

# MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF VIDEO PRESERVATION

A PROGRESS REPORT ON INITIATIVES  
WITHIN THE MEDIA ARTS FIELD

by  
**MEDIA ALLIANCE, INC.**

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with assistance from Mona Jimenez

MARCH 1996



Dedicated to  
advancing the  
independent  
media arts  
since 1979

*Made possible with generous support from the Greenwall Foundation  
and WNET/Thirteen, and with public funds from  
the New York State Council on the Arts.*

## ABOUT MEDIA ALLIANCE

Founded in 1979, Media Alliance is an advocacy and service organization dedicated to advancing the independent media arts in New York State. Media Alliance is the only statewide media organization of its kind in the country, with members including media arts centers, distributors, museums, libraries, educators, cable access and public television programmers, and independent artists and producers. Media Alliance responds to over 3,000 requests for information and resources a year, publishes a bi-monthly newsletter *Media Matters*, and regularly convenes members for workshops, conferences, and working groups on pressing issues. Among Media Alliance's current programs are the Media Action Grant, providing funding to rural media arts groups, and the Emerging Media Artist Program, offering workshops and resources for artists from traditionally underserved communities.

Positioned between local and national groups, Media Alliance serves as an information clearinghouse on video preservation for the media arts field, linking media groups with national and regional experts in archiving and conservation. In 1991, Media Alliance and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) conducted a national survey of video art collections. Later the same year Media Alliance and NYSCA convened the first video preservation symposium for the media arts field in New York, hosted by the Museum of Modern Art. The conference material, the survey, and extensive research formed the basis for the monograph *Video Preservation: Securing the Future of the Past* by Deirdre Boyle, published in 1993. During 1994, a day long series of workshops on video preservation were held as part of the Media Alliance conference *Multiple Currents: Toward an Interactive Media Community*. Media Alliance has also organized trainings and networking meetings, and has provided fundraising assistance to New York regional groups.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Hubbard began making films in 1975 and over the past 10 years has been increasingly concerned with issues of film and video preservation. In 1987, he co-founded the New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival. From 1991 through 1996, he worked at Anthology Film Archives. In conjunction with the National Moving Image Database, he created the first computer catalog of Anthology's film and video collection encompassing over 5,000 titles and, under a grant from the Jerome Foundation, inventoried and cataloged the entire Jerome Hill Collection. Currently, he is preparing a report on the need for archival storage of work by makers with AIDS for Media Network, a national organization promoting social change media.

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*Video Preservation: Securing the Future of the Past* by Deirdre Boyle is available for \$20 (\$16 for members) per copy plus \$2 shipping. New York State residents must add 8.25% sales tax or provide a tax exempt letter. To order, send a check payable to Media Alliance at the following address:

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## FOREWORD

Since the publication of our 1993 monograph, *Video Preservation: Securing the Future of the Past*, the media arts field has continued to pursue the long-term goal of preserving video art and community video for education, exhibition and research. This report seeks to update and expand upon some of the issues dealt with in *Video Preservation*, and at Media Alliance's last two conferences. While it emphasizes activity in the geographic area with which we are most familiar – the New York region – we hope it will be helpful to our colleagues across the country.

The media arts field has learned a great deal about preservation in the last five years, adding yet more complex information to our already complex lives. The passion that we have brought to creating a safe future for our fragile history should not be underestimated. We have learned that video preservation requires a multi-faceted approach, like keeping many plates in the air simultaneously: storage, cataloging, remastering, collection management. We have learned new languages, and been introduced to whole new fields of work. In this environment it's not easy to see our progress. Yet, I hope the contents of this report will remind us of the outcomes of our daily work.

This report is organized into six areas of overlapping concern that emerged in preparation for the Multiple Currents conference in the fall of 1994. They are not meant to be exclusive, but rather to be points of departure. Happily, in each of these areas, progress has been made, although the future remains unquestionably precarious. We can be reassured by the fact that we are on the eve of another gathering, Playback 1996, a conference organized by the Bay Area Video Coalition. The BAVC conference will no doubt bring us to a new level of understanding and expertise, and will be looked back upon as a milestone where new alliances were made, new plans launched – the content for our next progress report!

Mona Jimenez  
Executive Director  
Media Alliance

## RELATIONSHIPS

### *The need for cooperation and collaboration*

One of the most pressing problems in the preservation of video is the lack of a public presence by the field of independent media. Utterly overshadowed, indeed dwarfed by broadcast television, the work of video artists and community activists does not loom large in the public consciousness. Perhaps this will always be the case. However, in order to make preservation of these materials possible, we need to convince others of the importance of these works. National and statewide organizations such as Media Alliance and the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC), through their connections with hundreds of media organizations and individuals, have played a crucial role in bringing attention to these overlooked videotapes. There is still much work to do to educate not only funders, but also potential users of the materials, such as educators, scholars, curators, and programmers. Also, many archivists and conservators – who are traditionally responsible for an institution's collections – need education on the care and handling of tapes, and their historical and cultural significance.

Over the past several years, the media arts field has become more aware of, and involved with, other groups involved with moving image preservation. There has been an increased recognition of the valuable knowledge of media producers and professionals about how, when, and in what context tapes were produced, as well as technical knowledge about tape formats and equipment. However, media arts groups are typically unfamiliar with moving image preservation, conservation, and collection management, and lack staff to perform such tasks. Thus, partnerships between the media arts field and other moving image specialists are essential to the long-term care of independent video collections.

One opportunity that exists is to create dialogue with the video or media subcommittees of various archivist groups, such as the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists. These groups are working on various parts of the preservation problem, including establishing standardized language for describing the materials in library catalogs or finding aids, and setting policies and procedures for care and handling, including duplication, of the materials. Many archivists and librarians may be more used to dealing with, and certainly more comfortable with, books and paper materials,

while having charge of vast collections of videotapes. Books and paper materials do not necessarily present the complex problems of these endangered video collections. Paper materials can survive much greater variance in temperature and humidity and are capable of remaining intact for far longer periods than videotape. They do not require specialized machines in order for people to experience them. Media arts groups must position themselves to offer their expertise to these dedicated groups, to ensure the continued existence and usefulness of the thousands of videotapes in their care.

Cataloging language is another area in which stronger relationships with allies are needed. Cataloging rules and cataloging software were originally developed by librarians for use with books. These rules, for instance, presuppose an object that is infinitely reproducible and that remains essentially the same whatever the format. Whether hardback or paper, whatever the typeface or the number of pages, *Moby Dick* is still the intellectual entity *Moby Dick*. There may, of course, be different editions, but all the thousands of copies of a particular edition of a book will be the same and the records in the catalog will be identical. This is not true of videotape. There are relatively few copies of any single tape and yet, there may be several versions of that tape. Whether a particular copy is a master, sub-master, dub-master, or a reference copy is a vital piece of information. Furthermore, exactly what constitutes a master, sub-master, or a dub-master – the exact meaning of the terms – must be agreed upon if we are going to have compatible databases that allow us to communicate accurately the content of collections. Media producers and professionals, with their hands-on experience with production, are uniquely qualified to take part in the development of a common descriptive language for video materials.

### *The Playback 1996 conference*

The Playback 1996 conference is one example of an effort to build new relationships that has developed into a major international initiative. The Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC), in association with Media Alliance, will host this conference on March 29-30, 1996, at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, California. The conference is funded by both the Getty Foundation and the Andy Warhol Foundation. The intention is to bring together a diverse group of professionals including conservators, scientists, video artists, media curators, and television engineers who will be dealing with the multifaceted challenge of preserving the vast cultural and artistic history recorded on videotape. Experts from both the conservation and media arts communities will meet in the hope that alliances can be built around the common goal of preserving video collections held in museums, galleries, libraries, and other archives around the world.

BAVC convened eight groups of professionals throughout the United States to discuss eight vital topics in the eight months prior to the event: Installation Art and Obsolete Hardware; Ethical Principles and Dilemmas; Analysis and Evaluation Procedures; Cleaning and Remastering; Establishing Priorities for Preservation; Storage; Current Preservation Practices & Education and Awareness; and Changes in Technology and Practice. Each of the groups will present its findings to the conference in the form of white papers and panel presentations.

The papers and presentations will raise the issues and propose solutions. It is hoped that the conference will stimulate academic and museum-based conservators to write about video preservation issues in conservation journals, and that a curriculum will be developed to train conservators in techniques of video preservation. A long-term goal of the conference is to train conservators and, ultimately, to establish a university program for the training of video preservationists. This program would firmly establish the academic credentials of video conservators and define standards for the preservation of videotape that would be nationally recognized. Such a program would go a long way to eliminating criticisms that no standards exist for preserving videotape.

Another strategy of the conference is to bring members of the conservation community into contact with the media artists and media arts professionals who are involved in video preservation. Currently, some funders are hesitant to fund video preservation projects because they feel that clear standards have not been established, and they question whether videotape is a preservation medium at all. Many museum conservators who are confronted with large collections of aging videotapes are struggling with issues of preservation and can look to media arts professionals for their expertise with the production, care, and handling of videotape. Media arts professionals can greatly benefit from increased contact with conservators, who are experienced in the care of art historical objects, and have established systematic methods for their care. The conference will introduce the issues involved in establishing specific standards for videotape, and will allow for a full discussion of ethical concerns between art conservation and media arts communities.

# CATALOGING

## *In search of compatibility*

In January 1994, Media Alliance convened the first meeting of key New York media organizations since the publication of *Video Preservation: Securing the Future of the Past*. There was consensus that cataloging was a crucial first step to preservation. A compatible database would give groups a common base of knowledge about works in a range of collections, allowing organizations to collaborate on preservation efforts. Also, the group recognized that without certain vital information about the tapes they could not compete for funding for preservation, and, as a result, the collections would have little chance of receiving the acknowledgment they deserved as an important part of the cultural history of the United States.

These observations are confirmed by reading the guidelines of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), a major source of funds for preservation activities under the Division of Preservation and Access. Only one project involving video re-mastering has received funding from the division. That project was a collaboration between Thirteen/WNET (New York's public television station) and the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library to remaster the *Dance in America* series. Intellectual access – knowing what is in a collection and making the information available to scholars and the public – is a pre-requisite to funds for other preservation activities.

Within the media arts field we are acutely aware that access to most media arts collections is extremely limited, and in some cases impossible. Outside the catalogs of a few distributors, organizational and funder records, and a loose network of contacts within the field, there is no way to locate early works. The array of local methods (cataloging on index cards, paper lists, and various computer programs) makes for time-consuming and frustrating searches. Also the use of localized vocabularies has made the sharing of information extremely difficult. For example, without agreement on terms, one cannot identify primary source material; what is a "master" to one could be labeled an "original" in a nearby collection.

One example of the difficulties created by this lack of documentation is that encountered by the non-profit distributor Video Data Bank while creating *Surveying the*

*First Decade: Video Art and Alternative Media in the U.S.*, their recently completed series of tapes on the history of video art. The lack of documentation on specific tapes continuously plagued the project. Most of the information was gleaned from distribution catalogs. This made establishing a definitive version of each work extremely difficult. They found, for example, that a version of a particular tape held by Electronic Arts Intermix (another non-profit distributor) differed significantly from the Video Data Bank version. Which one of the tapes would constitute the "correct" version could be impossible to tell. This, of course, is a more general problem in video preservation. Without information on various versions or different physical states of a tapes housed in more than one collection, there is no way to know whether a particular version of a tape is the best one extant for preservation.

Furthermore, the differing terminology indicates a general lack of communication between institutions collecting videotapes and weakens the influence of the field. Government and private funders see a bewildering array of terminology and descriptions and remain unconvinced of the importance of cataloging videotape and of the expertise of those holding the work. With a substantial number of institutions participating in a collaborative cataloging project, the effort becomes much stronger and more impressive. Also, information about collections greatly increases their potential use by a wide range of people. With catalogued collections, it will be possible for the first time to target those tapes in dire need of immediate preservation, to indicate those tapes that will hold the most interest for scholars and funders, and to convince others of the vital importance of these tapes within video history.

Substantial obstacles stand in the way of creating a compatible database among a number of organizations, not the least of which is a lack of funding for staff, hardware, software, and technical assistance for preservation projects. Groups generally have one computer for everything -- from doing mailings to creating exhibition brochures and dealing with everyday administrative details. Information contained in a computer catalog of video holdings needs to be accessible to the organization for other uses, and easily inputted and retrieved by both professional and volunteer staff.

### *Approaching the NEH*

Media Alliance tackled the issue of intellectual access by making application to the NEH for a grant to create a database of over 8,000 titles held in twelve organizations



across New York State. This is the first known example of a compatible cataloging project among media organizations across a broad geographic area. Participating organizations include Anthology Film Archives (New York City), Art Media Studies Department of Syracuse University, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (New York City), Experimental Television Center (Owego), Everson Museum of Art (Syracuse), Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center (Buffalo), Media Bus (Woodstock), Paper Tiger Television (New York City), Port Washington Public Library, Tisch School of the Arts of New York University, Visual Studies Workshop (Rochester) and the Woodstock Public Library. These twelve collections represent a unique historical record of the earliest attempts to create video art and community television. The project, if funded, will greatly facilitate communication and the exchange of information between the institutions. This initiative is the first step toward the goal of creating a national standard for cataloging videotapes that would fully serve the needs of both small and mid-sized arts and cultural organizations and archivists.

These collections held by the twelve groups offer a remarkable and important picture of the early history of video and represent areas that tend to be overlooked in larger collections that are geared toward more mainstream work. The collections are concentrated in two broad areas of video production: video art and video collectives/community video. The tapes were generally made between 1968 and 1985 and the majority of them are on 1/2" reel-to-reel, the most endangered of video formats because of its age and obsolescence. The tapes are extremely diverse in style, approach, and production technique. They were produced in all areas of the state and present the viewpoints of people not usually represented in commercial broadcasts. Furthermore, the participating organizations are all either small institutions or small collections within larger institutions that would otherwise be unable to support the cataloging process.

The project would not only provide access to this information for the first time, but create a model for other cooperative cataloging projects. Currently, the usual practice in this field is for each institution to create its own database with its own local vocabulary. Even those organizations using USMARC, a nationally recognized standard for cataloging, use local terminology in their moving image databases. This project will establish a single template with a unified vocabulary and set of terms in a single practical, accessible, and user-friendly database. Once this is in place, scholars, researchers, archivists, and catalogers can be certain that a particular term in the record of one institution will have the same meaning as an identical term in the record of another institution.

The NEH project was proposed in partnership with National Moving Image Database (NAMID). NAMID is a major program of the National Center for Film and Video Preservation, which was established in 1984 by the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Film Institute. NAMID's mandates are to serve as a working tool to help in making informed decisions regarding the preservation of moving image materials, to facilitate shared cataloging, and to increase access to primary research materials on moving images. Along with major institutions, several media arts centers are already NAMID participants: Video Data Bank, Electronic Arts Intermix, and the Kitchen Center for Contemporary Arts. While the first NEH proposal was not funded, Media Alliance re-applied in June 1995, and expects notification in April 1996. More importantly, the first proposal led to a series of meetings and collaborations that strengthened relationships among the media arts field, NAMID, and others involved in moving image cataloging.

### *The Upstate Pilot Cataloging Project*

One such collaboration began in August 1994 in Rochester, New York. Representatives from Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Visual Studies Workshop, Experimental Television Center, and Syracuse University met in Rochester, New York, for a workshop led by Margaret Byrne, then Director of NAMID. As a result of that meeting, the four organizations agreed to begin a regional cataloging effort using a common template designed by NAMID. The template, designed on FilemakerPro software, was developed and tested at several sites throughout the country, including at Electronic Arts Intermix and the Video Data Bank. In developing the template, NAMID grappled with the extremely complex and intertwined problems of accessibility, non-standard information format, non-standardized vocabulary, different computer platforms, and numerous computer programs. The template addresses the problem described above, where organizations have extremely limited resources for hardware and software. FilemakerPro was chosen because it is versatile, powerful, and user-friendly and works well on both Macintosh and IBM platforms. The template is designed to allow conversion to USMARC by NAMID as the final step in becoming part of NAMID's national database.

Although NAMID data is not currently accessible remotely, NAMID staff will perform searches by request. AFI has recently become a node on the Internet and has a Web site currently under construction (some data is already available at [www.afionline.org](http://www.afionline.org)). NAMID itself expects to be on-line with some databases in the summer of 1996. Once the system is fully functional, all processed data will be made available through the AFI site, and eventually through links to participant sites.

The Upstate Pilot Cataloging Project took a another large step forward in May 1995 with a training session involving the same groups. The training was made available by Media Alliance and led by Jim Hubbard of Anthology Film Archives, with the assistance of Henry Mattoon, who succeeded Margaret Byrne as Director of NAMID. The participants were trained in data entry on the FileMakerPro template, and they hammered out further changes in the template to meet their requirements for ease of use and completeness of information. The participants also agreed to use a unified vocabulary for use with the template.

Progress in cataloging is not without its problems. Even small changes in the template take time, and the discussion on vocabulary is by no means over. However, the significance of this collaborative effort should not be underestimated. Further, this is the first time that a consortium of groups with video collections has created such a template. Over 1,800 records have been created to date by the Pilot Upstate Cataloging Group using the FilemakerPro template.

#### *Resources for a developing language*

There have been, of course, earlier efforts in the area of standardized cataloging and terminology. These include: the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules (AACR2), the standard rules for library cataloging; the Archival Moving Image Materials (AMIM) manual, which sets forth the general rules for cataloging moving images; and Moving Image Materials: Genre Terms (MIM), which tackles the complex problem of terms for genre and form. These were pioneering efforts in an attempt to bring together the needs of moving images catalogers and the already established standards for library cataloging.

The Cataloging and Documentation Committee of the Association of Moving Image Archivists recognized the desirability of revising MIM as early as 1992. In 1994, an inter-organization group was formed with representatives of those originally responsible for MIM, and representatives from the film studies and archival moving image communities. It was the committee's sense that involving representatives from both the cataloging and scholarly communities would provide different perspectives and therefore create an improved genre list. This effort was headed by Linda Tadic of the University of Georgia.

In the summer of 1995, the Motion Picture/Broadcasting/Recorded Sound Division and the Cataloging Policy and Support Office (CPSO) of the Library of Congress created a Form/Genre Working Group to establish a large list of form and genre terms, compatible

with Library of Congress Subject Headings, with subsets for the various specific special format areas. Moving images and recorded sound are included as subsets. Although the formation of this group supersedes the AMIA Committee, undoubtedly the Library's work will build on and extend the principles established by the earlier group. The Library envisions publishing a guide to form and genre terms both on-line and in book form. The Library expects input from users and professional organizations and intends to be responsive to library users, archival needs, and scholarly publications by incorporating changes and new terminology and publishing them on-line.

### *Next Steps*

The future remains uncertain for any broadening of cataloging efforts, due to the lack of funding for arts and cultural organizations, and their overworked or non-existent staff. The situation may even worsen as funding for the arts continues to decrease. With severe cuts to the National Endowment for the Arts, and changes in guidelines, the future of NAMID is called into question. NAMID must be stabilized, with increased funding for the participating sites, in particular smaller museums, libraries, and artist spaces. The media arts community must demonstrate its support for NAMID and continue to advocate for equitable distribution of preservation funds between video and film.

Clearly, media arts groups need to be active in developing the vocabulary for describing videotapes. Even though media arts staff are not trained archivists and cataloging language is unfamiliar to them, it is important that they become part of the process; first, because as makers they have crucial knowledge of the material, and second, because the future of their tapes is intimately bound up with the establishment of these standards. Media arts groups must be aware of the efforts of standing committees and seek input into their proceedings individually and collectively.

Media Alliance expects to receive word about its NEH grant in April 1996. If the project is funded, it will propel the regional cataloging endeavor to a new level. Nevertheless, education must be continued to build awareness among private and public funders of the need for cataloging, and to build an understanding within the media arts community of the benefits of accessible, standardized, and shared cataloging.

## REMASTERING

### *The question of archival formats*

Remastering of videotapes continues to be an urgent problem. Thousands of important tapes are in danger of being lost permanently because of their deteriorating physical condition and the fact they were produced in now obsolete formats. 1/2" open-reel tapes are the most endangered tapes. First, because generally they are the oldest tapes; second, because there are a decreasing number of machines available to play them on; and third, because many of the tapes have been stored under adverse circumstances. These tapes are extremely fragile and can clog the playback machines, causing them to stop running. As a consequence, the tapes must be thoroughly cleaned before being transferred to a newer, more stable format.

In preservation and conservation circles, moving images are still considered a new medium, while, in fact, the video medium is nearly thirty years old. Currently, videotape is not considered to be an archival format, as the term "archival" is generally reserved for formats that last at least 100 years. Unfortunately, this narrow definition causes severe problems for those attempting to preserve tapes. Many preservation/conservation funders (such as the NYS Program for the Conservation and Preservation of Library Research Materials) will not support preservation on a format considered to be non-archival. There is continued debate over a suitable archival format, with arguments for transferring to everything from Betacam SP to film, laser disk, or other digital formats. Yet with each passing year, we lose not just the tapes themselves. We also lose the equipment and parts, and the ability to re-manufacture them. Also disappearing are the engineers and scientists, the artists and producers, and those who know how and when the works were produced.

### *Experimentation by the Bay Area Video Coalition*

BAVC stands in the forefront of the effort to clean and remaster videotapes in order to preserve them for the future. In 1993, BAVC received a Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in order to establish a center for remastering obsolete formats of videotape, with the goal of developing the highest quality services at the lowest possible price. The project was developed under the leadership of Sally Jo Fifer, Executive

Director of BAVC, and Luke Hones, Director of Research and Development.

After extensive research, BAVC established remastering services within their already existing non-profit video production facilities. BAVC remasters predominantly 1/2" open reel tapes, but also has the capacity to remaster 3/4" and 1" Type C tapes. Cleaning of the 1/2" reel-to-reel tapes is offered through an arrangement with Tape Services in Santa Clara, California, utilizing a specially designed cleaning machine. The machine has tissue wipes that rotate at 6 revolutions per minute, a "sapphire blade" module that scrapes dirt off the tape, 2 slotted grid cleaners and a vacuum to remove the loose dirt. Through this process, both sides of the tape are cleaned. After cleaning, the tape is transferred at BAVC to a tape format chosen by the client. The choices include 3/4", SVHS, Betacam SP and Digital Betacam among others. BAVC claims a 98% success rate after cleaning and remastering approximately 2,000 tapes. They freely share information about their processes, and have produced a videotape describing their methods.

BAVC offers remastering services to members. BAVC membership costs \$35 per year, but is available to members of certain other media access centers for only \$15 per year. The cleaning costs for open reel tapes are \$6 per pass for each small reel and \$11 per pass for each large reel. Initial cleaning requires 2-4 passes, but some tapes need as many as 16 passes to get through the transfer machine. The cleaning costs for 3/4" are \$7 per pass for 30 minutes or less, \$8 per pass for 31-60 minutes, and \$10 per pass for more than 60 minutes. Transfer costs are based on the target format. For example, VHS is \$50 per reel; 3/4" SP is \$60; Betacam SP is \$70; and Digital Betacam is \$80. The price of stock is additional. There is a \$15 per hour spot check fee and, if, after a partial transfer the heads become clogged, there is a \$15 charge for work completed. The signal is put through a time-based corrector and bars and tone are added. The client can request a slate page and titles at a cost of \$10 per title card.

Luke Hones believes that, because video technology continues to evolve, the decision on a remastering format must be determined by what is the best choice for right now, not what is the best choice for all time. He feels that Digital Betacam is an excellent choice because of the quality of the system and believes that the Betacam name has lent credibility to the product. Because the new decks will play both Digital and analog Betacam, studios upgrading their equipment will likely opt for Digital Betacam decks and they will become quite common. However, individual clients should make the decision based on their own unique circumstances and not rely on an arbitrary standard.

## *Public/private collaborations*

Vidipax, a New York company that provides one of the most active commercial facilities, remasters virtually all formats of videotape. Vidipax utilizes a combination of hand-cleaning and machine-cleaning, using both custom-made and off-the-rack machinery. Their usual charge is \$85 per hour plus stock. The average tape takes two hours to clean and transfer. Customers can supply their own stock or buy it from Vidipax at a small percentage over cost. Vidipax likes working with video artists and will do everything they can to accommodate videomakers in need of remastering. Vidipax has also established a matching grant program for Media Alliance members. If a member organization receives a grant to remaster videotapes, Vidipax will match 25% of the grant amount. This applies to the per hour charge only. In other words, if the organization receives a grant of \$1,000 for video remastering, Vidipax will do \$1,250 worth of work.

According to Jim Lindner, President of Vidipax, the best tape format to use in remastering is Betacam SP because of the high quality of the tape and the fact that it is a component format. Furthermore, it is reasonably priced and based upon the large number of machines currently available, it is safe to assume that Betacam SP machines will exist in the foreseeable future. He warns against digital formats because none of the formats have become standard, and it is unknown how long any one format will exist. Because of the expense of purchasing digital equipment, he believes there are relatively few digital machines in existence and there may be discontinued in the future. He also feels that the different methods of compression vary significantly and that translation from one digital format to another is not as simple or as error-free as one may assume. He asserts that the best solution is to use multiple strategies for preservation (remaster on several different formats) because that offers a much higher probability of survival.

### *Next steps*

The continuing debate over an appropriate archival format has confused funders and those involved with preservation and conservation, and, in some cases, has perpetuated a state of inaction. We need to balance the need to find a stable format against the immediate need for duplication. If we wait for industry to develop an archival format, we are effectively abandoning the collections. We desperately need sites for testing and open experimentation with archival formats and methods. Establishing regional preservation sites -- a combination of commercial facilities and remastering services at media arts/community TV sites where production occurs -- would greatly increase the availability and

likelihood of necessary preservation. BAVC's work is an excellent model for an environment in which information is freely shared, with the goal of making the best possible transfer at the lowest possible cost. Their model also links research and experimentation to a site for current production, which makes sense if we are to encourage producers to make archival copies at the time of creation.

Playback 1996 will provide a crucial opportunity for expanding knowledge and debate about remastering. For the first time, scientists, conservators, and engineers will be interacting and communicating with media arts professionals, artists, and independent producers. This interaction will undoubtedly increase technical knowledge and foster important relationships between the disparate communities working to preserve videotape.



# STORAGE

## *Storage as preventative medicine*

Effective and secure storage remains a continuing crisis for those with videotape collections. Though it is not a very sexy problem, storage is an extremely important component of the effort to save video collections. Because of the length of time needed to preserve tapes and the great expense involved, storage becomes a crucial element. If a tape cannot be preserved, at least the original and the dub-masters can be kept in as good an environment as possible, so that they can survive as long as possible.

Collections in all but the largest, most well-funded, and most stable institutions have been kept under extremely varying conditions. Although most collections are stored in air conditioned environments, some institutions, because of budgetary constraints, must turn off the air conditioning on weekends and at night. Extremes of more than 30° are not unusual over the course of a year, and humidity may vary greatly from season to season, or even morning to night. Humidity causes the tape to stick to itself. Videotape is vulnerable to other debilitating conditions. Open windows provide even greater opportunity for dirt to contaminate tapes, making the tapes unplayable. Not rewinding on a regular basis causes bleed-through. These conditions wreak havoc on videotapes.

While there are commercial facilities that store tapes for a price, many groups are unaware of this option or lack funds for this expense. Most facilities are in or close to large urban centers, making storage impractical for groups outside these areas.

## *Efforts by the Museum of Modern Art*

The Museum of Modern Art furnishes an example of an ideal situation where a large and important cultural institution has made a strong commitment to moving image preservation. MoMA is nearing completion on its \$14 million Film Preservation Center located in northeastern Pennsylvania. Members of the Museum's Film & Video Department began discussion about a storage facility as far back as 1981. Actual planning began in 1985 assisted by a \$50,000 grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. An \$825,000 Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was instrumental in moving plans for the building toward reality. The Center was

also supported by Sony Pictures, Time Warner, Celeste Bartos and the MoMA Trustees.

Groundbreaking on the Center took place in June 1993, and the film and video collections are scheduled to be moved by April 1, 1996. It is extremely encouraging that a major institution has taken on the commitment to create the best possible conditions for storage of their film and video collections. The facility consists of two buildings. A 28,000 square foot structure for safety film contains 22 vaults for safety film, as well as a vault for videotape storage and a large vault for paper materials, consisting primarily of posters. The videotape vault with 690 linear feet of compact shelving will be kept at 55°F and 40% humidity. A 7,900 square foot building for nitrate film contains 34 vaults. Each vault has individual controls so that the ideal temperature and humidity levels can be maintained for the different materials.

#### *Possible cooperative solutions*

At the Media Alliance conference *Multiple Currents*, it was noted that one of two things are needed: 1) to create alternative sites for storing moving images or 2) to negotiate as a consortium for reduced rates for storage in existing facilities. A survey is needed to determine how moving images are stored currently, what the costs are, and whether collaborative strategies are possible or desirable. Information is needed not just to media arts groups, but from institutions holding videos on dance, theater, performance art and other art forms. Research is needed into possible models and funding for collaborative storage, as well as information on current options for commercial storage, their rates and capacity.

One suggestion is to investigate sources of funds for community economic development that may provide funds for a feasibility study of a storage facility as a business. For instance, an abandoned supermarket in an upstate New York community may be a possibility for conversion to film and video storage. If a number of organizations with collections worked together, a plan could be devised to house large numbers of videotapes at lower costs and better conditions than possible by an individual institution. A collaboration on storage could be complemented by collaborations for shared computer cataloging and access to the collections. Alternatively, this same consortium of groups could conceivably rent space in an already established commercial storage facility. Cooperative leasing could be much less expensive than what a single organization would pay.

## *The development of standards for storage*

Currently, there are no widely-accepted national standards addressing temperature and humidity allowances for long-term storage of videotape. The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) publishes a set of recommended practices entitled *Care, Storage, Operation, Handling and Shipping of Magnetic Recording Tape for Television (RP103)*. These recommendations enumerate the most basic practices necessary to ensure maximum life of videotape. The ANSI/AES (American National Standards Institute/Audio Engineers Society) Joint Technical Commission for Magnetic & Optical Systems has been working for several years to establish standards for the care and storage of recording tape. A draft of the Commission's report was recently sent to their memberships for a vote; however, it will be several months at least before their recommendations are made public.

### *Next steps*

Immediate steps must be taken to ensure proper storage of video materials while other more long-term preservation strategies are developed. However, we must recognize that it is not always desirable or feasible to simply transfer collections to existing major repositories. Funding is needed to research the feasibility of creating new storage facilities, or upgrading existing facilities on a regional basis. A national survey, along with accompanying regional surveys, are needed to determine how moving images are stored currently, what the costs are, and whether collaborative strategies are possible or desirable.

Media Alliance has applied to the NEA to conduct such a survey of storage, and to conduct the research outlined above. The results of the survey will be used to develop a plan to address regional storage needs, and will seek funding for its implementation. Pending funding, the needs assessment will be designed in April 1997, conducted in May - June, with results by July 1997. Research will be conducted during August 1997, with funding proposals submitted after that date. A decision on the grant is expected in November 1996.

## COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

Collection management encompasses more than the physical care of the collection. It is not simply shelves and storage, cleaning, exhibiting and preservation. One of the most complicated problems faced by any collection is the question of who retains copyright to works within the collection. Media arts collections have been acquired in various different ways for various purposes over the past thirty years. Some works are purchased outright, some with restrictions on their use. Some tapes were acquired for an exhibition or through a residency. Many tapes are donated without any specific mention of rights. Over time, artists die, collection managers retire or find new jobs and, without proper documentation, the question of copyright becomes more clouded. There may be further complications. For example, a tape may be purchased with only the right to use in scholarly study. At a certain point, it comes to light that this is the only extant copy of the work. Does the institution have then have the right to copy the tape in order to preserve it for scholarly use? It is extremely important that these issues be dealt with, if possible, at the time of acquisition. However, the arduous chore of settling rights for previously acquired tapes must be carried forward. Nevertheless, the rights on some tapes will never be settled.

### *Copyright law*

The following describes in general terms the development of copyright law affecting video collections. It should not be considered legal advice, and all readers are encouraged to contact a lawyer for complete information.

Prior to 1989, if a work was published without a copyright notice, it fell into the public domain. Publication consists in making a tangible copy of something. If you are selling your work, even if you make only 5 or 10 copies, then it is considered to have been published. If you have only one copy or it has been exhibited only once or twice, then it is considered not to have been published. The copyright notice consists of the year, the author's name and the symbol ©, a "c," the word "copyright" or the abbreviation "copr." In addition, you needed to fill out a form and send it with a fee and a copy of the work to the copyright office at the Library of Congress. If you failed to follow this procedure, you would have received the benefit of publishing or exhibiting your work, but afterwards you would not own it; nobody would. In the case of film, the Library of Congress has the

right to ask for a 16mm print, but it is possible to get that waived and send a less expensive form of the film such as a videotape.

In 1989 the United States brought its laws into conformity with the Bern Convention. The current situation is that you automatically own the copyright of a work you have created. This automatic copyright is good only for this country and, of course, does not give anyone notice that you have copyrighted a work. Registration with the Library of Congress gives you greater protection and allows you to sue to obtain statutory damages in copyright infringement cases. Also, if you find yourself in litigation, the stronger your position, the easier it is to resolve disputes. Copyright registration clearly strengthens one's position. In essence, two levels of copyright exist: one, simply by creating the work, and another by registering it. It is always a good idea to put the copyright symbol on your work because it asserts your creation of it, still, you are in a much more convincing position if you register it as well. Alternatively, people have used such schemes as mailing a copy of a screenplay to themselves, leaving it unopened and allowing the postmark to serve as proof that it was written before the postmarked date.

A further complication exists in the ownership of works for hire. If an organization hires someone to create a work, then the organization would own the copyright. If that person worked freelance or was not paid, the situation becomes more ambiguous. Further, anyone who had substantial creative input into the work can claim major authorship. This can include director, screenwriter and composer. The producing organization should obtain a release in writing, acknowledging that the makers were employees and have no copyright interest. Unfortunately, this will not mitigate the problems with those thousands of videotapes already in collections where this was not done. One strategy worth considering is to claim copyright until someone challenges it, and then to work out a solution. Also, it may be possible to register entire collections with one fee, if there is something substantial that ties the collection together, such as a single corporate producing entity.

Another complex issue has to do with differing use of the work, especially as new technologies emerge. Establishing the right to broadcast a tape is relatively simple compared to the use of a portion of a work on a CD-ROM, on a Web page or as stock footage. Further complications exist when the work is used on cable access, as part of a presentation in a classroom, or even narrowcasted to a number of classrooms. New technologies used in educational settings present numerous copyright complications. For instance, a student might want to use a clip of a videotape in a "paper" that is presented on disk.

This clip would be used for a few weeks and then erased. Perhaps, only the student and the teacher would ever see the piece. Questions arise such as: How long a clip would constitute fair use? Would the length of time the "paper" existed impact on copyright infringement? Clips delivered to classrooms through an on-line digital system for a lecture would involve similar questions. Solutions to these and other complex new situations will require much discussion and certainly a rewriting of the copyright laws.

### *Next steps*

In order to provide access to older video collections, many groups will need technical assistance to resolve questions of ownership and copyright. There is a need for commissioned papers on these issues using case studies and offering recommendations for resolving rights, with sample forms and documentation, and guidelines to preventing future problems. Archivists, librarians, producers, rights holders and programmers are among those who should be consulted in the development of such materials.

## FUNDING

With little funding or expertise, progress on preservation has been slow and idiosyncratic. Arts and cultural groups have suffered continual cutbacks in public and private funding over the past five years. Media arts is also one of the most underfunded disciplines for arts funding. Thus, resources tend to go toward production and public programming, not to preservation. In addition, video preservation has always been underfunded in relationship to film preservation. For example, while AFI offered a regrant program for film preservation, there was never a comparable program for video. A tiny fraction of the resources of NAMID have gone to groups such as Electronic Arts Intermix, Video DataBank and Anthology Film Archives, with major institutions receiving the bulk of the funds.

Unfortunately, a great deal of education needs to be done before video preservation is seen as a priority by private foundations. The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts has provided continued support for projects (see below), and to BAVC for their remastering services and for the Playback 1996 conference. The Greenwall Foundation has provided several years of support to Media Alliance for their New York regional coordinating activities. Among public funders, the New York State Council on the Arts has remained a consistent supporter of video preservation projects, supporting Media Alliance for the Multiple Currents conference and coordinating activities, as well as numerous New York groups for archival projects or remastering. The NEA has also funded a small number of projects (see Video Data Bank below), aside from their long-standing cooperative agreement with AFI, that previously funded NAMID.

Perhaps the overriding obstacle to greater funding is the lack of information about videotape collections and video preservation. The Library of Congress has recognized that "there is little up-to-date information on the problems facing American television and video preservation." In view of this, they are holding hearings in Los Angeles, New York and Washington during March 1996 in order to gather information towards "the establishment of a comprehensive national television and video preservation program" and "to coordinate efforts of television and video archivists, copyright owners, creators, educators, and historians and other scholars concerned with preserving America's television and video heritage." This will form the basis of the State of the American Television and Video Preservation Report, coordinated by William T. Murphy under the Library's Motion

Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. Media Alliance and other representatives of the media arts have met with Murphy and provided testimony in order to assure that video art, community access and collectively-made video will be an important part of this national plan and that the work of individuals and smaller institutions in collecting and preserving videotape will be recognized and supported.

### *Funding preservation as video history*

One key to increased funding for video preservation is to make video history more visible to potential audiences and funders. Unfortunately, discussions about the mechanics of remastering and the complexities of cataloging are not terribly interesting to most people and are unlikely to elicit enthusiasm for the monumental effort needed to protect video history. Another strategy is to create projects which bring the tapes to the public. Projects such as the series *Surveying the First Decade*, curated by Chris Hill (formerly of Hallwalls) and Kate Horsfield (Video Data Bank), and the joint preservation project of the Minnesota State Historical Society and Intermedia Arts, allow tapes to be programmed or studied. Projects such as the Hypercard stack *The Chicana/o Movie-miento* by Ondine Chavoya create finding aids to assist educators and researchers with locating older works. These undertakings provide excellent examples of how the presence of earlier video materials can be increased by exciting the public's imagination while increasing their awareness of the need to ensure the survival of the rich heritage of video history.

*Surveying the First Decade: Video Art and Alternative Media in the U.S.*, created by Video Data Bank, consists of a series of eight videotapes, a total of 17 hours. More than 70 individual works by 65 artists are included and the series spans the history of video art from 1968 to 1980. The two volumes are sold for \$1,100 as a package and are available through the Video Data Bank. The project was funded by the NEA and the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. The Data Bank is also preparing a book to accompany the tapes. The five hundred page text will consist of a curatorial essay, transcripts of interviews with video scholars, artists and curators, reprints of out-of-print and unpublished articles on video, videomaker biographies and videographies, tape descriptions, a survey of video research facilities and extensive bibliographic information.

Intermedia Arts and the Minnesota State Historical Society collaborated on a project that was funded by the Andy Warhol Foundation and received important technical advice from the 3M Corporation. Through the project, they sought to preserve as much as possible of the work produced by Intermedia's predecessor organization, University



Community Video (UCV). This work consisted of a large collection of 1/2" reel-to-reel tapes and some 3/4" tapes, many of which were unplayable. The 1/2" reel-to-reel tapes were transferred to SVHS and the 3/4" tapes to new 3/4" stock. VHS user copies were made of all transferred tapes, to allow easy access to the materials. The user copies are available to the public at the Minnesota State Historical Society. The bulk of the collection is documentary tapes, although it does contain video art. All rights remain with the original makers. In all but a few cases the tapes were not the original masters. Most of the masters remained with the original artist; however, for various reasons, it was not possible to go back to these originals.

One of the most significant aspects of the project was the decision-making process. Two full time archivists logged the information about the tapes into a database. Next, a committee was formed consisting primarily of people involved with UCV at the time of the making of the tapes. In addition, representatives of both Intermedia Arts and the Minnesota State Historical Society were part of the committee, which debated the issues and decided which tapes merited remastering. Approximately, 200 tapes were selected for remastering. The transfer of the 1/2" reel-to-reel material was done at the Bay Area Video Coalition over a 6-to-9 month period.

The Hypercard-based project *The Chicana/o Movie-miento Part I: Asco and Post-Asco* by C. Ondine Chavoya demonstrates the great flexibility of computers and their ability to convey large amounts of information in an accessible and engaging manner. A project such as Chavoya's can be relatively inexpensive, though certainly labor intensive. Yet it can provide a means of calling attention to creative work and cultural history, in this case Latina/o art, that might otherwise be ignored.

*The Chicana/o Movie-miento* focuses on the intersections between performance, interventionist public art and media technologies in the work of ASCO, a Los Angeles-based Chicana/o multi-media and performance art group active in the early 70s through the mid-80s. The project traces ASCO's history, including their performances, their "No-Movies" (parodies of movies that were "filmed" without motion picture technology and distributed as film stills), and their cable access videos. A user may point and click on an area of the computer screen that leads to a particular aspect of the collective's work. The resulting screen provides a brief history of the work and how it was made, as well as several stills or Quicktime movies to supplement the written information. As you get deeper into the Hypercard stack, your knowledge increases, and you have been given a taste of what the work has to offer. The project can serve as a prototype for a finding aid that

would teach people about various aspects of video culture and history. While it may not contain a real time video, it could contain information about how and where to locate a particular tape. Organized around various themes and available on CD rom, such information could lead researchers to the primary source material. While having developed an interesting prototype, Chavoya needs funding to complete his project.

### *Next steps*

While we cannot expect funds to dramatically increase for video preservation, the articulation of needs in a thoughtful and coordinated way will assist the field to develop new sources of funds. National, regional and local strategies are needed to address preservation issues; thus for efforts to be successful, funding must be provided at all levels, using multiple strategies. Existing organizations and collaborative projects (such as NAMID, the Bay Area Video Coalition's remastering services, and the Pilot Upstate Cataloging Group) must be strengthened. There are on-going needs for information and technical assistance, and for periodic meetings to network and develop new skills. These efforts are important at both the national and regional level. In the distribution of funding and other resources, we must not force small organizations to compete against major institutions and repositories. There must be a recognition that tapes of significant value exist in many different cultural and geographic communities.

Largely through a labor of love, non-profit distributors such as Electronic Arts Intermix and Video DataBank continue to make early video art available to national and international educational markets. With the elimination of funding sources such as distribution assistance from National Video Resources, funds are urgently needed to assist them in researching and developing new markets, as well as to properly care for the materials they distribute.

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The following committees may be helpful:

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