

so I step into story.  
Don boots and coat,  
trudge to the shed,  
bring in imaginary  
firewood, which we burn  
into entropy &  
43 & 88 & numbers  
that plot like drifting  
snow, against  
the barn, the only  
hill for 100's of  
100's of miles  
of roads. *How*  
*many roads are in*  
*the world*, you ask.  
*How many, what*  
*if I were?* How many.  
How so many?  
How so so many.

ACCESS

# ENTER, THE VIDEO ESSAY

Sarah Minor

ON THE BRINK of access has us thinking about hatches, portals, new points of contact. Perhaps fittingly, in Issue no. 9, we're kicking off a new section of the journal that will feature hybrid forms of video literature readers can access from the printed page via QR code.

(THUNDER RUMBLING)

The video essay and the cinepoem are genres of hybrid writing that combine artful text with moving image, often in a very short form. They do this by letting writing and video footage take turns setting the tone, delivering the images, or playing the role of narrator. What we see across this genre are pieces of literature backed by footage that is more than a supercut, but less than a documentary. Or perhaps they're videos driven by texts that are less than a voiceover, but more than a song lyric. Faster than a mood board, louder than a screensaver, the literary video is a genre that has long anticipated audiences who read long poems, call grandmothers, and binge TikTok all on the same screen.

(LAUGHTER)

This issue features videos by Carolina Ebeid, Richard Frailing, and Sophie Paquette, three writers who work in both text and video, and who each have incorporated captions into three very different video forms. Subtitles—audio made visible—are by no means a requirement of a video poem or essay. Early versions of the genre rarely included them. But these three writers show us how the open subtitle is both more and less than a portal for access.

(DOOR CREAKING)

Like a silent film, Paquette’s video essay is vivid but soundless, its conversation made more intimate by dialogue presented quietly at the bottom of the screen. Ebeid’s subtitles record her audio narration faithfully but accentuate both her wordplay and the range of textures in a cinempoem that layers English, Spanish, and academese. Frailing’s captions transcribe his audio, but in doing so make the tensions between two voices that have been autotuned somehow less strange; more audible.

(ANCESTRAL WHISPERING)

Access is not a quality inherent to complex systems. It is, most often, a thing facilitated, demanded, or forged. Last year, research showed that over half of Americans watch TV with subtitles turned on “some or all of the time.” Most viewers who responded to these studies are not hard of hearing, but are rather watching movies that contain whispering, or actors speaking in British accents. Some are learning new languages, streaming videos beside a sleeping child, or scrolling reels on a crowded subway. Professional sound mixers think that these days, the many varieties of audio hardware used across the world can pair badly with the tendency of contemporary TV to layer more music, sound effects, and dialogue than ever before.

(SQUELCHES WETLY)

As with most accessible modalities that advocates of the Americans with Disabilities Act fought to normalize, captions facilitate the participation of many types of viewers, even those who don’t—or don’t yet—count themselves as people benefitted by accessible design. The video essay is just one art form that tunes us into these possibilities, wielding the caption as an artist’s tool, a flexible form of expression for writers working with and against media platforms that foster shifts in readers’ attention. On the following pages, please enjoy our inaugural video section, accessible via the QR codes ahead, or by navigating directly to Brink’s website.

## DIASPORA STUDY SLIDE PROJECTOR || Carolina Ebeid



In “Diaspora Study Slide Projector,” Carolina Ebeid unfurls a family archive—“pictures from New Jersey, Baghdad, Florida, California”—to demonstrate the layers of time, language, and place that survive in the analog slide projector. This piece is interested in overlapping margins, in how the human figure, dressed in a white shirt, has the propensity to behave like a screen. Using text and projected image, Ebeid accesses both the “tongue mother” and “the mother tongue,” overlaid in shades of surrender.



## FLYING DREAMS || Richard Frailing



Richard Frailing's "Flying Dreams" stages a conversation between an artist and a therapist who asks him encouraging questions, such as, "People fly in dreams for different reasons. Do you feel like you had to escape?" But the footage playing behind their dialogue evades answers as seamlessly as the artist does. The film reels capture women cutting cake, a man with a baby in his arms, while two voices consider the risks of inheriting scars along with psychosis. "Flies don't fly, they swim; the air to them is like syrup or sap," muses the artist as documents of a personal history hover, paddling just out of reach.



## ICAUGHT ON FIRE FOR THIS || Sophie Paquette



Sophie Paquette's "I Caught on Fire for This" is a video essay full of humor and longing. This is a project about deep time, inevitable crushes, and the paralysis of the internet age. Voiced impossibly by miniature porcelain figures, Paquette demonstrates once again her ability to draw both blood and tears by combining text and a set of deceptively simple visual elements.

