Making a Laboratory

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As noted above, dynamic configurations can be used to structure practice without transversal video, if the videographer role is removed or replaced. Similarly, transversal videography has often been implemented without dynamic configurations. But the combination of these two cuts in DCTV leaves behind a particular kind of audiovisual material. This material is intimately linked to the individuals who produced it, while also having significance independently of them, insofar as it does not claim to represent “what happened” objectively, but only as a particular audiovisual tracing produced by the intersection of multiple contributions. The question of what can be done with this material must be asked across several registers: technological, legal, ethical, political, and so on. On a technological level, the material can be edited and widely shared with increasing ease, thanks to the availability of
desktop video editing software and internet streaming platforms. While editing and publishing videos is not yet as technologically accessible as writing and distributing textual documents, the gap between these types of media grows ever narrower. From the perspective of a university or other institution, the material generated by DCTV falls somewhere between artistic production and research data, which may be treated differently by intellectual property law. The system of contracts that determines legal relations between members of the research team and their host institution may or may not map easily onto the ethical commitments researchers feel towards each other or their political commitments. All of these potential contradictions meet at the editing desk.

The epistemological rigor of DCTV arises largely from its postponement of the compositional power that organizes artistic and knowledge production, which Foucault famously called the “author function” (1984). Banishing this power from the laboratory allows the dynamic configurations to produce a genuinely experimental event, within which the author function is postponed and all participants meet together in the temporality of emergent interaction. However, the author function cannot be fully dissolved in any project that engages with contemporary cultural and political contexts, especially if it aims
to produce circulating documents or works. The videographic materials generated by DCTV labs are extraordinarily rich as well as radically open-ended. The question of how to organize and edit them, as well as how and where to publish or share them, is displaced from the temporality of the lab only to return later with a distinct temporality of its own: that of the “editor function” or the role of the video editor. This is another role, another power, which is parallel in some way to the roles and relations defined previously, but which exists in a separate temporality from that of the DC-based laboratorial practice. The editor has the power not only to select and order fragments of audiovisual material but also to juxtapose these with textual and spoken language and other materials. It is well-known that juxtaposing even a single word with an image can radically alter the meaning of both (Rancière 2007). Titles and subtitles, voiceovers, annotations, and other layers of textuality and montage can entirely transform the meaning of a video document. The DCTV editor, therefore, unlike editors who merely implement a prior directorial vision, has the power to make fundamental choices about meaning.

The editor’s choices in this context are epistemic. They are not merely different ways of representing what happened in the lab, but more like a distinct mode of writing or thinking, with the responsibility
to craft meaning from experimentally generated audiovisual materials. Catherine Grant, quoting Annette Michelson, has described the feeling of “ludic sovereignty” that she experiences at the editing table, when crafting video essays as a form of film criticism. Working with extracts of well-known movies, Grant describes how the “experience of repeatedly handling the sequence in and out of its original context” led to “new affective knowledge” (2014: 52–54). The care with which Grant describes handling these audiovisual materials, and the affective charges they

1 On videographic film criticism, see the Vimeo group Audiovisualcy (https://vimeo.com/groups/audiovisualcy) and the online journal [in]Transition (http://mediacommons.org/intransition/). It is interesting to note that, although there are more and more videographic journals, apart from my own Journal of Embodied Research (http://jer.openlibhums.org/), these do not focus on embodiment. That we do not think of video as being intrinsically linked to embodiment tells us which side of the camera has historically held structural power. If we were to assume that the person who is recorded owns the recording — rather than the person holding the camera — then we would have to think of video as a medium that is deeply and fundamentally related to embodiment. Instead, most of the work that understands video as a medium for thought locates this thought in the work of the videographer, director, or editor, rather than that of the embodied practitioner.
carry, resonates with the task of the DCTV editor to frame and contextualize experimentally generated audiovisual data. Yet the DCTV editor is working with audiovisual material that they themselves have co-generated as part of an experimental configuration. Even more importantly, the DCTV editor is creating what is likely to be the first and perhaps the only public form these materials will take. Whereas the audiovisual film essayist is creating a secondary work that in no way displaces its (usually better known and higher status) object of analysis, the DCTV editor is actively shaping the primary output of the laboratory process. The choices they make about how to compose this material may therefore become definitive of its meaning in the public sphere, making the responsibility of the DCTV editor in some ways more similar to that of a visual ethnographer. Overall, the work of the DCTV editor combines elements of both the ludic play found in videographic film criticism and the sense of responsibility associated with ethnographic video, without being reducible to either of these.

A comprehensive breakdown of video editing tools that might be used by such an editor is beyond the scope of this book. As noted above, the full range of editing techniques wielded by contemporary video editors is available to the DCTV editorial role, with the caveat that the meaning of these techniques must be
reworked and rediscovered in relation to the specific nature of the material being edited. Certainly, there is a huge range of possibilities between simple and complex editing strategies. In the context of a newly constituted DCTV lab, it might be wise to begin from the narrowest and most restricted palette of editorial choices, in order to gradually uncover and face the ethical, political, and hermeneutic issues that the process raises. In the first complete DCTV lab process, the team’s initial publication was an online catalogue of clips to which strict limitations on editorial power were applied. The editorial stage in this process consisted of just two steps for each item in the catalogue: first, the selection of a single uncut fragment of audiovisual material, and second, the choice of a title for that fragment. Each item in the Songwork Catalogue (Spatz, Erçin, and Mendel 2017) is uncut in the sense that there are no editorial interventions between the “in” and “out” points. One benefit of this approach is that each item could be approved through a fully collaborative process. Because they each only involve three editorial choices— in-point, out-point, and title—the research team could discuss those for as long as needed to reach consensus. Most often the initial set of choices was proposed by a single person, but the whole trio could then debate, if necessary, until consensus was reached. This sometimes involved
moving the in-point or out-point, revising the title, or even rejecting a proposed selection. As a result of this process, the Songwork Catalogue is fully co-authored in a way that corresponds to the co-authorship of the lab work underpinning it.\(^2\) Taken together, the more than three hundred clips in the Songwork Catalogue offer an epistemologically rigorous transversal window onto six months of full-time DCTV practice.

Much more is possible once the editor is freed to make use of additional video editing tools. Initially this might be limited to a chronological montage of single-session materials: the selection of multiple excerpts from a single practice session, which allows, for example, a three-hour lab session to be condensed into a much shorter video essay. To allow greater complexity, such limits can be abandoned as excerpts from multiple sessions can be used or the chronological ordering of moments can be broken. Multiple visual fragments, as well as photographs and other images, can be juxtaposed within a single frame, using visual cues such as size and position to establish

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\(^2\) This co-authorship applies to Songwork I, II, and III, the main sections of the Songwork Catalogue, which curate selections from the 2017 Judaica project laboratory. Songwork 0 is a selection of clips from my earlier projects, which include many other co-authors who did not participate in the editing phase.
a relationship between them. Audio layers can also be combined, although superimposed audio tracks are not as perceptually separable as juxtaposed images. Voiceovers provide a common if mundane way to introduce additional perspectives and contexts around audiovisual material. Beyond this, a whole world of editorial framing is afforded by the possibility of layering written text alongside or on top of audiovisual materials. While a video’s actual title sits outside the audiovisual work and names it more or less concisely, the audiovisual medium can hold all manner of textuality within its frame, from title cards (as in old silent movies) and subtitles or captions to vertically or horizontally scrolling text; or even textual annotations intentionally placed within the frame. The color, size, and position of text in relation to the audiovisual material involves its own semiotics. Finally, the editor has the power to open up the audiovisual form to all manner of other sources, from archival footage to contemporary cinema and journalism. Through such a choice, DCTV-generated material can be set alongside other materials circulating in today’s audiovisual universe and within film and video history.\(^3\)

\(^3\) All of these techniques except the last have been explored in video essays generated by the Judaica project. The project’s
Once edited, video documents can be placed in digital archives, submitted to peer review, made available for citation, and posted publicly online, where they instantly become available to millions of viewers. Ethical, political, and legal frameworks for intellectual property are increasingly ambiguous or contradictory in the digital age, often failing to make sense of the new modes of copying and creation afforded by the internet (Coombe 1998; Coombe, Wershler, and Zeilinger 2014; David and Halbert 2014). One of the generative possibilities of DCTV is its ability to speak back to these discourses from the perspective of experimental practice as understood in performing and embodied arts. In this context, we bring to wider audiovisual debates a commitment to honor what I call the “contestable privilege” of the practitioner-researcher (Spatz 2020: 116) as someone who moves between various positions in the creative process: practitioner, director, videographer, editor. While this commitment has precedents in video art and artistic research, the disaggregation of roles in DCTV allows

first two peer-reviewed video articles are Spatz, Erçin, Gatt, and Mendel (2018) and Spatz, Erçin, Mendel, and Spatz-Rabinowitz (2018). For an updated collection of Judaica project video publications, visit the Urban Research Theater website (http://urbanresearchtheater.com/judaica/).
us to examine the ethics of audiovisual co-authorship in greater detail and perhaps also to contest conventional editorial hierarchies by prioritizing the ethical relationships that obtain between these roles. Accordingly, one might begin from an ethics of vulnerability whereby the practitioner—the one whose audiovisual body is most explicitly featured in the videographic trace—has priority when it comes to editorial power. In other words, we could assume that in DCTV the editor function is first assumed by the individual who occupies the role of practitioner in the footage being edited. The foregrounding of vulnerability is first an ethical premise, but then also an epistemological claim, owing much to feminist standpoint theory and the notion of first-person authority (Bettcher 2009); and a political claim, linking the vulnerability of the researcher to a broader politics of vulnerability (see Butler et al. 2016). The contestable privilege of embodied authorship in relation to audiovisual material accrues secondarily to those who, like the director, are outside the core space of practice but may also be traced visually or auditorily by the camera; thirdly to those who, like the videographer, have contributed to the practice and its recording without their own body being audiovisually traced; and only much later
to those who might wish to make use of this material without having participated in its generation.\textsuperscript{4}

An ethics of vulnerability reverses common assumptions about how audiovisual material is produced and edited, including those that underpin most intellectual property law. It suggests that the videographer who physically makes the image should have the least control over it, precisely because of the structural power and disembodiment inherent in that role. Meanwhile, the practitioner—who is structurally vulnerable not only because their body is traced but also because they are least able, from within the space of practice, to cognize exactly what is being recorded as the recording is made—retains the greatest share of editorial privilege and control. By asserting this logic, DCTV pushes back against the historical disempowerment of the practitioner role which, if we follow Schneider and other theorists of

\textsuperscript{4} As suggested above, an ethics of vulnerability cannot be separated from a queer feminist analysis of gender. Scheman (2012) develops the idea of vulnerability as standpoint epistemology and the particular knowledge that comes from vulnerable positionality. See also Talia Mae Bettcher on the “first-person authority” of trans experience (2009), as well as the reclaiming of the gendered, queered, and racialized position of “bottom” in Stockton (2006) and Nguyen (2014).
both directorial and videographic power, incarnates and enacts the disempowerment of feminized, racialized, and queer bodies, as well as Agamben’s zoe. Of course, taking on the role of practitioner, director, videographer, or even editor within a DCTV process cannot circumvent a lifetime of experience or a whole world of statically structured systems of injustice that forcibly objectify certain bodies. I am not suggesting that the circulation of roles within a DCTV lab erases or escapes the sedimented identities of the researchers; it would be a mistake to attribute such a utopian power of remaking the world to any method. On the other hand, neither should we underestimate the onto-epistemological power of laboratorial cuts by assuming that whatever happens within the lab space merely repeats or reiterates existing structures and identities. If technologies of notation and audiovisual recording carry any discursive, argumentative, or rhetorical power, that is because they are capable of instituting and tracing spaces of experimentation in which the circulation of powers can intersect in unexpected and even unprecedented ways, including those that can only be articulated in multimedial forms.

I do not claim to know what can be done with DCTV’s audiovisual materials, either ethically, in terms of what ought to be done, or aesthetically-politically-epistemologically, in terms of what kinds of effects
this material could potentially have when published in academic, artistic, or public spheres. All I want to do here is to outline a few principles, or provisional starting points, for the development of video works generated through this method. First, I want to stress again that the raw archive of video generated by a DCTV lab should be understood as fully co-authored by all the participants in a given configuration, as each role and relation make an essential contribution to the experimental process. (Even a silent and invisible director shapes the practice through their decision not to intervene.) That said, the practitioner’s position incarnates a unique combination of structural vulnerability and epistemic privilege. The practitioner’s account of what happened, or what a given session was “about,” should therefore take priority whenever there is a conflict between editorial visions — although, if possible, a better solution is to encourage and support the development of multiple editorial perspectives generating diverse videographic works.

At one extreme, DCTV video data could be fed into a qualitative or even quantitative analytic process by tracking words, gestures, eye movements, or other discrete elements across bodies, space, and time. At the other extreme, it could be made into a kind of video art, perhaps analogous to screendance, where the audiovisual material stands alone on its aesthetic
merits, without explicit methodological framing.\(^5\) I am personally most interested in a third possibility, which I will call hermeneutic research. This refers to the kind of research undertaken in the humanities under the banner of critical theory and poststructuralist philosophy. Could DCTV generate critical interventions, in the sense of persuasive and affective arguments that unfold through a precise juxtaposition of textuality and audiovisuality? Pertinent questions for a hermeneutic approach to DCTV data would include: What happened? What did it mean? How can that meaning be articulated and shared? These are interpretive questions. They do not assume that the meaning of the video is hidden within it through a positivist link to the truth of the documented practice, but neither do they treat the video as freestanding “found footage” unrelated to that practice. Instead, they work the tenuous and multiplicitous links between practice and document, tracing back and forth between them, interpreting this relationship and building that interpretation into a series of editorial choices that are simultaneously aesthetic and hermeneutic.

Edited videos produced using DCTV materials should also be understood as co-authored. However,

\(^5\) On screendance, see The International Journal of Screendance (http://screendancejournal.org/).
there are different types and degrees of co-authorship at the editorial level. We might recognize, for example, a spectrum of co-authorship that runs from collaboration to consent, where the former refers to a substantive process of co-creation within the editorial process itself (as described above through the example of the Songwork Catalogue) and the latter to the granting of permission for editorial choices. This spectrum suggests the need for a precise credit taxonomy when it comes to the attribution of edited video works. In the case of fully collaborative co-authorship, the names of all authors would presumably be listed alphabetically. On the other hand, co-authors who are involved via lab participation and subsequent consent, but without substantive input to the editorial process, might be listed after “with,” as has been done in the case of the two Judaica project peer-reviewed video articles cited here. In these examples, I am

6 With present technologies, collaborative video editing still necessarily takes place via a back-and-forth process mediated by a technological object, rather than through real-time interaction. Collaborative writing is usually done this way too, although online tools like shared Google Docs now make real-time collaborative writing possible. Before too long, such a real-time collaborative video editing process might also become technologically feasible.
listed first to indicate my primary editorship of the material, which nevertheless included multiple rounds of comments and feedback from the other named authors. The need for such distinctions shows how the complex co-authorship of audiovisual outputs in a DCTV process can raise important legal, ethical, and political questions appropriate to an audiovisual age. With these complexities in mind, we can turn to a broader consideration of the onto-epistemological interventions made by DCTV.

DCTV follows Grotowski’s fundamental commitment to an ethical “poverty” that consists in prioritizing embodiment through embodied practice, embodied knowledge, and embodied research. Grotowski’s earliest manifesto, “Towards a Poor Theater,” begins from questions about the relationship of embodied practice to the audiovisual: “What is the theater? What is unique about it? What can it do that film and television cannot?” (Grotowski 1982: 18-19). At that time, the economic realities of audiovisual recording prohibited a post-Grotowskian “poor” grappling with audiovisuality. The means of production were simply too expensive. Today, in contrast, we live in the era of the “poor image”:

7 In the same year that the article “Towards a Poor Theatre” was first published in Polish (1965), video artist Nam June
The poor image is a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletarian in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends towards abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming. (Steyerl 2012: 32)

The newly accessible production and circulation of “poor” images make it possible to short-circuit experimental practice and audiovisuality. In the era of the poor image, we can bring audiovisual recording into the space of the poor theater and in this way offer a third alternative to the two potentialities between

Paik purchased one of the first Sony portable video cameras available in New York. “Suddenly, after many years of development within the broadcast industry, the technology of television production became available to non-broadcast users — the means of televisual production could finally be appropriated” (Marshall 1979). This was a key moment in the development of video art, which nevertheless has not yet had much crossover with post-Grotowskian practice.
which Grotowski’s work gradually moved, namely a performing arts practice oriented towards public presentations and an embodied research practice with personal or esoteric aims. Poor video enters the space of embodied encounter as a fourth relation and instantiates a different kind of link with the “outside” of laboratorial space, the surrounding world from which the laboratory is set apart.

Bringing audiovisual recording into the space of poor theater is topologically, and hence ontologically, distinct from bringing skilled embodiment into the rich laboratories of technoscience. In cognitive studies and neuroscience, an increasing interest in skilled and expert practice has led to the development of many new kinds of laboratory setups in which the activities and bodily states of practitioners are measured and recorded (e.g., Leman 2016; Kerr and Schmalzl 2016). Yet the economic and epistemological parameters of such studies inevitably place embodied practice at the service of technoscientific methods and measurements. As a result, and despite what some proponents might claim, neuroscientific studies of skilled practice tell us more about brain scanning machines, and the disciplines they afford, than about skill, practice, or embodiment. Even laboratory designs that aim to place “training and the development of artistic skills” on even footing with “empirical experimentation”
through an interdisciplinary framework (Hansen and Barton 2009: 132) have to grapple with the much greater institutional, economic, epistemological, and political power of the sciences in comparison to embodied arts. DCTV, in contrast, does not aim to be interdisciplinary in this sense. It does not bring embodied practice into technoscientific laboratories or even bring technoscientific methods, or scientists themselves, into the space of embodied practice. Rather, building on the economies of the poor image, DCTV appropriates the relatively old technology of the video camera and brings it into a space of dynamic configurations structuring embodied roles and relations, with the aim of overturning established hierarchies of knowledge and reinventing audiovisual-ity from the perspective of embodiment.

To return to a point made in the first section of this text, the opening and closing cuts that define DCTV’s laboratoriality are not separated in time. Dynamic configurations (when they incorporate the videographic relation) generate transversal video not eventually but immediately, in each moment that the camera records. The epistemic gap between the two cuts is not a temporal delay. Rather, it is a mutual agreement by the research team to operate according to a specific configuration of relations, which opens up a space of unknown in which no one can predict
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exactly what will happen. Even or especially if the team has been working together for years; even or especially if they know each other very well and have many shared habits; even or especially if they have explicitly agreed to work on certain materials—the disaggregated powers specified by dynamic configurations ensure that the interactions between the researchers will always be unpredictable. Of course, the unpredictability of one given configuration may be more or less interesting than another, but as in any lab process, this is a matter of intuition as much as positive prediction. By the same token, the closing laboratorial cut never comprehensively traces what happens in any moment. Rather, one tries to implement it in such a way as to have a reasonably good chance of tracing whatever is most likely to prove valuable, which is, again, a matter of guesswork as much as established knowledge. Reading the experimental process backwards, as Barad does, we must then acknowledge that transversal video does much more than document an event that would have taken place regardless. In other words, the presence of the camera absolutely does change what happens—not in the sense of a reduction, as might be expected, but through a radical transformation and expansion of the onto-epistemological status of the experimental moment. By generating audiovisual traces that will
later be available for reworking and dissemination, the presence of the camera ensures that what happens ceases to be training or rehearsal and becomes instead a kind of ongoing and iterative audiovisual research grounded in embodied practice.

The two cuts of DCTV can be used to structure any practice session, even on a one-time basis or over the course of a few days. However, DCTV’s true value as a research method is only revealed when it is used over a period of weeks or months, with enough time to allow for the development of an iterative cycle of alternation between its two distinct temporalities: the temporality of the lab and the temporality of lab design and the editor function. The second of these is continuous with the temporality of life outside the lab, with everyday life, or what is often called the “real world,” within which the lab is located. This temporality obtains both before and after the laboratorial moment or cut (a cut that is understood to be two cuts). Before the cut, laboratory sessions are designed, perhaps with reference to written proposals using DC notation. Additional details, such as the choice of materials to be practiced and the time, location, and duration of the session, may also be agreed upon. After the cut, the audio-visual outputs of the lab are viewed and discussed, in whole or in part; their meaning is analyzed and debated; selections, titles, and other editorial choices
are made; and audiovisual catalogues, essays, and other works may be published. In an iterative process, these “before” and “after” tasks merge, as discussions prompted by the audiovisual materials feed into decisions about the next round of lab design. Of course, the role of lab designer, like that of editor, should not be held entirely by an individual. There may be a project leader, who proposes lab designs in accordance with project goals, with the rest of the team contributing on a collaborative or consensual basis. Alternatively, the role of lab designer could circulate between individuals, or it could emerge from a fully collaborative process. Over time, it is the back-and-forth, iterative process of moving between these two temporalities that gives DCTV the potential to short-circuit the poor theater and the poor image, perhaps revealing a new approach to the relationship between embodiment and audiovisuality.