# 4. Cut—Interlude in the Editing Room

"Montage. You physically hold a moment, like an object, like this ashtray. You have the past, present, and future in your hands."
Jean-Luc Godard[1]

The search for a specific place in the filmmaking process in which theory turns into practice takes us not to the author's desk but to the editing room. This is usually one of the unseen places in filmmaking, and for this reason alone it is very rarely the subject of cinematic narrative: "For people who work in the editing room, no matter whether they work on their own film or someone else's, one experience is fundamental: no one seems to have the faintest idea of what goes on there."[2] This ignorance doesn't usually give rise to curiosity, however. While there is an element of magic in photographic processing, and the darkroom can become an Archimedian point of an entire film, as Michelangelo Antonioni has shown in Blow Up, the editing room lacks visual appeal. The editing process—despite the extent of the genre "film in film" and the diversification of self-reflexive forms of cinema[3]—is rarely the explicit subject of a film. In general, self-referential films are concerned with the immediate shooting of a film or with the screening of a finished product in the cinema.[4] Both are phases of visibility and thus of social interchange: on the one hand, the production of a film as an often conflictive relationship between director, actors, producers, and so on;[5] on the other, its reception by the audience, which

1 Godard on King Lear, F/USA 1987, in Godard, "Le montage, la solitude et la liberté" [1989], *Godard par Godard II,* 242.

2 Gerhard Schumm, "Montage, das große Geheimnis," *Der Schnitt* 33 (2004), 54–55: 54.

3 See Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature. From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Columbia UP 1992).

4 Farocki marks this discrepancy in a review of Godard's Passion, where he points out the difference between the production of commodities and film production: "The products are put in a display window, and advertising distributes images of them. Everything is done to make people aware of them, while their production is hidden behind walls. (With film production it is a little different, as something is made public from the shoot and only the editing is entirely hidden.)" Harun Farocki, "Passion," *Filmkritik* 7/1983, 317–328: 321.

5 The classics of this subgenre include Godard's Contempt, François Truffaut's Day for Night (F 1973), and Federico Fellini's Eight and a Half (F/I 1963). For an analysis of these films, see Harald Schleicher, *Film-Reflexionen. Autothematische Filme von Wim Wenders, Jean-Luc Godard und Federico Fellini* (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1991).

responds to the film and relates to the characters on screen.[6] The editing room, as an interim stage between these two poles, is, similar to the author's desk, not a space that suggests itself for the development of an exciting story; not least because it isn't a place of social interaction but of interaction between images. Much of the time at the editing table is "dead" time, spent in winding film material back and forth; the decisions taken here are only reflected in the edited material that results from the montage process—the cut is unseen visual work that becomes invisible. Consequently, the editor is much lower down the hierarchy than the director, cameraperson, producer, or author.

Only the Russian film, as a by-product of the early Soviet montage euphoria, has conceded a prominent place to the image of the editing suite alongside its numerous theoretical treatises on different types of montage. No photograph of Sergei Eisenstein is better known than the one in which he can be seen viewing a film strip with a serious look in his eyes, and Godard in turn based one of his much-reproduced portraits on it.[7] But above all Man with a Movie Camera,[8] Dziga Vertov's metafilm from 1929, which attempts to synthesize all aspects of film production and reception in the figure and adventures of a cameraman, cannot ignore the work of a cutter at her editing table. For Vertov, the editing room was an almost religious place of resurrection and revitalization.[9] Vertov repeatedly has the still frames—film material which the cameraman has shot in the previous sequences—jump into the moving images of narration, thus ascribing to the editing process a synthesizing power that blends the past of the shoot, the present of the editing, and the future of the projection. Godard echoes this idea of montage

6 Woody Allen has explored the possibilities of this interaction most consistently in The Purple Rose of Cairo (USA 1985), in which the screen and the auditorium merge into one another and a love story takes place between the viewer Cecilia (Mia Farrow) and her screen idol Tom Baxter (Jeff Daniels).

7 For example, on the cover of his first volume of writings. For the 300th edition of the *Cahiers du cinéma*, which he edited in May 1981, Godard combined the photo of Eisenstein with a picture of Sigmund Freud and one of Freud's texts. While Eisenstein inspects the celluloid and prepares his edit in the foreground, the inventor of psychoanalysis watches him from the screen. Montage, as a rhetorical intervention that brings forth latent and invisible elements, appears in this juxtaposition to be the production of an "optical unconscious," as described by Walter Benjamin in his essay on the artwork. The collage is reprinted in Michael Temple, James S. Williams, Michael Witt, eds. *For Ever Godard* (London: Black Dog Publishing 2004), 12.

8 Man with a Movie Camera, USSR 1929, director: Dziga Vertov.

9 This is vividly presented in Vertov's earlier film Kino Eye, in which the intertitle "The cinema eye reverses time" introduces a sequence in which a cow that has already been cut up for meat is returned to life. Kino Eye, USSR 1924, director: Dziga Vertov).

as reanimation in an important text: "In montage, the object is alive, while during the shoot it is dead. It has to be resurrected. This is sorcery."[10]

Farocki's and Godard's interest in the editing room continues the 1920s tradition of thinking about montage. But the fact that these two directors have featured the editing room in their films and texts also has to do with its marginalization.[11] As a literal embodiment of their poetics of the "in between," the editing room is one of the keys to the central working concepts of both directors.

## What an Editing Room is: Interface

"Are scientific experiments conducted at an editing station?"
Harun Farocki[12]

Hovering between question and statement, "What an Editing Room Is" was the heading for a short text that Harun Farocki wrote for *Filmkritik* in 1980. The title alone indicates the neglect of this location by film discourse. For if the specific function of the editing room in the process of making a film were understood, an explication would not be necessary. But the title is also an aesthetic statement: it articulates an interest in visual relationships, in the power that lies in the combination of images, and in the invisibility into which the decisions involved in image production are often forced. Farocki initially describes the editing room as a place of the "in between": "Film script and shooting schedule are ideas and money; shooting a film is work and spending of money. The work at the editing table is something in-between."[13] This topographic description not only refers to the unresolved status of editing a film but also to the fact that something is made visible in the editing room that lies in between the individual frames and sequences. This is another reference to the invisible third element that is so central to the poetics of Eisenstein, Farocki, and Godard.

The extent to which editing is connected to theory depends on the productive dimension of a collision between several shots and also on the fact

10 Godard, "Le montage, la solitude et la liberté," 245.

11 It is worth noting that both directors have usually edited their films themselves—Harun Farocki often under the pseudonym of Rosa Mercedes.

12 Interface, D 1995, director: Harun Farocki.

13 Harun Farocki, "What an Editing Room Is" [1980], ibid., *Nachdruck/Imprint. Texte/Writings*, eds. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nikolaus Schafhausen (Berlin: Vorwerk 8 2001), 78–84: 78.

that through this dynamic the film develops a "life of its own," which gives the work at the editing table an almost metaphysical dimension. "That is the work performed at the editing table: getting to know the material so well that the decisions taken as to where to make a cut, which version of a shot to use, or which music to play follow of their own accord."[14] This automatism, which shifts the editing decisions to the material itself, leads Farocki to the idea of an "autonomy of the image." The film does not confront the filmmaker as a passive object but takes the practical decisions—through the movement and dynamic inherent in the material—for the person who then only has to make the cut: "It's the film that thinks," to take up Godard's pointed statement once again.

The text that Farocki wrote about the editing room in 1980 also occupies an intermediate position. It should be understood as a temporal interface, connecting the past and the future in the sense of Godad's King Lear quote, as it represents both a look back at Farocki's television work of the early 1970s[15] and a theoretical blueprint for his installations of the 1990s. In both cases, the editing room—concealed or unconcealed—is central. In the early 1970s, Farocki made two programs in the WDR series *Telekritik*[16] in which the editing table, although it isn't depicted, represents the material precondition for Farocki's diagnosis of television broadcasting. The term *section* (the French title of Interface), must be understood literally here, as Farocki undertakes an almost medical examination of televisual reality. He extracts individual examples of the genre "feature" from current television productions and subjects them to a multilevel process of criticism: from the uncommented showing of an item to a repeated presentation with comments to interpretive thoughts about how the conventional approach to television might be countered by a critical way of working. Farocki emphasizes the central role of the editing table as an analytical instrument in an accompanying text:

14 Ibid.

15 Farocki himself sees this work critically today. The time between Inextinguishable Fire and Between Two Wars wars primarily spent earning a living from television commissions and—from 1974—as an unpaid editor and author on *Filmkritik*. The works for television are particularly interesting here, however, because in their deconstruction and critical analysis of a certain type of television program (feature), they also developed a theoretical and practical counter-program.

16 The Trouble with Images. A Critique of Television, BRD 1973, director: Harun Farocki. The Struggle with Images. A Critique of Television, BRD 1974, director: Harun Farocki.

> In the case of the feature, archive and editing table are a particularly sharp instrument against the rhetorical envelope. For in this sad genre of the feature, almost all the means of portrayal are means of deception. How the material is edited, how the information is sequenced, how the images relate to the sound: all this is aimed at deception. Like someone who has nothing to say and clothes this nothing in complete sentences.[17]

The text recalls Karl Kraus's attacks on the empty phrases of the daily press; here, the editing table is an analytical tool that exposes the shallowness of the visual and sound levels through repetition and exact observation. But The Trouble with Images goes beyond the criticism of individual features: Farocki is basically concerned with general propositions about the combination of images, so that a different approach to images becomes visible, behind the seen, as it were.

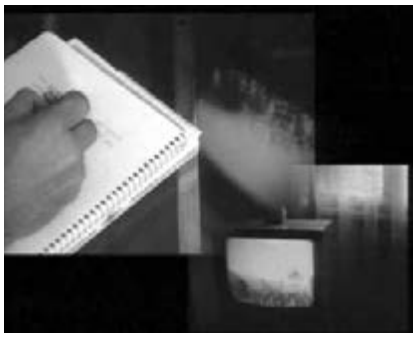
Films usually only make their montage decisions visible in the final result. Farocki, however, repeatedly raises the issue—in words and images—of how such decisions are taken and what it means to connect images. "You notice montage, but not editing. Montage is an intellectual linking of images. The editing is [...] creating flow, finding rhythm."[18] In this opposition of editing and montage, which for a long time had its political equivalent in the East-West conflict,[19] Farocki's and Godard's sympathies undoubtedly lay on the side of the intellectual linking of images. An installation like Interface, in which the work at the editing table is the basic situation of the film, shows such an intellectual linkage in practice and can also be seen as a kind of "adaptation" of the text "What an Editing Room Is." What the text describes in a short subheading as "gestural thinking" is translated in the installation into the working gestures at the editing table. Fifteen years after his short text, Farocki now took the opportunity—for the exhibition *Le monde après la photographie*[20] in Villeneuve d'Ascq in France—of being able to produce a work that theoretically examined the combination of images and put a new kind of juxtaposition to the test that he calls "soft montage," a method he has continued to use in many of his subsequent works. Moving into an exhibition space primarily enabled the spatial separation and synchronous presentation

17 Harun Farocki, "Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit. Das Fernsehfeature/Der Ärger mit den Bildern," [about The Struggle with Images] *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 2, 1973.

18 Harun Farocki, "Die Aufgabe des Schnittmeisters: Ökonomie. Gespräch mit Peter Przygodda," *Filmkritik* 10/1979, 487–491: 489.

19 See Ute Holl, *Kino, Trance und Kybernetik* (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose 2002), 25f.

20 *Le monde après la photographie*, Musée d'art moderne de Villeneuve d'Ascq, France, June 10 to September 30, 1995.



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of two images.[21] The exhibition space, unlike the cinema screen, can arrange two images in such a way that the viewer is brought into different relationships with what is shown, and the triangle between the two images and the viewer configures itself variably.

Interface not only presents this type of montage as a product but foregrounds the relational process itself. At least two images—and thus a potential multiplication—are always on view in Interface. In the tradition of early Romantic theory, Farocki had already made the figure 2 into a cipher of "eternity" in Between Two Wars in the late 1970s: "*One* story can't be about *two* people; *one* story can't be about *two* worlds; *one* story can't be about *two* classes, because two is already the totality,"[22] says the author, who is significantly not seen directly but as a reflection in the shining surface of his desk. An image—that of the author—and a text come together and prefigure, before the text about the editing room and the installation Interface, the idea of interpenetrating image and text and of presenting both as a literal process of reflection. Interface takes up this idea again and continues it. Farocki views images from his films, partially supplemented with new footage,[23] each time combining two images with one another. But above all he comments on this process of viewing and montage. Interface is a reflection on the possibilities of the non-linear combination of images, and his juxtapositions accumulate numerous further dichotomies, for example that of image versus text, of film versus video, of visual versus tactile, of coding versus decoding. Editing table and montage—as with Godard—thus become a metaphor for the relating and linking of ideas.

The viewer is confronted by the first doubling immediately after the title insert (ill. 41). Above left, someone is noting a text on a writing pad—a little later, we know it is Farocki himself. To the right but still in the same image,

21 Most of Farocki's installations have single-channel versions for broadcast on television.

22 *Zwischen zwei Kriegen. Film von Harun Farocki. Beschrieben und Protokolliert von Peter Nau. Mit 68 Abbildungen* (Munich: Verlag der Filmkritik 1978), 33.

23 The film also mentions a project about secret documents and the process of coding and decoding that has not been realized.

the blurred bluish reflection of a monitor can be seen. The first sentence of the commentary, spoken by Farocki, closely relates writing and seeing: "I can hardly write a word thse days if there isn't an image on the screen at the same time. Actually: on both screens."[24] This opening gives the film a double foundation: the gesture of retrospection is located in the here and now of the present, and thus historicized, and it is emphatically identified as the reflections of Farocki the author, whose presence as viewer, writer, and speaker are central from the very beginning. However, this is not associated with a glorification of the author but rather clarifies the general tendency of the installation to portray the author as receiver, as someone through whom the thoughts of the images organize themselves and link up.[25] The author is himself the interface, and the image is the catalyst that sets the intellectual and linguistic process in motion. The editing table is the setting for a theoretical viewing that translates into a text of images and words; a place where production and reception coincide. "Both screens" can mean the two screens of the editing table where Farocki sits, and which can be seen in the next shot,[26] but it can also refer to the two monitors or images with which the viewer is confronted in the exhibition and which lie outside the editing-table situation. In this sense, the doubling of the image potentially extends the number of possible combinations into infinity.

There is a further "second" image in this first one: a photograph of Nicolae Ceauşescu, general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, standing on the balcony of the Central Committee Building delivering a speech, the sudden interruption of which contributed to the overthrowing of his dictatorship in 1989. Farocki takes up a central image from the film Videograms of a Revolution, which he produced with the Romanian media theorist Andrej Ujica and which is compiled from television and amateur

24 This and the following quotes—if not otherwise identified—come from the English subtitles of Interface.

25 In the text "Wie man sieht" which accompanies the film As You See and appeared in Uwe Nettelbeck's journal *Die Republik*, no. 76–78, September 9, 1986, 33–106, Farocki quotes a remark by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who similarly understands the human subject as a channeling of different discourses: "I appear to myself as the place where something is going on, but there is no 'I', no 'me.' Each of us is a kind of crossroads where things happen. The crossroads is purely passive; something happens there. A different thing, equally valid, happens elsewhere. There is no choice, it is just a matter of chance." Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* [1978] (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul 2005), x.

26 With Interface it is difficult to talk about "shots" in the classic sense, as the alternation of images and sequences rarely takes place on both monitors at the same time.

footage from the period of the uprising.[27] This image, which was broadcast by state television and replaced by the announcement "Transmisiune directa" when the speech was interrupted, played a central role in the Romanian revolution. The suspension of the visual representation of state power for a moment produced a gap into which a different power—in this case, the Romanian citizens who occupied the television station a short while later—could press forward. The sudden invisibility of power revealed another power—that of the people:

> The televisual blackout does in fact indicate the power-preserving alliance between medium and politics. In the moment that the television image of the dictator collapses and the medium is thrown back on its materiality (it can show images of the world, except that now the authority that decides what is real, and thus worth showing, is suspended), a revolutionary situation seems to have occurred.[28]

In Interface, Farocki again takes up the montage from Videograms of a Revolution and reconstructs it at the editing table. By confronting the television footage of Ceauşescu's speech with a further image taken simultaneously in a private apartment by a video amateur, he succeeds in making a valid statement about something as abstract as the loss of power, a message that only emerges through the relationship between the images. Two images oppose each other like shot and countershot: Ceauşescu can be seen on the television in the apartment; on the streets, the demonstrators are streaming away from the state-organized rally. A camera pan by the amateur filmmaker relates the two, and it is this production of a relationship that Farocki paradigmatically addresses in Interface. If the live broadcast is understood as a gesture of the assertion of power, both its technical interruption and its confrontation with the countershot of the demonstrators leaving the gathering place are its recognizable subversion. Placing them side by side in a soft montage, and thus showing both of them simultaneously, reveals montage as a diagnostic, political, and poetic instrument.

27 Farocki has written a text entitled "Substandard" which gives background information to the film: Harun Farocki, "Substandard" [1993], ibid. *Nachdruck*, 249–267.

28 Eike Wenzel, "Hinter der sichtbaren Oberfläche der Bilder. Harun Farockis dokumentarische Arbeit an gesellschaftlichen Umbruchsituationen. Zu *Videogramme einer Revolution* und *Die führende Rolle*," *Der Ärger mit den Bildern*, eds. Rolf Aurich, Ulrich Kriest (Konstanz: UVK 1998), 269-286.

In Videograms, these two images introduce an intensive debate about the relationship between "real" power and the power of the image during the events in Romania. Here, in Interface, the tracking shot by the amateur filmmaker Paul Kossigian almost allegorically introduces a reflection on the possibilities of combining two images. The film is autobiographical, as Farocki re-views selected films from Inextinguishable Fire to Videograms of a Revolution, making them the subject of a metafilm retrospective. But more importantly, the work is a formal examination of the possibilities of soft montage.[29] To put it simply, this type of montage replaces or supplements the consecutiveness of sequences with a coexistence of two visual levels and uses the numerous combinatory possibilities that arise from this juxtaposition.

> There is succession as well as simultaneity in a double projection, the relationship of an image to the one that follows as well as the one beside it; a relationship to the preceding as well as the concurrent one. Imagine three double bonds jumping back and forth between the six carbon atoms of a benzene ring; I envisage the same ambiguity in the relationship of an element in an image track to the one succeeding or accompanying it.[30]

The chemical metaphor that Farocki develops here to describe the forces between two images is no coincidence and produces various connections in its turn. It takes up an image from Between Two Wars, in which the benzene ring is a symbol for the circular and mutual dependence of the industrial processes introduced during the Weimar Republic. The film tells of the chemist Friedrich August Kekulé, who knows the individual components of benzene—carbon and hydrogen—but has to find out the logic of their variable individual and double connections. Applied to soft montage, the metaphor stands for ambiguity and flexibility: images should not be fixed to a specific, timeless "content," for their translation into text or metaphor is itself a model that has to be presented and continually reinterpreted as such. The emphasis is shifted from a concept of meaning based on the identity of the image to the production of meaning as the effect of a constellation.

29 Soft montage has already been mentioned in the conversation between Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki about Godard's Numéro Deux: Harun Farocki, Kaja Silverman, "In Her Place," ibid., *Speaking About Godard* (New York/London: New York UP 1998), 141–169: 142.

30 Harun Farocki, "Cross Influence/Soft Montage," trans. Cynthia Beatt, *Against What? Against Whom?* eds. Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig Books 2009), 69–74: 70.

In 1968, in Le gai savoir, Godard made use of a similar metaphor in order to explain the strategy of his image–sound analysts Emile and Patricia: "To find a solution, whether to a chemical or a political problem, you have to dissolve; dissolve hydrogen or dissolve the parliament. Here we dissolve the images and the sounds,"[31] is how the two describe their three-year program of analyzing and altering images and sounds. This model of an analysis of images and language oriented to the exact sciences once again traces an arc, via the connection between Godard and Farocki, to early Romanticism. Novalis also alluded to physics in his *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*. His remarks almost read as a paraphrase of Godard, even though he understands "images" to be composed of language: "Experimenting with images and concepts within the faculty of representation in a manner wholly analogous to physical experimenting. Associating. Allowing to arise—etc."[32]

The comparison between visual connections and chemical bonds establishes the direction of Farocki's method in Interface. For the image of a chemical connection between two images also contains the necessity of analytically describing this connection and subjecting it to various kinds of experiments in order to be able to describe it more exactly. The editing room, according to Farocki, is a laboratory for examining visual relationships. That the metaphor of the lab is only one of several conceivable models for the work of editing becomes clear when the idea is taken literally and the technical equipment threatens to disappear in a fog of dry ice, as if it were an actual laboratory.

The division of the visual space into several image fields, which is the basis for Interface, has precursors in all the visual arts. In my analysis of Still Life and the subgenre of the inverted still life, I have already pointed out that the superimposition of various visual spaces through frames, windows, or the creation of hierarchies between foreground and background opened up numerous possibilities for self-reflection in painting. And this practice was also present in film from early on. When the playing-card figures in a film by Georges Meliès, for example, become independent and step out of their cards, they set a varied play of fiction and reality in motion that implicitly also says something about the possibilities of the cinematic medium.[33] The history of the experimental

31 Jean-Luc Godard, "Le Gai Savoir (extraits de la piste sonore)," *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 200/201, April/May 1968, 53–55: 54.

32 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia* [1798/99], trans., ed. David W. Wood (Albany: State University of New York Press 2007), 162.

33 Les cartes vivantes, F 1904, director: Georges Meliès.

film in particular contains many attempts to subdivide the image through multiple exposure and filmic tricks. The split screen was also increasingly used in the commercial cinema of the 1960s—on the one hand, for the narration of simultaneousness, on the other, as a formal correspondence to situations of narrative doubling.[34] Farocki, however, transfers this visual practice to an experimental arrangement that not only shows two images but also the act of their combination. Godard's film Numéro deux, which represents a complex interweaving of film, video, and television,[35] is the model for Farocki's investigation of the juxtaposition and interpenetration of two images:[36]


Ill. 42 and ill. 43

> When Godard presented Numéro Deux in 1975, a 35-mm film that (mainly) shows two video monitors, I was sure that here the new experience of

34 One example of the narration of simultaneity through a split screen is Norman Jewison's The Thomas Crown Affair (USA 1968). Another, whose formal doubling of the image also corresponds to the subject matter, is Brian de Palma's Film Sisters (USA 1972), which tells the story of a pair of Siamese twins. In the early 2000s, Mike Figgis in particular has explored the narrative possibilities of the DV camera and the use of a (multiply) split screen. In Timecode (USA 2000), he tells four stories, each consisting of a single take, simultaneously and with frequent overlaps; he continued this experiment in Hotel (USA 2001).

35 "The unique thing about *Numéro Deux* is that the film was conceived in television terms, but in cinema clothing. […] Television, from which the film was conceived, doesn't exist enough, and film exists too much." Jean-Luc Godard, "Faire les films possibles là où on est" [1975], *Godard par Godard I*, 382–386: 382.

36 See also the conversation between Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki about this film: "The idea of doubling the image must have come to Godard from working in video. Video editing is usually done while sitting in front of two monitors. One monitor shows the already edited material, and the other monitor raw material, which the videomaker may or may not add to the work-in-progress. He or she becomes accustomed to thinking of two images at the same time, rather than sequentially." Farocki, Silverman, "In Her Place," ibid., *Speaking About Godard*, 141–169: 142.

> video editing, the comparison of two images, was evident. What do these two images share? What can an image have in common with another?[37]

Another example from INTERFACE can illustrate the effects of 'soft montage.' (ill. 42 and 43). On the upper image, Farocki's hand can be seen inserting a cassette into a video recorder—the film INEXTINGUISHABLE FIRE, as can be read in the second image. This is followed on the right-hand monitor by the first scene of the film, from 1969, in which Farocki unemotionally reads a Vietnamese eye-witness account of a napalm attack. More than two decades later, he speaks this monologue with a slight time displacement, partly from memory, partly like an interpreter. At the moment in the original film in which Farocki's right hand reaches outside the frame for a cigarette in order to extinguish it on the back of his other hand, there is a cut in the other image to Farocki's hand stroking the scar he bears today. The older image is continued in the more recent one; its traces can be followed from left to right. The images come into contact with one another; the author reaches out to the author over a gap of twenty-five years.[38]

This metaphor also contains the motif of touch and the tactile, through which Farocki distinguishes the media of film and video from one another. A long sequence shows Farocki's hand winding a film, checking the tension of the celluloid with his index finger and thumb and sliding it lightly through his fingers. He speaks about the tactile quality of the film image, which is lost in video in favor of visual virtuality:

> While working at the film editing table, I keep the tip of my finger on the running image or sound reel to feel the cut or the glue before I see or hear it. This is a gesture of indicating "fine perception" or "sensitivity." They had had almost no contact with the object, but perceived it nonetheless. When working with video, I don't touch the tape, I only push buttons. Another activity for the fingertips.

The difference between film and video is not only in the type of image—on the one hand, the photographically developed frame, on the other, abstract electronic information on magnetic tape—but also in the resulting modus operandi. The filmstrip requires touch and turns the work at the editing table into "gestural thinking," as described in "What an Editing Table Is,"

37 Farocki, "Cross Influence/Soft Montage," 72.

38 I will go into the motif of the hand in the films of Godard and Farocki in chapter 6, "Two or Three Ways of Speaking with the Hands."

while the manual work in video editing is more indirect. Film editing has something of the modeling work of the sculptor, while the tactile aspects of video editing are reduced to pressing buttons. Concrete workmanship and abstract intuition are opposed in both media. Farocki's associative approach is illustrated by his finally bringing together the video gesture of winding images back and forth at the touch of a button with the feeling of touch required for counting money: "With a banknote, it becomes particularly clear how little essence and appearance coincide." Money is an example here of the disparity between sign and content, but the banknote can also be seen as a metaphor for the circulation of images, whose surfaces continually need to be questioned in terms of their value, valance, and function.

## Montage, toujours: JLG/JLG

"I don't see how one can leave the montage to anybody else,"[39] exclaims Godard in one of his numerous texts on montage. And he also explains why the editing room has become a solitary place for him:

> In the editing room the territory is so fiercely contested that you really need a common point, the "third point," invisible between the two ends of the filmstrip. "What kind of film are we making? Why are we happy to make it? Why do we want to make this particular film, now, in this particular way?[40]

If Farocki's description of editing in "What an Editing Room Is" proceeded from the production constraints—lack of money, dark spaces that turn the editing room into the site of the excluded, suppressed, invisible aspects of filmmaking—Godard highlights the conflicts between those involved: there are fights about the realization of one's own ideas about montage; collaboration is only possible if the editors see the same "invisible" thing between the images and share the same vision of the film project. In the editing room, questions of the implicit and explicit ideas about the film arise at every step. Over and above these more pragmatic difficulties around organizing the work in the editing room, Godard also speaks about the function of montage, to which he ascribes an almost metaphysical dimension

39 Godard, "Le montage, la solitude et la liberté," 243.
40 Ibid., 244.

Ill. 44 and ill. 45

remote from the everyday and links it to the concepts of "utopia" and "destiny." Godard does indeed think about the editing room as a place of potential rescue that implies freedom of choice much more than shooting does. The actual "chemical reaction" between the images, which remains abstract on the set and can only be thought of as a potentiality, is translated into a definite form through the editing of the material, just as a block of stone already contains the statue that is to be carved from it: "In the montage you meet destiny. [...] It really is the possibility of transforming your freedom into destiny."[41]

In these words, it is easy to discern a "metaphysics of montage" that elevates the editing room to the most important place in the production of a film, and in fact it has often been remarked that montage is the "central, volatile, and essentially open-ended metaphor"[42] that structures Godard's thinking about film and history. However, Godard—unlike Harun Farocki—has never made a film that entirely centers on the work at the editing table. Only HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA clearly demonstrates that it can only have come about through the viewing, arrangement, and organization of films and texts, and thus that the editing room is one of its central categories: consequently, in its first chapter the rolls of film on the editing table are as important a structuring element as the typewriter and the microphone. The rattle of the electric typewriter and the sound of the film being wound back and forth on the editing table are a characteristic feature of the soundtrack (ill. 44 and 45), and together with Godard's commentary they combine to form a complex superimposition of word, sound, and image. The phrase "Don't change

41 Ibid.

42 Michael Witt, "Montage, My Beautiful Care, or Histories of the Cinematograph," *The Cinema Alone. Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard* 1985–2000, eds. Michael Temple, James Williams (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP 2001), 33-50: 44.

anything, so that everything becomes different," Godard's first words in Histoire(s), can certainly be interpreted as a description of the work at the editing table: without "changing" the scenes and text fragments, strictly speaking, but through displacement, dissolves, quick fades in and out—in short, types of montage—their meaning is completely modified. This is most drastically the case in Godard's superimposition of Elizabeth Taylor and footage from Auschwitz, in which dead bodies are slowly covered by the face of the actress lying rapturously in the arms of Montgomery Clift—a scene from George Stevens' A Place in the Sun.[43]

But where is the "missing link" between these shots? Are they more than an almost cynical opposition of maximum suffering and greatest happiness? Godard comments on the scene with the words: "If George Stevens hadn't been the first to make a color 16-mm film in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, Elizabeth Taylor would probably never have found a place in the sun." The shots are linked by the fact that George Stevens filmed both scenes, and he represents a bridge between the two images which Godard makes visible through the editing table and the typewriter: "Film exposes the brutal reality of human suffering in the interval between the beauty of a smile and the hell of the Final Solution. Montage *à la* Godard constructs an image of history in the light of an extreme variation between a vision of happiness and the sense of catastrophe."[44] The invisible image that comes about in this coupling is the result of a palimpsest-like dissolve between two apparently distant images, whose hidden content Godard reveals.

If in Histoire(s) du cinéma the editing table represents the technical a priori of Godard's approach to (film) history, it is an explicit theme of another of his films, which shows more points of contact with Farocki's analysis of this piece of equipment. There are numerous correspondences between Interface and the video JLG/JLG, which Jean-Luc Godard produced in 1994. At almost the same time, both authors turn to their own places of work and combine filmmaking with introspection.

The site of filmmaking is reflected in terms of production conditions and media, authorship literally becoming a practice of viewing, theory, and (self-)quotation. More than a self-portrait, JLG/JLG appears at first sight more like an inventory of the various media Godard has used as material in his work. Godard writes concepts into an empty notebook; in a long tracking shot along a bookcase, recalling the supermarket sequence from Tout va

43 A Place in the Sun, USA 1951, director: George Stevens.

44 Alan Wright, "Elisabeth Taylor at Auschwitz: JLG and the Real Object of Montage," *The Cinema Alone*, eds. Temple, Williams, 51–60: 52.

BIEN, the written word is surveyed instead of consumer goods; paintings and reproductions are filmed, as well as TV sets and video monitors.

The editing table is therefore not introduced as a central metaphor but as one of the many places where "work with images" takes place: Godard's apartment, the bookshelves, video cassettes, prints, and the exterior shots of the Swiss landscape are at least as important, if not more so. The main title of this "self-portrait in December" makes it clear that the prospected "self" can only be addressed indirectly: JLG/JLG, as with every self-portrait, is the site of a duplication, a splitting into two symmetrical parts. Subject and object of description only apparently coincide; in reality they are the effects of an internal montage. But how do the two halves relate to one another? How should the title be understood and paraphrased? Godard on Godard? Godard by Godard? Godard next to Godard? Godard himself has rejected such an interpretation: "There is no 'by.' [...] If there is a 'by,' it means it's a study of JLG, of myself by myself and a sort of biography, what one calls in French *un examen de conscience*, which it is absolutely not."[45] But what is it then? "JLG," the figure whose image is developed in the film, is a reader, author, speaker, above all someone who sees and is seen. From the very first shot, which highlights the altered black-and-white photograph of a boy who we later learn is the young Jean-Luc, the film is two things at once—reflections on the "I" and reflections on the image—and demonstrates how little they can be separated. Identified by its subtitle as a snapshot, a point in time, the film shows a retrospective and melancholy search which begins and ends with this photograph. "The somewhat contrite impression I make in the small photograph, which doesn't just come from a couple of slaps [...]. The sole aim of this film should be to find out about it," says the voiceover (Godard) after a few minutes. The path that this search takes is not a psychoanalytical self-inquiry, however; the film is not an attempt to re-enter the past but consists of a survey of the visible space currently surrounding this photograph. The film is more interested in a cinematic investigation of texts, images, and sounds than a psychological self-examination. It continues in tranquil shots, whose precise lighting is often reminiscent of paintings: rooms and objects in a private home; and on the other hand almost motionless landscapes—a Swiss Lake, green hills, a snow-covered forest.[46] Views out of the window partially link theses two levels, and handwritten pages also supply "chapter headings" throughout the film. While the dichotomy of "outer" and "inner,"

45 "Jean-Luc Godard interviewed by Gavin Smith," *Film Comment*, March/April 1996, 31–41: 35.
46 Godard didn't shoot these sequences himself but asked a photographer friend to take footage of the surroundings, which he worked into the film.

to which these spaces are assigned, also contains two possible approaches to the self—"inner" would be Godard's voice, "outer" his image, which variously appears as a photograph, film image, or in the viewfinder of a video camera—the editing room, which plays an important role in a later scene, is not allocated to either of these poles. It lies in between and is a reservoir in which the numerous media with which the JLG of the film surrounds himself—paintings, books, a video camera, the television—potentially coincide and can be joined into a film.

JLG/JLG is punctuated with fragments of philosophy and literature—in this respect, the most obvious theoretical level is that of the cited texts. Numerous quotations can be identified on the soundtrack, as Godard either names their sources or films the book title. Alongside Wittgenstein—a statement from *On Certainty*—the authors are Heidegger ("Chemins qui mènent nulle part" writes Godard in his notebook, the French title of *Off the Beaten Track*), Merleau-Ponty, Diderot, Nietzsche, and others. But the exact identification of the sources is less important than how they are used, for, as in other films, the quotations only partly refer to the contexts from which they come and are mostly emphasized as extracts and excerpts. They are not cited as a *pars pro toto*, to represent an overall context, but stand out from the film like splinters. In this, they are examples of Godard's radical extracting and "cutting" reading practice: "I have rarely read a book right through, ten or fifteen perhaps. This has to do with the fact that if a sentence impresses you, it is almost entirely sufficient. If you read a whole book, you lose the élan and the shock the sentence gave you."[47] Editing, montage, and arrangement therefore also determine Godard's approach to texts—and the editing table, even though it only appears in one scene of the film, can be seen as an overarching metaphor for his understanding of material.

The scene in which editing and the editing table are central stands out from the rest of the film because it is not associated with either of the two poles of landscape and home. It takes place in a spacious, tidy office: Godard's production company. While a young secretary negotiates loudly with a producer on the phone, a woman introduces herself as an editing assistant. Justice Fielding is blind and only "sees" her surroundings through touch and hearing; on the soundtrack, she and Godard will later quote a dialogue from Diderot's "Letter on the Blind," which deals with the difference between inner and outer image, with imagination and actual seeing:

47 Jean-Luc Godard, "Une boucle bouclée. Nouvel entretien avec Jean-Luc Godard par Alain Bergala" [1997], *Godard par Godard II*, 9–41: 15f.

| | |
|---|---|
| Godard: | One day I said to her, "Mademoiselle, imagine a cube." |
| Fielding: | I see it. |
| Godard: | Place a point in the centre of the cube. |
| Fielding: | I have done so. |
| Godard: | From the point, draw straight lines to the angles; into what have you divided the cube? |
| Fielding: | Into six pyramids, each having its base one side of the cube, and a height equal to half its height. |
| Godard: | True, but tell me where you see this. |
| Fielding: | In my head, as you do.[48] |

As in Diderot's text, the boundary between inner and outer, between "real" and "imaginary" image, is one of the main lines of distinction here, the subversion of which leads to an extension of the concept of the image. The introduction of the blind editing assistant transfers both types of "seeing" to cinema, and the art of the visible is brought into contact with the invisible. The linking of blindness and editing immediately indicates the possibility of producing an invisible third image through the combination of two, which is explored as the scene unfolds. At this point, the film becomes a reflection on the relationship between seeing and feeling; the tactile qualities of the filmstrip, which Farocki points out in INTERFACE, also mark an important distinction here: "Through her monologue, Godard brings together the two senses that are generally most opposed to one another—seeing and touching. 'To see' comes to signify 'to touch,' and 'to touch' 'to see.'"[49] The monologue that Kaja Silverman refers to is an extended passage from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, which Godard has his blind assistant speak. In JLG/JLG, he describes a scene to her from HÉLAS POUR MOI,[50] produced in the previous year, and tells her the exact number of frames after which she is to make the cut. His assistant repeats his instructions conscientiously, and then, after a series of black frames, carries them out, her hands gliding over the cutting mechanism of the editing table. These gestures are accompanied by her long quotation from Merleau-Ponty: (ill. 46 and 47):

48 Denis de Diderot, "Addition to the Letter on the Blind" [1749], *Diderot's Early Philosophical Works*, ed. Margaret Jourdain (New York: Lenox Hill 1972), 142–157:153.

49 Kaja Silverman, "The Author as Receiver," *October 96*, spring 2001,17–34: 31.

50 HÉLAS POUR MOI F/CH 1993, director: Jean-Luc Godard.

Ill. 46 and ill. 47

> If my left hand can touch my right hand while it palpates the tangible, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own? [...] But this domain, one rapidly realizes, is unlimited. If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. And if I was able to understand how this wave arises within me, how the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape, I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own.[51]

Merleau-Ponty's text is an attempt to describe the perceiving body—what he calls "the flesh" (*la chair*)—as an ineluctable authority in which the various modes of perception coincide. This primarily occurs because of its double function as perceiving and perceived subject. Seeing and being seen, active perception and passive reception, combine into a dual figure that has its equivalent in the concept of the author that Godard develops in JLG/JLG. The active author, who initiates and stages perception, and who could certainly be charged with egocentricity or narcissism, is countered by a perceiving, "receiving" author. The film, it can be argued with Kaja Silverman, is less the vain product of one of its two figures than the place of a conflict they argue out: "I actually think, however, that the two Godards

51 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," *The Visible and the Invisible* [1964] trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP: 1968), 130–155: 141, 140f.

featured in the title JLG/JLG are the two Godards who compete with each other for center-stage in that film: the author as legendary personage, and the author as receiver."[52]

On the other hand, the use of Merleau-Ponty's text—independent of its philosophical implications—can be read as allegoric. It is a commentary on the genre of the self-portrait, which, by definition, means both perceiving and being perceived. The seeing subject and the seen object, which Merleau-Ponty understands as being coincident in the perceiving body, together constitute the point of departure and arrival of autobiographical work. But Godard also quite literally relates the "coiling over of the visible upon the visible" mentioned in the quote to the visual practice of cinema when he underlays the words with the visual commentary of the rotating spools of an editing table. It is one of the many examples of Godard's deliberate "misreading"—in this case taking the metaphorical "coiling" (*enroulement*) literally. For in an entirely material sense, the unwinding and rewinding of a filmstrip is of course nothing less than the visible revolving around the visible. Going further than Christina Scherer in her analysis of JLG/JLG, I would therefore suggest reading this sequence as a reflection on the practices of film itself—on the material preconditions for the correlation of different images at the editing table and the genre of autobiographical speech.

The editing room here is primarily a place of self-reflection and the coincidence of the sense of touch and sight. Michael Witt has pointed out that Godard evokes a sculptural quality through his editing and his permanent reflection on the material with which he works: "In view of his insistence on systematically assuming the role of editor of his own work since the 1970s, there is a real sense in which Godardian thought has been consciously channeled through a physical, sculptural engagement with his material."[53] But the editing table is also the place where reception (texts) and production (images) are linked, where other people's texts and one's own images converge.

The belief in the power of image combination (over that of the single image) doesn't only go back to the Russian theorists of the silent film. One of Godard's most important points of reference, also quoted in JLG/JLG, is a short text by the French surrealist Pierre Reverdy. Reverdy doesn't speak about material images but about poetic metaphors and comparisons. Yet

52 Kaja Silverman, Gareth James, "Son image," *I said I love. That is the promise*, eds. Gareth James, Florian Zeyfang (Berlin: b_books 2003), 210–243: 215.

53 Witt, "Montage, My Beautiful Care," 33f.

Godard understands his statement literally, which here, ironically, means in a metaphorical sense (ill. 48–50).

> The image is a pure creation of the spirit. It cannot be born of a comparison, but of the rapprochement of two more or less separate realities. The more distant and just the relationships between these realities that are brought together, the stronger the image will be. Two realities with no relationship between them cannot be usefully brought together. No image is created. Two contrary realities cannot be brought together. They oppose each other. An image is not strong because it is brutal or fantastic, but because the association of ideas is distant and just.[54]




Ills. 48-50

Pierre Reverdy is a model for Godard in one thing above all: he doesn't think of the image as a single entity but as the result of a difference. Only in the combination and convergence of two differing but not opposing realities does an image arise. The recurrent phrase "distant and just" (*juste*), which JLG takes up, recalls Godard's much-quoted (and untranslatable) phrase from his Dziga Vertov Group days: "Ce n'est pas une image juste, c'est juste une image."[55] But it also provides a precise defini-

54 Jean-Luc Godard, *JLG/JLG. Phrases* (Paris: P.O.L. 1996), 21f. Reverdy's definition of the image was first published in 1918 in the journal *Nord-Sud* and reprinted in Pierre Reverdy, *Plupart du temps. Poèmes en prose* [1915–1922] (Paris: Flammarion 1967), 409f. This translation is the one Michael Witt gives in Witt, "Montage, My Beautiful Care."

55 In LE VENT D'EST (1969, directors: Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin), the phrase is repeatedly given in intertitles.

tion of the work of combining two images at the editing table. Rephrased in media-theoretical terms, this means that the relationship between two images, and all the more between two visual media—such as photography and film—is equally characterized by difference and similarity.