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Video Preservation
Assignment #1
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Video Production: Video Art and the works of Jean-Luc Godard in the late 1980s

"To use video as you would cinema, and to use cinema as you would television, is to
make a television that doesn't exist, and a cinema that no longer exists. Film people reject
video absolutely. The advantage of video, however, is that you can see the image you're
making before you make it; you can decide whether or not you want to lay claim to it."
-Jean-Luc Godard[1]

Video Art and Godard

In her essay "Video: Shedding The Utopian Movement," Martha Rosler argues
that "video's history is not to be a *social* history but an *art* history, one related to, but
separate from, that of other forms of art" (emphasis in the original).[2] However, the artists
who began the video art movement did so using new technologies made possible by the
very industrial society which they critiqued using the medium. If video art remains to be
viewed as a "criticism . . . of mainstream Western industrial and technological culture,"
its history must cohere the social, technological, and artistic aspects of the medium.[3]
After the introduction of video on the commercial market in the late 1950s artists began
utilizing the medium, which continues to evolve technologically, as a mechanism to
construct stories and images that would not have been possible were it not for the format
on which they were produced. The 1980s bore witness to a changing environment in the
world of video production. Video art, which became increasingly popular in the 1960s,
reached a new peak as smaller formats and non-linear video editing systems became
more prevalent. Those editing workflows and the freedom they allow video artists must
be included in what is currently a predominantly critical and theoretical history of video
art in order to construct a history that fully explores the medium and why artists adopted
it to create their works.

Renowned French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard is perhaps best known for his
works during the French New Wave movement, but he also engaged in a great deal of
video production beginning in the 1970s. His first experimentation integrating video into
what was before an entirely film-based production workflow took place in 1975 on
Number Two, which was made using both 35mm film and analog video.[4] In the decades

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[1] *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image*, Eds. Mary Lea Brandy and Raymond Bellour (New
York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992): 174.
[2] *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, Eds. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer
(New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1990): 43.
[3] *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, Eds. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer
(New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1990): 31.
[4] Jean Luc Godard, David Sterritt, "Filmography," *Jean-Luc Godard: interviews*
(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998): xxvii.

that followed, Godard continued his experiments with various video formats, creating a number of short works made entirely with video, which culminated in the beginning of what some consider one of the greatest works of cinematic commentary: the made for television video production *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1988-1998). The first installment of this seminal work, *Toutes les histories* (1988), is notable for its use of video and television technology to examine and comment on the history of cinema through both form and content.

Histoire(s) du cinéma: Toutes les histories (1988) is the first of eight chapters in Jean-Luc Godard's decade-long *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, a cinematic project that utilized video as a way to explore and comment upon both the history and stories of cinema. In the words of critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, "by writing his own film history and criticism on video, using means that are readily available and relatively inexpensive, Godard is proposing a direction that filmmakers and video artists everywhere could explore with benefit."[5] Prior to beginning the *Histoire(s) du cinema* phenomenon, Godard made two entirely video-based works that, while less widely recognized than *Histoire(s) du cinema*, emanate similar messages about a changing cinematic landscape due to innovation in production technology. *Soft and Hard: A Soft Conversation about Hard Subjects* (1985), and *Meetin' WA (J.L.G. Meets W.A.)* (1986), exemplify Godard's exploration of video and its potential to alter the way stories are told on the screen. *Soft and Hard*, co-directed with Anne-Marie Miéville, is a video essay that has been described as a "provocative and witty inquiry into cinema, television, and image making," and uses footage of Godard and Miéville's daily life edited together with images from other film and media texts alongside a conversation between the couple about the evolution and influence of media and cinema on both people and each other.[6] The use of voice over, montage, and varied speeds point to the capabilities of video to examine media and its construction. Similarly, *Meetin' WA*, another of Godard's "dialogues," this time between the filmmaker himself and Woody Allen, "engenders a . . . rhythmic transport produced by the editing, a rapid alternation between text and image," and by a fragmented soundtrack.[7]

Since the development of the video medium is "heavily dependent on technology . . . the activity of artists' video is inevitably as dependent on the same technological advances."[8] Video works like those of Godard were made possible by a changing landscape in video technology, in which new and more portable video formats and recorders offered new opportunities to video artists. Two of the most common videotape formats for artists at the time were Betacam, a videocassette developed in 1982[9], and U-

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[5] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Making History - Essay and interview with Jean-Luc Godard." Available at http://zakka.dk/euroscreenwriters/interviews/jean_luc_godard_05.htm, accessed 10/29/11.

[6] Electronic Arts Intermix, Catalogue Description of *Soft and Hard*: http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=3591, accessed 11/01/11.

[7] *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image*, Eds. Mary Lea Brandy and Raymond Bellour (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992): 182.

[8] Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art: The Development of Form and Function*, (New York: Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2006), 5.

[9] Peter Ward, *Basic Betacam Camerawork*, 3rd ed. (Woburn, MA: Focal Press, 1997): 30.

matic, which was introduced by Sony in 1971[10]. While some of Godard's works utilized both film and video and he likely experimented with various video formats, it has been suggested that his all-video works from the 1970s and 80s were produced on U-matic.[11] However, despite the artist's chosen format, it is really the editing technique that determines the production workflow for video art works of this era, as the steps for both linear and non-linear editing are essentially the same for both Betacam and U-matic since they are both cassette formats. At this point in the history of video art, some video artists were utilizing non-linear editing production workflows while others were still using a linear system, which allows for video editing that is more similar to traditional linear film editing. It is likely that Godard used both linear and non-linear editing workflows throughout his experimentation with video – especially since this work spanned over two decades - so it is important to look at both techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of how artists used video production to create works with both a form and content unique to their chosen medium.

Linear Editing Workflow

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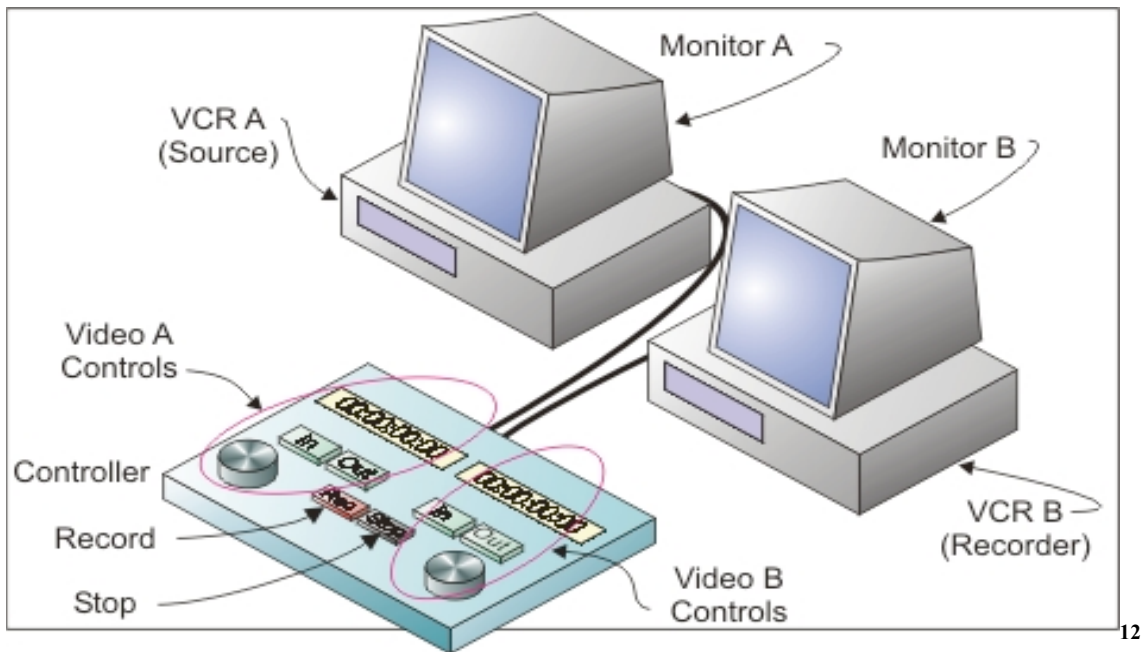
   Linear video editing is a deck-to-deck process in which the original, or source tape, plays in one deck, which is connected to a software program. Editing is communicated through a controller keyboard, which dictates which sections of the source

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[10] Subra Ganesan and Biren Prasad, *Advances in Concurrent Engineering: CE97 Proceedings* (Basel, Switzerland: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1997): 401.
[11] Distributors at Electronic Arts Intermix are under the impression that Godard's video works from the 1970s and 80s were made on U-matic as that is the format of the sub-masters in EAI's collection. Conversation with distribution assistant, 11/01/11.
[12] CDLI, Communications Technology 2104/3104 Analog Video Lesson, https://www.cdli.ca/courses/ctecx104/unit03_org02_ilo02/b_activity.html, accessed 11/4/11.

tape are recorded onto the tape in the second video deck. Since video cannot be edited as film, where the original is cut up and spliced together to create a work print, there is necessarily a generational gap between the source tape and the master due to this necessary editing process. However, linear video editing does operate in a similar way to film in that all editing must be one-directional. If a mistake is made toward the end of the editing process, the editor must return to the beginning to re-edit and re-record the desired sequence of footage. There are a number of editing systems that were available during the 1980s, but the main functions remained the same.

Once recording is completed, the video editor puts the source tape into one VCR deck and a blank videotape into the second deck. Utilizing a controller keyboard and a "central computer interfaced to necessary machine controllers," the editor then cues up the first tape to the point at which the first sequence to be recorded on the second tape begins. [13] This is repeated until eventually an edit decision list (EDL) with time code of each segment that is being edited together is generated via the computer's editing screen.[14] The EDL is then copied to a floppy disk, from which the editing information can be used to "re-create the edited master" tape in the future.[15] An effects switcher, which would be hooked up to the central computer system connected to the editing decks, is necessary for producing special effects such as superimposing images, which Godard and other video artists use frequently. The most common of these during the 1980s were the Grass Valley 100-series.[16]

The resultant elements from this workflow are easily identifiable: original source tapes, an EDL, and the final output, or master tapes. However, it is important to remember that there is a generational gap between the source material and the masters that may affect the quality of the image, especially when many copies are made from that master. This is reason to retain all of the original elements as well as the EDL to ensure that the highest quality images of a production remain available into the future.

This linear workflow is indicative of the kind of imagery seen in the long sequences of conversation in *Soft and Hard: A Soft Conversation about Hard Subjects*, in which Godard and partner Anne-Marie Miéville discuss their views and personal experiences of cinema and its evolution. However, considering the collage imagery of stills from other films and video footage also present in this work, a non-linear workflow would have given Godard easier control over the multitude of images he edited together.

Non-linear Editing Workflow

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[13] Michael Rubin, *Nonlinear: A Guide to Digital Film and Video Editing*, 3rd ed. (Gainsville: Triad Publishing Company, 1995): 39.
[14] Michael Rubin, *Nonlinear: A Guide to Digital Film and Video Editing*, 3rd ed. (Gainsville: Triad Publishing Company, 1995): 39.
[15] Michael Rubin, *Nonlinear: A Guide to Digital Film and Video Editing*, 3rd ed. (Gainsville: Triad Publishing Company, 1995): 41.
[16] Michael Rubin, *Nonlinear: A Guide to Digital Film and Video Editing*, 3rd ed. (Gainsville: Triad Publishing Company, 1995): 39.

Non-linear editing systems (NLEs) allow analog video artists to edit their works with random access to all footage without having to edit from the source tape sequentially. Random access, defined as "*quick* access to randomly selected points in the dailies and/or the master," (emphasis in original) involves digitization of the source tape to allow for such editing.[18] Much like current digital editing software such as Final Cut Pro, the many variations of NLEs in the 1980s let video makers edit their footage together in any order desired. This requires an NLE to have three monitors rather than two: one to view source material, one to view the master, and one to track data from the computer. The EditDroid from Lucasfilm, released in 1984 and pictured above, is an example of the type of digital NLE used for video editing at that time.[19] The EditDroid has six laserdisc players and two ¾" decks. Source material from the ¾" source tapes are transferred to laserdisc, from which random access is granted, but footage can also be pulled from the ¾" decks into the editing timeline.[20] An EDL can still be created, but is not vital to the workflow as with linear editing. This workflow requires a much more powerful computing system than the linear systems to handle the various inputs and access capabilities (EditDroid uses a SUN system; the SUN data monitor is shown at the far right of the picture above), but effects are still made using a Grass Valley switcher.[21]

The resultant elements of the NLE workflow are the original source tape(s), digital intermediates (in the case of the EditDroid that would be the laserdiscs), possibly

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[17]Photo from *Yerkman's Blog*, http://jeffyerkey.com/2011/04/, accessed 11/04/11.

[18] Michael Rubin, *Nonlinear: A Guide to Digital Film and Video Editing*, 3rd ed. (Gainsville: Triad Publishing Company, 1995): 9.

[19] "Company History," Lucasfilm, http://www.lucasfilm.com/inside/history/, accessed 11/04/11.

[20] Michael Rubin, *Nonlinear: A Guide to Digital Film and Video Editing*, 3rd ed. (Gainsville: Triad Publishing Company, 1995): 225.

[21] Michael Rubin, *Nonlinear: A Guide to Digital Film and Video Editing*, 3rd ed. (Gainsville: Triad Publishing Company, 1995): 225.

an EDL, and the final output, or master tape(s). As opposed to a linear editing system, works created with NLEs pose the problem of how an artist – or future archivist – can properly store and care for the digitized footage.

This non-linear workflow, which allows for random access to footage enabling an artist to create any desired montage was very appealing to video artists like Godard, who sought to present a multitude of sounds and images in rapid succession, often at variable speeds with text and two or more audio tracks.

Conclusion

Video art works created on cassette analog formats during the 1980s were all edited in one of these two ways. The shift to NLEs in video production workflows gave artists the opportunity to edit in a more freeform style, and made abstraction easier to achieve, but the linear method was likely used just as much, if not more, by artists like Godard, who came to video from a film production career. Regardless of the chosen workflow, the use of video allowed Godard to see what he was creating at the time of creation and enabled him to play with the structure of his works in a much different way than is possible with film. In the words of Philippe Dubois, "Whether he uses slow motion or superimposition, Godard is always experimenting in video with figures that permit him to think in images, and not in language, and to interact with them instantaneously, which allows him to see at the moment he conceives."[22] That possibility offered by video production resulted in Godard's use of the medium to comment on the influence of mass media, cinema, and the relationship between the two.

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[22] *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image*, Eds. Mary Lea Brandy and Raymond Bellour (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992): 181.