



Pass the Salt – audio commentary

Christian Keathley, Middlebury College, US, ckeathle@middlebury.edu

Audio commentary by maker Christian Keathley about his 2006 videographic essay "Pass the Salt."





Creator's Statement

“**Pass the Salt**” was not published at *[in]Transition* but it is, I think, an important part of the journal's pre-history.

Back in the late 1980s, just after graduating college, I began to think about how one might adapt a scholarly essay for re-presentation in audio-visual form. I completed two such projects: *Clues* (1991), adapted from Carlo Ginzburg's essay, “Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes,” and *Snapshots* (1995), adapted from an essay by Robert B Ray that appears as a chapter in his book *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* (Harvard UP, 1995). The first of these was an hour-long video, and the second was a 20-minute piece combining two video monitors and projected 16mm film running simultaneously. Neither of these was a straight adaptation – that is, both worked with other material, mostly biographical and historical, that did not appear in the source text. This new material served to increase the narrative component of the work.

After finishing a Ph.D. and then completing my first book, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Indiana UP, 2006), I wanted to return to doing this kind of production work, but with a specific focus on films, and I was stimulated by the video essay work I was seeing. On the one hand, there were the more mainstream critical videos showing up on YouTube, as well as the more sophisticated critical analyses appearing regularly as supplements on DVD releases. But I also discovered more non-explanatory conceptual works, like one might find as part of an avant-garde screening or a gallery installation – works by artists like Victor Burgin and Martin Arnold. I wanted to do something somewhere in between these two poles – or rather, something

that borrowed from each, combining the explanatory quality of the former with some of the poetical richness and conceptual inventiveness of the latter.

Around this time, Katie Grant was also starting to make video essays, and she had seen “Pass the Salt” (though I can’t remember how). She contacted me, and we talked and shared the work we were doing. In 2012, we met in person for the first time at the SCMS conference in Boston, where she pitched to me the idea of a journal that would publish videographic essays. I loved the idea – and we were equally committed to nurturing work that combined explanatory and more poetical elements – but we weren’t yet sure how we could make it happen. Then Drew Morton pitched a similar idea to MediaCommons, and my Middlebury colleague Jason Mittell, who was then an editorial board member with that organization, put him in touch with me and Katie. From there, things happened quickly. Two years later – and with essential support from Chris Becker at JCMS – the first issue of *[in]Transition* appeared. Revisiting this video on the tenth anniversary of *[in]Transition* is particularly meaningful for me. It seems that just yesterday I was working more or less alone, on a project whose potential dissemination was unclear, and now I am part of a community of dozens of other scholar/makers engaged in their own videographic work, which they will see published in an award-winning peer reviewed academic journal.

Working with Katie, Drew, and Jason in those intense early years was always exciting – and it is now deeply gratifying to see this thriving journal pass into the caring hands of such capable co-editors. Thanks to everyone who has worked so hard to make *[in]Transition* a success!

Biography

Christian Keathley is the Walter J. Cerf Distinguished Professor of Film & Media Culture at Middlebury College. He is the author of *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Indiana UP, 2006) and co-author with Robert B. Ray of a BFI Film Classics volume on *All the President’s Men* (Bloomsbury, 2023). He is a founding co-editor of *[in]Transition*, and he is the co-author with Catherine Grant and Jason Mittell of *The Videographic Essay: Practice and Pedagogy*.

