Electronic Labyrinths
An Archaeology of Videographic Cinema

Jonathan Rozenkrantz

Abstract

This study scans six decades of film history in search for video images, the imaginaries within which they are framed, and (taking cues from the archaeological methods of Friedrich Kittler and Michel Foucault) their technical, historical, and institutional conditions of existence. The British experimental science fiction film *Anti-Clock* (Jane Arden and Jack Bond, 1979) revolves around a video device with the capacity to confront subjects with their own repressed memory images. While being fictional, these "memory monitors" have real conditions of existence: the emergence of video therapy and surveillance practices, conceptions of video as a recording medium, and the video processing allowing for this imaginary medium's cinematic treatment. Framing such films as *videographic cinema*, this study provides a mapping and tracking of works such as *Anti-Clock*. From prospective imaginaries of surveillance and control to retrospective ones concerned with memory and history, the two-part dissertation tracks an epistemic shift occurring between videographic cinema's *emergent phase* conditioned by video as a medium for live transmission (1950s-1980s), and its *remanent phase* in which the video images and imaginaries become reconditioned by the reconception of video as a recording technology (1970s-2010s).

Chapter 1 looks at the emergence of videographic cinema through 1960s science fiction films and political thrillers in which the electronic image came to connote imminent futures of surveillance and control. Chapter 2 studies films that responded to the perceived threats of broadcast TV by imagining more or less outrageous reality TV formats. Drawing on research published by a forgotten avant-garde of psychiatrists, Chapter 3 shows how video in the 1960s gave rise to a utopian belief in self-confrontation techniques whose progressive promises were complicated by explicit overlaps between video therapy and surveillance practices. Video self-confrontation techniques also inform Chapter 4, which tracks the emergence of the *videographic psyche* (based on an analogy between videographic and mental images) as it was invented/discovered by 1970s artists, therapists, and filmmakers – soon to crystallise into the conception of video as a means for confronting subjects with their own repressed memories. Chapter 5 zooms out to map a larger post-millennial media landscape in which the obsolescence of analogue video granted a nostalgic appeal to its particular noisy aesthetics, fusing the cultural connotations of a certain retro "VHS style" with the material conditions of magnetic recording. Continuing the mapping of analogue video in the digital age, Chapter 6 zooms in on a selection of recent films that excavate obsolete video formats to scrutinise historical events and the media conditions of their description. Having started as an archaeology of videographic cinema, the dissertation thus ends by considering videographic cinema itself as a form of archaeology.

Department of Media Studies

Stockholm University, 115 93 Stockholm