuses on the imagination and phantasies, which encompass video technologies. However, in a series of clarifications, Rozenkrantz separates the methodology of his book from the seminal *Media Archaeology* (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011), noting that there is a general confusion between "media imaginaries" and "imag-

inary media"—the latter are fictions, while the former "are the sum of connotations engendered by and with regards to an actual medium" (24). He emphasises that "media imaginaries" are not to be confused with "media fantasies," "media discourses," or the Lacanian "Imaginary." The connotations of video images in cinema are limited by historical conditions—the key terms used here for denoting the prospective and retrospective horizons of the imagination are futurities and remanences, "mnemopticon," and "retrospectacles"—and are all closely tied with the temporal configurations of media technologies.

The call in *Videographic Cinema* for an archaeology of technical media—"the study of media conditions, the study of media images and imaginaries, and historiography theorized/theory historicized" (17)—determines the selection of items from the examined field. From a corpus of films stretching from Georges Méliès's *La Photographie électrique à distance* (1908) to David Sandberg's *Kung Fury* (2014), Rozenkrantz highlights the cases in which the visual form of videographic elements is not only emulated, but in which the material differences between analogue and video technologies also play a key role.

For example, the first film analysed in depth, *A Face in the Crowd*, a 1957 political satire about the impact of TV shows on the political sphere, was selected because it reflects on the "liveness" of the TV: the protagonist turns the monitor toward a camera, "generating what must be cinema's first videographic hall of mirrors—an effect impossible to achieve by photochemical means as it is conditioned on simultaneous capture and transmission" (72). The "liveness" of TV here is explained by the difference of mode of rhetorical address from that of feature film, for example, in the recurring images of oneself. The imperfect dramatic space of live TV shows, which is due to the immediateness of the capture and transmission, transforms the "ignorance [of the protagonist] into an asset" (72). Such subtle observations make it possible to capture the close relationship between the specific dramatic space induced by broadcasting live and affective structure; between medial condition and revelation of new forms of spontaneity (and its highly ambivalent impact on the sociopolitical sphere).

Surveying the media conditions of videographic images, Rozenkrantz does not concentrate exclusively on artistic applications, but also considers commercial uses, especially surveillance and psychiatric use. Although in *Videographic Cinema* Gene Youngblood's vision of "expanded cinema" is an important point of reference, the experiments of media art are less highlighted. Some of the book's examples come close to experimental film, for example Andy Warhol's famous *Outer and Inner Space*, the *TV Buddha* video-installation by Nam June Paik, and so forth. Among the films analysed in detail, the 1979's film *Anti-Clock* by Jane Arden and Jack Bond can arguably be labelled as such, however Rozenkrantz decides not to follow this line of inquiry. Greater emphasis is placed on the general understanding, the mainstream use, and imagination of video technology.

[1] *Foucault uses the technical model borrowed from the eighteenth century philosopher Jeremy Bentham that makes possible—paraphrasing Rozenkrantz—"for the few to view the many," and turns it into a model of surveillance based on the asymmetrical relations between the perspectives of the viewer and the viewed.*

Rozenkrantz briefly reviews the process through which, from the mid-1930s onward, video was understood as the "visual output of TV reception" (30). The key turning points in the spreading of video technology are the introduction of the first CCTV in a Houston jail in the mid-1950s, the launching of traffic surveillance systems in the UK and Germany, the appearance of the first black-and-white videotape by Ampex, the development of colour video recording by RCA, and the invention of the portable recorder. *Videographic Cinema* follows the differentiation between TV and video that, after 1965, makes it possible for video technology to spread outside the terrain of broadcasting, and to emerge as a creative medium. This shift in the understanding of the video as a medium, from surveillance technology to art, is treated in detail by drawing attention on the shifting scholarly evaluation of the video, from Rosalind Krauss's essay, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" (1976) to Lucas Hilderbrand's essay (2009), which lists a large range of negative connotations of video.

The malleable concept of video as mnemonic technology and as art implicitly excludes a large part of its popular use. One of the great achievements of the book is the balanced demonstration of the tensions within the concept of video, from utopic expectancies and experimental applications to morally dangerous mass use that in some cases is considered something that should be legally regulated and restricted.

The prospective horizon of a newly emerged electronic image technology that needs to be appropriated is examined from the perspective of the expanded theory of Foucauldian panopticism. Rozenkrantz follows the sociologist Thomas Matthiesen, who in 1997 introduced the "synoptic" function (the many seeing the few) as a counterpart to the "panoptic" function.[1] To this, *Videographic Cinema* adds the autoptic function (seeing oneself), making a tripartite system of functions (panoptic, synoptic and autoptic) with which it is possible to treat a wide range of media imaginaries.

Departing from a specific hint in Sidney Lumet's *The Anderson Tapes* (1971), Rozenkrantz highlights the now largely forgotten psychiatric use of video techniques as surveillance and "televised therapy sessions" (100) that "recalibrated symbiotic relations centuries old" (102) of spectacle, surveillance and psychiatry. The possibility of self-observing through the lens of another viewer (associated with a huge audience) pairs the autoptic function with the synoptic one. Referring to the techno-philosopher Friedrich Kittler, who made a peculiar equation between technical standards and the human psyche, Rozenkrantz notes:

"So-called Man" may be determined by technical standards, but no more than the standards themselves mediate already established norms. Here, then, is the blind spot of the autoptic gaze: it cannot perceive its own historical conditions." (105)

This subtle critique of the Kittlerian stance makes it possible to extend the inquiry to the increasing correlation between video images and the

human psyche from the 1970s onward. In films like Fernando Arrabal's *Viva la muerte* (1971), a film about processing the trauma of the Spanish Civil War, video recordings stand for the envisioned deaths of the protagonist's father. *Videographic Cinema* emphasises the ironic stance of the film, in which the analogue recordings (mixed up with the falsity of cited propaganda) are equated with ordinary perception. In films like *Anti-Clock* or David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) he detects a more complex and twisted relation between memory and video images. Rozenkrantz emphasises that video in *Anti-Clock* functions "as a technology for forgetting" (136), in *Lost Highway* video noises are "the non-representation of the Real." In these films the electronic images are not allegories of personal memory, but mediatisations of perception, in which video estranges the fixed relations between locations and materialised memories, identification and social indoctrination.

The turn in the understanding of video from professional medium suitable for reaching a mass audience into a personal one from the 1980s goes hand in hand with the increasing connection with a psychopathic connotation. Through a series of great analyses from Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing* (1987) up to Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* (1992) Rozenkrantz demonstrates the fuzzy interrelation between a new type of experiencing reality "directly" through video and controlling reality: video, through making invisible forces visible (Deleuze), became a dangerous technology, associated among others with pornography and erasure.

After the sudden obsolescence of video in the early 2000s new kinds of nostalgia are attached to electronic images. The noise and decay of videos, and the snowy images became expressions and signifiers of a disappearing analogue physicality. The noisiness of copying and storage shed a new light on the short life span of the electronic images. The problem of authentication, treated in the context of Jaimie Baron's concept of archive effect (Baron 2014) also became important. The remoteness and obsolescence of analogue video technologies make the authentication as an "experience of reception" (Baron 2014) a key problem.

With enlightening references to postmodern theories Rozenkrantz makes readable the two new central sources of joy found in analogue video images. The one is the "pleasure of retrospectacle" (165), exemplified by *Kung Fury*, which exploits the peculiar aesthetics of videogames from the 1980s. "The correlation between the circular form of cultural production and the cyclical form of commodified time," writes Rozenkrantz, "had transformed the culture industry into a millennial retrospectacle." (158) The fusion of retrospection and spectacle, and the looking backwards transform a not "too pleasurable nor very playable" (161) technological environment into a pleasurable spectacle of an aged youth culture "coated with a patina of remanence decay" (162).

The other path followed by Rozenkrantz takes into account another form of retrospection connected with video images. In these films shot on analogue formats the spectator's instinctive choice to detect obsolete formats as signs of documentation are taken into account "blurring the

line between fiction and non-fiction" (158). Yet *No*, a film by Pablo Larraín (2012), an example presented in detail, is not simply a mockumentary, but a very complex and breathtaking reflection on (Chilean) history, where the mediatisation of political events can be read from a much more ironic standpoint, when media conditions themselves are changing.

Through a long list of excellent analyses *Videographic Cinema* follows the changing forms of use and apprehension of videographic images—a very suggestive study and a true examination of the theoretical frames conditioning the archaeology of technical images.

LIST OF REFERENCES:

Baron, Jaimie. 2014. *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Hilderbrand, Lucas. 2009. *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka, eds. 2011. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Krauss, Rosalind. 1976. "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism." *October* 1: 50–64.