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.