Illuminations

BEN SPATZ (iD)

ABSTRACT

One of the most important questions for videographic research today is the relationship between textuality and audiovisuality. Does textuality always have to frame and contextualize video, in order for it to be research? What if textuality were located topologically within video, instead of the other way around? Is text needed at all? Can't some audiovisual material "speak" for itself? In 2020, as the Coronavirus pandemic was setting in, I decided to launch an open call for a special issue of illuminated videos. As I wrote in the call, many practitioners did not have the opportunity to work with others this year, because of the pandemic. I thought it might be a good time to ask people to go back into their video archives and think about how they might annotate and recontextualize selected audiovisual material. Contributors were asked to work with a piece of uncut video. No editing of the video or audio tracks was allowed, except for basic corrections. In other words, the audiovisual track has to follow its own temporality, without cuts. The contributions to this special issue are presented in order from shortest to longest. I hope this will be useful way to introduce the form of illuminated video.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Ben Spatz

University of Huddersfield, UK

b.spatz@hud.ac.uk

VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: *https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.90*.

Available for download here: *https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.90.s1*.

STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE

The Voices of the Pages (2017) ed. Caroline Gatt. Knowing From the Inside. University of Aberdeen.
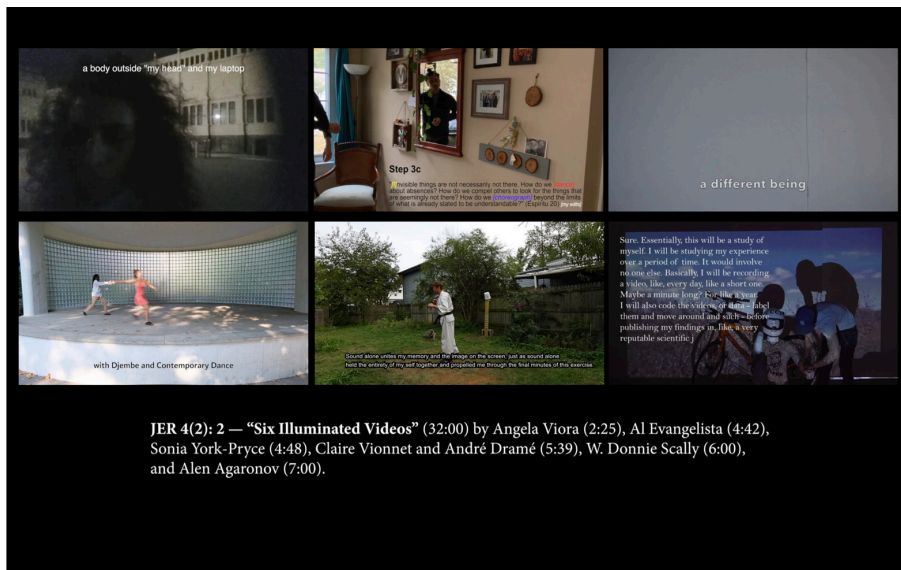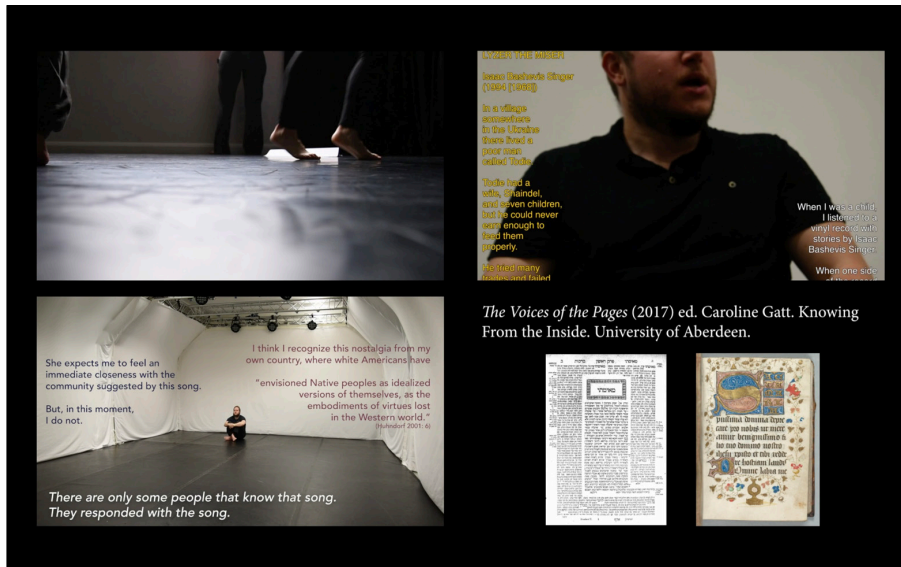
JER 4(2): 2 — "Six Illuminated Videos" (32:00) by Angela Viora (2:25), Al Evangelista (4:42), Sonia York-Pryce (4:48), Claire Vionnet and André Dramé (5:39), W. Donnie Scally (6:00), and Alen Agaronov (7:00).
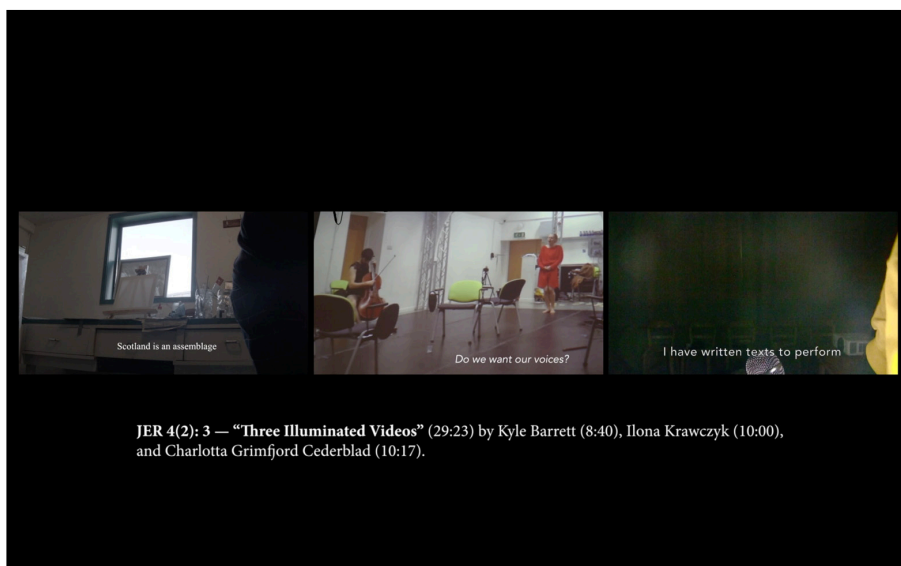
JER 4(2): 3 — "Three Illuminated Videos" (29:23) by Kyle Barrett (8:40), Ilona Krawczyk (10:00), and Charlotta Grimfjord Cederblad (10:17).

In collaboration with LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore, Akram Khan Dance Company, and Target3D.
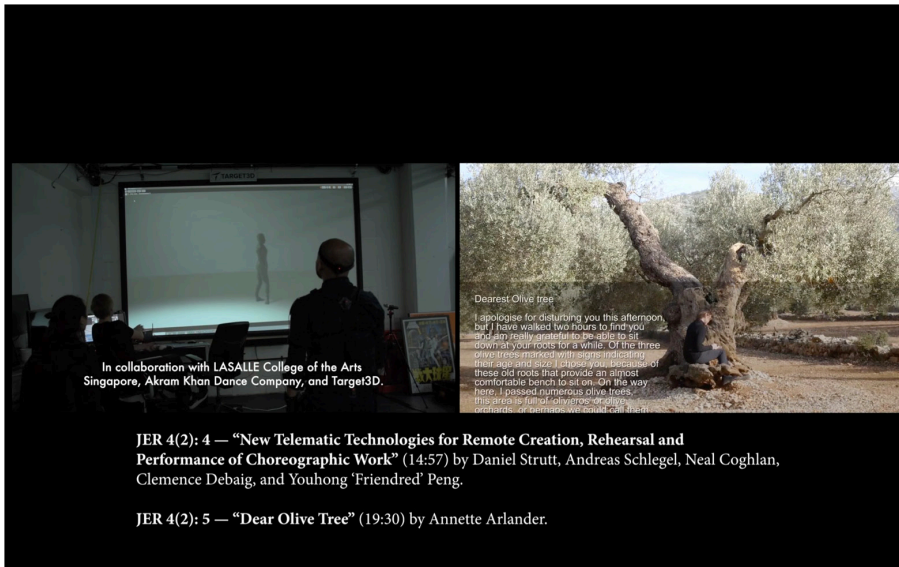
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VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[Note: This is a transcript of a video article. Individual elements from the transcript, such as metadata and reference lists, may appear more than once in the document, in order to be properly read and accessed by automated systems. The transcript can be used as a placeholder or reference when it is not possible to embed the actual video, which can be found by following the DOI.]

[00:10]

"Illuminations."
Editorial video essay.

JER 4.2 (2021):
Special issue of illuminated videos.

> This is Ben Spatz, editor of the *Journal of Embodied Research*.

> One of the most important questions for videographic research today is the relationship between textuality and audiovisuality.

> Does textuality always have to frame and contextualize video, in order for it to be research?

> What if textuality were located topologically within video, instead of the other way around?

> Is text needed at all? Can't some audiovisual material "speak" for itself?

[00:44]

Illuminated videos by Ben Spatz with N. Eda Erçin, Caroline Gatt, Agnieszka Mendel, and Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz:

"Triptych: Genesis, Kavana, Sabbath." *PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 2.2 (2018): 25 minutes.

"Diaspora: An Illuminated Video." *Global Performance Studies* 2.1 (2018): 30 minutes.

"ancestors: an illuminated video." *International Journal of Performing Arts and Digital Media* 17.1 (2021): 10 minutes.

> Since 2017, I have been exploring a form of videographic research output in which textual annotations are layered onto underpinning audiovisual material.

> I call this form "illuminated" video.

> The idea for illuminated video came out of the 2017 Judaica project laboratory, which I led with Eda Ercin and Agnieszka Mendel.

It owes a great deal to Caroline Gatt's introduction of books into the theatre laboratory space, which is based on her own research.

The Voices of the Pages (2017) ed. Caroline Gatt. Knowing from the Inside. University of Aberdeen.

Another important influence is the form of the Talmud, in which multiple layers of textual commentary build up over time, juxtaposed against one another on the same page.

[image of Talmud page]

The form of illuminated video epistemically complements that of the illuminated manuscript.

[image of illuminated manuscript page]

Where an illuminated manuscript augments a primarily textual work with visual illustrations, illuminated video uses textual annotation to augment, enhance, investigate, and perhaps even critique a primarily audiovisual work.

I think of illuminated video as both a hermeneutic method and a form of publication.

cf.

Research Video, Zurich University of the Arts
https://www.zhdk.ch/en/researchproject/549545

Motion Bank, Mainz University of Applied Sciences
https://app.motionbank.org

Unlike some other forms of video annotation that are currently being developed, illuminated video works with video editing rather than an online platform. That means the annotations are embedded using video editing software and then exported as part of the video file.

The composition or selection of text, as well as its placement and timing in the audiovisual track, is part of analyzing what is happening in the video.

I find this especially helpful when working with my own embodied research or artistic research videos. It allows me to embed a layer of critical analysis into the video, rather than having to surround the video with a voiceover or a separate written statement. I am especially interested in annotating or illuminating uncut video material.

In 2020, as the Coronavirus pandemic was setting in, I decided to launch an open call for a special issue of illuminated videos.

[03:05]

JER 4.2 (2021): Special Issue of Illuminated Video

For those of us who are in social isolation but otherwise well, this may be a time to undertake further work with our existing video archives. While unable to generate new embodied moments together, we can take this opportunity look back at video material we have previously created and further unfold its meanings. With this in mind, JER proposes a special issue of *illuminated video.*

Submissions to this special issue should strictly follow three parameters:

1) The audiovisual material should no longer than 20 minutes and *uncut*. There can be no editing of the video or audio track, no added effects (except for basic color correction), no voiceover or other added soundtrack, and no montage — in other words, this is a single "raw" video recording.

2) To this uncut video, authors may add any number of textual annotations or "illuminations" in addition to the title and author(s). These may include subtitles, annotations, explanations, descriptions, analysis, and scholarly or poetic quotations. The size, color, and placement of these texts should be given attention, as well as their density or sparsity. (In a 20-minute video, there might be five or fifty textual illuminations.) All sources must be properly cited within the video.

3) The authors of the video article — those who select the video material and write and append the textual illuminations — should appear in the video itself, or otherwise demonstrate accountability to those whose bodies appear. Ideally, you should be *writing on your own audiovisual body*.

The purpose of this special issue is to explore the relationship between textual and audiovisual layers, as well as the potential for sharing ethically grounded and embodied knowledge by textually "illuminating" one's own audiovisual body. The raw video material should be of interest by itself, but it does not need to be "high quality" in videographic terms. This is intended as an opportunity for practitioners to return to your own video archive and generate a new work, in which you speak/write back to your own practice through textual annotation. Depending on the number of submissions, this issue may be peer reviewed as a whole, rather than each article individually.

> As I wrote in the call, many practitioners did not have the opportunity to work with others this year, because of the pandemic.

> I thought it might be a good time to ask people to go back into their video archives and think about how they might annotate and recontextualize selected audiovisual material.

> Contributors were asked to work with a piece of uncut video. No editing of the video or audio tracks was allowed, except for basic corrections. In other words, the audiovisual track has to follow its own temporality, without cuts.

> I remember theatre director Tadashi Suzuki talking at one point about performance as the composition of "animal energy," and how different this was to film, where the energy of the human performer is cut by the cinematic montage.

Working with uncut video grounds the viewer in the temporality of the documented practice.

It invites a different kind of reading/watching: tuning into the practice, while also following the textual flow.

This kind of video is also easier to produce than styles that are based on a complex editing montage.

> In illuminated video, the temporality of the documented practice is not cut.

> There is also no additional soundtrack or voiceover added, beyond what was recorded at the time.

> Some of the debates around performance documentation have focused on whether video can capture the ephemerality of a live event. Others have emphasized the point that video is never a neutral or transparent record of what happened.

> These are important points, but I think we have moved beyond them in the development of embodied and artistic research. The question is no longer how video relates to some primary work or event of performance. Instead, we need to ask questions about the relationship between audiovisuality and textuality.

We need to ask questions about the relationship between audiovisuality and textuality.

What new forms can we develop to serve our needs as practitioner-researchers?

> Video is not a neutral form, but neither is writing.

> What new forms can we develop to serve our needs as practitioner-researchers?

[04:56]

JER 4(2): 1 — "Illuminations" (editorial).

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JER 4(2): 3 — "Three Illuminated Videos" (29:33) by Kyle Barrett (8:40), Ilona Krawczyk (10:00), and Charlotta Grimfjord Cederblad (10:17).

JER 4(2): 4 — "New Telematic Technologies for Remote Creation, Rehearsal and Performance of Choreographic Work" (14:57) by Daniel Strutt, Andreas Schlegel, Neal Coghlan, Clemence Debaig, and Youhong 'Friendred' Peng.

JER 4(2): 5 — "Dear Olive Tree" (19:30) by Annette Arlander.

JER 4(2): 6 — "From an Ethics of Estrangement to an Anthropology in Life" (20:11) by Caroline Gatt and Diego Galafassi with Gey Pin Ang.

JER 4(2): 7 — "He Almost Forgets That There is a Maker of the World" (32:06) by Ben Spatz with N. Eda Erçin, Caroline Gatt, and Agnieszka Mendel.

The contributions to this special issue are presented in order, from shortest to longest.

I hope this will be useful way to introduce the form of illuminated video.

The first two articles are composites, combining multiple contributions.

[05:12]

JER 4(2): 2 — "Six Illuminated Videos" (31:25) by Angela Viora (2:25), Al Evangelista (4:42), Sonia York-Pryce (4:48), Claire Vionnet and André Dramé (5:39), W. Donnie Scally (6:00), and Alen Agaronov (7:00).

The first, "Six Illuminated Videos," brings together several methodologically diverse contributions, ranging from two and a half to seven minutes in length.

Angela Viora's "Phenomenology of Big Hair Caught Up in the Wind at Night" brings us an everyday moment, illuminated by poetic texts.

Al Evangelista's "How to Dance with Filipinx Ancestors?" asks about the embodiment of history and diaspora through a moment of exploration in domestic space.

Sonia York-Pryce's "Sôma" asks about the ageing body through an intimate screendance.

In "Dereskina," Claire Vionnet and André Dramé explore relationships between technique and identity through a danced duet across differences of race, gender, and nation.

W. Donnie Scally's "Reconfiguring Sensory Experience: The Sounds of 100 Rounds of Karate Shadowboxing" gives us the last few minutes of a training experience pushing a body to its physical and perceptual limits.

Finally, Alen Agaronov's "Meeting the Definition of Human Subjects Research: A Case Study" layers textual commentary onto an already dense moment of performance, confronting the conventions of institutional ethics with the problem of embodied research.

[06:38]

JER 4(2): 3 — "Three Illuminated Videos" (29:33) by Kyle Barrett (8:40), Ilona Krawczyk (10:00), and Charlotta Grimfjord Cederblad (10:17).

The next composite article, "Three Illuminated Videos," is made up of longer video essays, each lasting about nine or ten minutes.

Kyle Barrett's "Illuminated: Antisyzygy" explores the global moment through the philosophical annotation of an act of painting.

Ilona Krawczyk's "More Than One Voice" investigates the epistemology and ontology of the voice as explored in a performance installation called *Dreamvoice.*

The third essay, Charlotta Grimfjord Cederblad's "Preparation," offers and intimate and unexpected glimpse into the moment that precedes what is usually documented.

[07:27]

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> In addition to the two composite articles, the special issue includes four full video articles.

> Daniel Strutt and a team of colleagues, working telematically between Goldsmiths in London and LaSalle in Singapore, push the limits of current technology to explore the potential for remote creation, rehearsal, and performance of choreographic work.

> Annette Arlander's "Dear Olive Tree" moves in what might be called the opposite direction, dwelling with the relationship that a human being might find with a very old tree.

[08:05]

JER 4(2): 6 — "From an Ethics of Estrangement to an Anthropology in Life" (20:11) by Caroline Gatt and Diego Galafassi with Gey Pin Ang.

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> Caroline Gatt's contribution, with Diego Galafassi and Gey Pin Ang, richly annotates a presentation that asks how anthropology could be influenced and transformed by the embodied knowledges of performing arts.

> The last contribution is mine, created with three colleagues I have already mentioned. "He Almost Forgets That There is a Maker of the World" embeds 50 textual annotations within thirty minutes of uncut practice, which for me are among the most important to have taken place in the Judaica project's investigation of contemporary jewish identity.

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> Several of the projects shared through the special issue contributions are linked to me personally in various ways, but many are not.

> I hope that this special issue will help to expand the way we approach the relationship between textual and audiovisual elements, especially in the context of academic research in which embodied practice is a central aspect of the methodology.

Contributions to the Journal of Embodied Research that make use of illuminated video, by itself or in combination with other videographic forms, are very welcome.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Ben Spatz ⓘD *orcid.org/0000-0002-1466-6634*
University of Huddersfield, UK