X F R
S T N

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

"XFR STN" initially arose from the need to preserve the Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club distribution project. MWF was a co-op "store" of the artists' group Colab (Collaborative Projects, Inc.), directed by Alan W. Moore and Michael Carter from 1986–2000, which showed and sold artists' and independent film and video on VHS at consumer prices. As realized at the New Museum, "XFR STN" will also address the wider need for artists' access to media services that preserve creative works currently stored in aging and obsolete audiovisual and digital formats.

The exhibition will produce digitized materials from three distinct repositories: MWF Video Club's collection, which comprises some sixty boxes of diverse moving image materials; the New Museum's own rich archive, which includes documentation of historic public programs and performances; and an incoming and, thus, newly assembled collection of transferred materials from artists within the larger public sphere. Consistent with the dictum "distribution is preservation," the project argues for circulation as a mode of conservation. "XFR STN" will serve as a collection and dissemination point for artist-produced content, as well as acting as a hub for information about these past projects (including production materials and personal recollections). The project is both a pragmatic public service and an activity as metaphor: an opportunity to present a media production process in continuous dynamic transformation.

"XFR STN" is emblematic of the kind of risk-taking, limit-pushing projects that the New Museum has long supported. It enables a unique invitation to artists and, in particular, to the immediate community of artists who live or have lived near the Bowery. To this end, it is pertinent that many of the figures whose work will be digitized and shown via MWF's engagement will also be found in the Bowery Artist Tribute, a series of ongoing interviews that have been collected by the Museum since it relocated to its present site.

"XFR STN" is, truly, an endeavor that requires a village of sorts. Acknowledgments for this project are daunting in their span. In addition to the active and inspiring participation of Alan W. Moore, Taylor Moore, Alexis Bhagat, Andrea Callard, Coleen Fitzgibbon, and other Colab affiliates, Walter Forsberg has been invaluable in every aspect relating to the implementation of the project. As Audio-Visual Conservator of "XFR STN," he ensures the project operates as close to best practice as possible. We are thankful to him and his skilled team of technicians, which includes Rebecca Fraimow, Leeroy Kun Young Kang, Kristin MacDonough, and Bleakley McDowell.

Staff members from throughout the Museum were called upon for both their specialized skills and their untiring enthusiasm for the project. Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement, initiated the project and worked closely with Digital Conservator at Rhizome, Ben Fino-Radin, the New Museum's Digital Archivist, Tara Hart, and Associate Director of Education, Jen Song, on all aspects. Providing immense expertise and generosity of spirit, Doron Ben-Avraham, IT Manager, and Brian Traister, IT - AV Administrator, were crucial to the realization of the project and added immensely to the surrounding dialogues. Joshua Edwards, Director of Exhibitions Management, Walsh Hansen, Chief Preparator, Kelsey Womack, Exhibitions Assistant, and Derya Golpinar, Associate Registrar, all worked together to manage a complicated set of criteria. Sarah Stephenson, Editor and Publications Coordinator, and Chelsea Amato, Graphic Designer and Production Manager, were crucial in producing a rich array of accompanying mediation materials for the show. Ethan Swan, Bowery Artist Tribute Coordinator, first brought the project to the Museum's attention, for which we feel particularly appreciative.

We are also very grateful to the funders who have provided support for this program. Generous endowment support for Education is provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Skadden, Arps Education Programs Fund, and the William Randolph Hearst Endowed Fund for Education Programs at the New Museum.

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Lisa Phillips, *Toby Devan Lewis Director*

"XFR STN": 3 FAQS

1 WHY "XFR STN"?

"XFR STN" began with a proposal to the New Museum from Alan W. Moore, who, in the spirit of his practice (Moore is a founding member of Colab), was looking for a partner. Described as an artistic project as well as a public service, "XFR STN" was conceived by Moore to address a specific context—some eight hundred videotapes in a storage bin in Staten Island, amassed during the life of the Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club (MWF)—but also a general condition. Significant amounts of the past four decades of artistic production are trapped on obsolete storage media (from U-Matic tapes to floppy disks). For many artists, the cost of digitization and recovery of this obsolete media is prohibitive. Museums and other art institutions are also faced with tough choices around preservation: which artworks to prioritize, and even more urgent, perhaps, how to ensure that works by less- or not-known artists don't continue to disappear with the format that they live on. In other words: how to preserve the possibility of discovering works, especially those contained in obsolete formats, that are not already written into versions of the canon?

"XFR STN," an Education Department project and exhibition spanning eight weeks and housed in the New Museum's Fifth Floor gallery, will be a fully functioning lab with three transfer stations (two dedicated to moving image formats and one to born-digital materials). Trained technicians will work during Museum hours to digitize materials from three repositories: MWF's cache of tapes, the New Museum's rich institutional archives, and the public's holdings of their own art-associated production. This third category—which acknowledges the breadth and depth of the artistic community in New York—will produce an archive at once chance-driven and yet, we suspect, revelatory. In a sense, "XFR STN" might be described as looking closely at recent history in order to negotiate the present, perhaps even the future.

While cognizant that this is an exhibition that necessarily assesses technological shifts over the last forty years—to say nothing of giving a glimpse of the art world during that time—the project is unabashedly educational. "XFR STN" begins at the New Museum but its success will hinge on whether and how it initiates conversations that open up further and elsewhere. Emphasizing the exchanges that will happen around materials as they are transferred (producing, in the process, new data of many kinds), "XFR STN" enables questions beyond the immediate tasks at hand. Indeed, beginning from the early days of planning the project, everyone involved felt it necessary to call upon friends and colleagues to help tease out the many complexities—philosophical, technical, and artistic—that began to emerge. We are, as visitors to and participants in the project, called to reflect on what it means to engage in producing more content, even while simultaneously retrieving something from the past. On a conceptual level, these are questions that address a cultural climate that would seem hardly lacking in freely circulating images and information. On a practical level, these are questions that necessarily ask us to re-evaluate practices and principles of production as artists and protection as institutions.

2 WHY THE INTERNET ARCHIVE?

The act of digitization or data recovery itself is a necessary, but only the first step in a responsible plan. Once an artist's work has been recovered from obsolete media—be it a VHS cassette or a 5.25-inch floppy disk—these bits must now be inscribed on a new storage medium. The spinning disk of a hard drive is a tenuous and temporary data carrier. If artists left "XFR STN" with nothing more than their recovered materials stored on a portable hard drive, we would truly be doing them a disservice. We would fail to meet digital preservation best practices by storing culturally and personally valuable content on an unstable carrier, and not providing any sort of redundancy or duplication. However, it would not be feasible or sustainable over the long-term for the New Museum to take on the responsibility of storing the terabytes of data that will be produced as a result of "XFR STN." As a solution, the New Museum has partnered with the Internet Archive to make all materials recovered as part of the exhibition available to the public. Subscribing to the dictum that Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe,[1] we embrace the notion that distribution itself is a preservation strategy.

The Internet Archive is a nonprofit institution whose mission is "free and open access to the entire world's knowledge," and whose purposes provide permanent access for researchers, historians, scholars, people with disabilities, and the general public to historical collections that exist in digital format. It is a veritable Noah's Ark for digital and digitized cultural heritage. The Internet Archive's storage infrastructure is both vast and stable, and there is no other such "no questions asked" preservation-minded institution that embraces the unbiased collection, storage, and preservation of cultural heritage ephemera. By partnering with the Internet Archive, we are placing digitized artist materials in a massive data center whose primary mandate is preservation, access, and distribution unencumbered by commercial models. The New Museum will be sharing all uncompressed preservation masters produced during "XFR STN" with the Internet Archive. The Internet Archive will not only provide permanent public download of these preservation masters, but will additionally transcode and provide streaming access to all materials. Videos can easily and always be streamed on the Internet Archive's website, archive.org. By partnering with the Internet Archive, we propose a strategy that offers not only a stable home for these at-risk materials, but an effective distribution platform.

In sum, we find this open sharing and partnership with the Internet Archive to be the most effective means of mitigating the very real challenge of providing long-term or archival digital storage to massive quantities of material that, outside the context of "XFR STN," may not find their way to collecting institutions before degrading entirely.

3 WHY THE NEW MUSEUM?

"The New Museum of Contemporary Art was founded on the premise that works of art are not only objects for visual delectation and assessment, but are repositories for ideas that reverberate in the larger context of our culture."
—Brian Wallis, New Museum Curator, 1984[2]

Founded in 1977, the New Museum was conceived as a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. As the only major New York City museum dedicated to contemporary art, the idea was always a contentious one. Questioning the standards of tradition, permanence, and connoisseurship generally associated with museum collections, the New Museum's stated mission was "to provide a forum for contemporary art, especially work that has received little or no public exposure or critical attention, or that might otherwise be inaccessible to a broad-based audience; to share new issues that are constantly raised in current artistic inquiry; and to challenge the context of historical precedent and museum practice."[3] This early mission aimed to support recent art made by less established artists through exhibitions, events, interpretation, and documentation.

One of the most radical innovations was the Museum's approach to collecting. In 1978, the New Museum initiated a "Semi-Permanent" collection policy that allowed the Museum to critically examine and deaccession works from its collection after ten years to make room for new additions—though the idea was never successfully implemented. In 1995, the initial collection policy was revisited and re-evaluated in the exhibition "Temporarily Possessed: The Semi-Permanent Collection." Seventeen years after the concept of a semipermanent collection was introduced, the exhibition's organizers recognized, "If contemporary art making is often formulated in radical opposition to tradition, lack of access to the past also places limits on the meaning of the present."[4] The semipermanent collection policy was officially frozen in 1997. Over the years, the Museum's approach to history and collecting has considered how its own institutional past might inform its current program.

Containing documentation of ideas in the form of images, text, audio, and other media culled from the New Museum's rich history of public programs, the New Museum's Digital Archive is particularly concerned with providing evidence of "ephemeral" events and time-based practices that resist traditional modes of documentation. At the same time, the Digital Archive, with its apparently "immaterial" nature, is anchored within the material reality of boxes, folders, videocassettes, cloud storage linked to data centers, and other new and old technology. The common characterization of digital archives as "immaterial" frames them in opposition to the analog. Resisting this limited dualism of old/new, analog/digital, closed/open, we might instead conceive of the New Museum's Digital Archive as aiming to expand the reach of "traditional" cultural objects, by increasing their preservation, reproduction, distribution, and use.

In the catalogue for "Temporarily Possessed," New Museum curator Alice Yang posited, "How does one maintain the forward trajectory towards innovation without rendering an absolute rupture between the old and the new and losing sight of the histories that contextualize recent developments?"[5] Today we ask: How do we represent and activate the Museum's history in light of its present? How do we remobilize or criticize particular histories? As the archive is made available online, questions remain regarding how the archive itself may be reinterpreted in a contemporary context. How do we make decisions about what to make available online? How do we address the distinctive features of such different forms of access?

These are questions we attempt to face head-on with the intricacies of a project like "XFR STN."

Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement, New Museum
Ben Fino-Radin, Digital Conservator, Rhizome
Tara Hart, Digital Archivist, New Museum
Jen Song, Associate Director of Education, New Museum
July 2013

[1] A phrase formalized by the Stanford University Library LOCKSS project: lockss.org/about/history

[2] Brian Wallis, "Introduction," eds., Brian Wallis and Marcia Tucker, *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), vii.
[3] Terrie Sultan, ed., "Statement of Purpose," in *The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York: Eleventh Anniversary* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1988), 6.

[4] Brian Goldfarb and Mimi Young, eds., *Temporarily Possessed: the Semi-Permanent Collection: September 15-December 17, 1995* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 26.
[5] Brian Goldfarb and Mimi Young, eds., *Temporarily Possessed: the Semi-Permanent Collection: September 15-December 17, 1995* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), 155.

"XFR STN": THE NEW MUSEUM'S STONE TAPE

INTRODUCTION

"Magnetic tape is compact, responsive—all the sales chatter says it is. Also: delicate, and prone to lose its memory." In the plot of Nigel Kneale's seminal 1972 BBC TV special, *The Stone Tape*, this visionary declaration spurs the teleplay's research into new methods of video preservation. Given that "tape's finished...its day is done," protagonist Peter Brock and his coterie of Ryan Electronics technicians embark on developing a groundbreaking new media format—one that will defeat the Japanese electronics industry, replace the need for magnetic tape, and make all of them filthy rich. To house their mass of requisite machinery (oscilloscopes, microphones, data recorders, and computing esoterica), Brock's team relocates to a sprawling countryside castle. However, once there, the engineers soon encounter eerie apparitions of the building's deceased former inhabitants. Appropriately enough for the classic era of British science fiction television, Brock decides to use his team's instruments and "go after it with electronics," quickly discovering that the ghosts aren't ghosts, per se. Rather, the aged Gothic edifice itself is revealed as a powerful and enduring new recording medium capable of preserving moving images—a "stone tape": free from delicate physical supports prone to decomposition, replaying video inside the minds of humans.

When I first heard the rough conceptual parameters of the New Museum's "XFR STN" project, the premise of Kneale's imagined institutional memory bank immediately came to mind. The "XFR STN" undertaking proposed installing elaborate electronics workstations, seeking a unique context to preserving information held on magnetic media, and trying to make it last for millennia. Trained technician graduates from New York University's Moving Image Archiving and Preservation program would operate thousands of dollars' worth of old video and digital equipment (reconditioned with the generous technical support of DuArt Film and Video's restoration department), adhere to reformatting best practices, and store all resultant material through a partnership with the Internet Archive, where it would be made publicly accessible. In this, "XFR STN" seemed just as wonderfully ambitious, peculiar, and geeky as the objectives of Ryan Electronics.

In the last half-decade, several of New York's major art museums have recognized the imperative of Ryan Electronics's quest for a media preservation super-strategy. At the Guggenheim, Joanna Phillips's strong record of media collections and exhibition-driven conservation, and Peter Oleksik's immense achievement-in-progress of digitizing MoMA's mammoth video art canon, are two efforts that immediately come to mind. But as an institution without a comparable collection or retention policy, the New Museum's proposal to offer a publicly displayed free media transfer service, open to all, is radical in practice and distinct within contemporary modes of video and data preservation. In lieu of mere celebration, this essay attempts to articulate some of the stakes "XFR STN" addresses given videotape transfer's clandestine, expensive, and politically charged history.

COPYING VIDEOTAPE IS ARCANE

Lucas Hilderbrand's 2009 book, *Inherent Vice*, excavates the illicit nature of videotape copy-making and traces the practice of bootlegging, suggesting that the resulting signal degeneration of videotape copy-making reflects an "aesthetics of access."[1] While Hilderbrand posits that each videocassette transfer becomes a singular and fetishized text, the clandestine nature of videotape copy-making practices he points to is far more pertinent to this exhibition's contrarian approach. Secretive duplication extended beyond illegal bootlegging universes, echoing in dominions of commercial dubbing, industrial mastering, television production, and home off-air taping. While copy-making of tapes may have been ultimately aimed at their eventual exhibition, the act of transferring tape and making video copies can generally be understood as a historically private, concealed, and arcane activity.

The home entertainment market commoditized videotape for over two decades, principally through the VHS format. Yet, practically and technically how those billions of linear tape feet were magnetically encoded with moving images remained a complete mystery to most of the public. The technology for recording electricity signals that can represent moving images via videotape is complex. And, unlike film, videotape's black binder hides the logic of its information transmission. Consumers bought copies of their favorite movies, completely unaware of the existence of thousands of daisy-chained VCR rigs or high-speed anhysteretic contact dubbing Sony Sprinters at large commercial duplicators like Rank Video Service or Magnetech Corp. While the mystification of labor may have played a role in this functional ignorance, did anyone really care how the millions of VHS-dubbed minutes of *Forrest Gump* were created to fill Blockbuster's shelves?[2]

In the bygone era of amateur "taper" cultures, too, videotape copy-making was done behind closed doors—by home enthusiasts or enterprising copyright infringers. Off-air taped compilations of network soaps or wacky cable-access shows, in addition to bootlegs of contraband classics like *Cocksucker Blues* or *Superstar: the Karen Carpenter Story*, were created anonymously and circulated underground. Even the now-defunct "old" Kim's Video was rumored to homebrew their own copies of Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club titles, never broadcasting that fact to MWF honcho Alan W. Moore (who nonetheless could figure it out). For love or for gold, making homemade copies generally remained private—whether for the development of a personal home library, to avert copyright infringement lawsuits, or to simply save the price of a legitimate store-bought copy. At friendly neighborhood PAL-to-NTSC services, similarly, transfer is a backroom activity. At contemporary video preservation vendors, where videotape duplication is offered as a paid service, this mysterious occlusion exists in climate-controlled, secure, off-site facilities that house towering racks of electronic decks, cabling, and flashing lights. Even in the city's own archives, museums, and libraries that have the sufficient resources, video reformatting stations are situated deep within their fortresses and subbasements, often in nondescript and undisclosed locations.

The reversal of praxis that "XFR STN" provides is one of its most immediately striking aspects. While promising to give new and renewed visibility to hidden caches of material content, "XFR STN" importantly also draws back the veil of video transfer and video technology in a zoological fashion. This seems apt given what Canadian video artist Tom Sherman calls the video medium's inherent "communications potential."[3] As a project of the New Museum's Education Department, here, on the pedestal of the open gallery, the public is invited to learn as much about the transfer process as they are to witness it being undertaken and endure the real-time commitment it involves. This fact makes "XFR STN" a very decidedly different operation for copying videotapes.

VIDEO TRANSFER IS EXPENSIVE

The obvious exceptions to this narrative of hidden video duplication are the scores of artist-run video production and distribution centers that emerged in the 1970s and '80s. Many of those enterprises are well documented through primary "how-to" documents and oral histories, which evidence that large scores of artists and amateur moviemaking enthusiasts did indeed train, learn, and teach the nuances of video creation and duplication. In no small measure, the output of several of these New York–based groups—Colab, ETC Studios, and eventually MWF—forms the rationale and content focus of the "XFR STN" project. Detailed primary source accounts of their efforts, and those of others, can be found elsewhere in the pages of this publication. Yet, even for these factions, the process of taping, transferring, and copying the video they produced and distributed often carried with it large economic barriers-to-access for hardware equipment, blank tape stock, and expertise. In the early 1970s, as one example, an Ampex AVR-1 broadcast-grade two-inch Quad VTR cost over $100,000—about the average price of three new houses at the time. As time progressed, newer, smaller formats partially reduced these costs, but not to the degree moving image-makers enjoy today. The fact that the New Museum will be using "XFR STN" as an opportunity to digitize materials from its own institutional videotape archive only reiterates this point.

While video technology's economic realities were mitigated by community media organizations across North America, large-scale duplication of videotape content remained a costly and time-consuming process attached to the price of newer and higher-grade tape stock and hardware. In the era of digital preservation these costs have rebounded, given the need for storage devices that require ongoing fixity verification, obsolescence monitoring, and data migration. Unlike physical videotape objects, you can't just place data on a shelf. Nowadays, in museums and collecting institutions, preservation transfer and maintenance costs for legacy videotape collections are pricey enterprise-scale activities, requisite for investment protection. The costs may be even dearer if an artist insists that an institution repurchase an older work in its new-fangled high-definition "restored" instantiation. Or, when an artist insists on antiquated cathode ray tube monitors to display their older digitized "tapes," thereby forcing the museum to keep a working inventory of monitors and parts.

By enabling artists-at-large to sign up for free transfers of their personal archives and work, "XFR STN" joins in the lineage of community media efforts and alleviates the financial burden of transferring materials. While the aggregate number of transfer hours the "XFR STN" project proposes to accommodate may be modest relative to the amount of material in need of migration, this effort should prove invaluable to those artists wishing to participate.

Instructional insert from Sony half-inch reel-to-reel videotape stock, circa early to mid-1970s

Decommissioned VHS tape stock loading machines, up for auction. Image: Courtesy Digitrak

VIDEOTAPE IS CONTENTIOUS

Given the costs of these transfers, the limited means available to do so, and the sheer gargantuan mass of videotape created in the technology's half-century of formats, it is no slight understatement to say that videotape transfer can be a contentious act. Whose work gets shown, exhibited, rented, duplicated, sold, acquired, and ultimately preserved, when not everyone's can be? Whose doesn't?

Looking at the historical relationships between collecting institutions and video artists, this contentiousness gets intensified. Like, a lot. What is—and, crucially, what isn't—in institutional video art collections, proves, as Martha Gever put it, "the inadequacy of video history conceived as art history."[4] If, as Winston Churchill is attributed as uttering, "the best way to make history is to write it," then the best way to make video history may be to do transfers. This is no plug for elitist connoisseurship, but rather proof of how "XFR STN" stands to turn histories of curatorial exclusion on their head. Decades removed from its pubescence, eclipsed by digital technologies, video art's "History" cannot be accurately sketched without ensuring access to the breadth of works made on tape by all kinds of artists—not just those represented by the fanciest galleries or owned by the most prestigious institutions. Accepting established histories of artist-made tape and television from the 1970s, '80s, and '90s by replaying video art's Greatest Hits misses the evanescing chance to know a wealth of other important contemporaneous ancillary works. For those with any serious curiosity in moving image history, it runs the risk of turning into a bad classic rock radio station.

Given the reality that manufacturers have failed to indefinitely support videotape technologies beyond their commercial viability, format obsolescence ratchets up the high stakes of this contentiousness. The tape-is-dead clairvoyance of Ryan Electronics's fictive technicians is realistically echoed in the conclusion of the 1973 *Spaghetti City Video Manual*, where the collective Videofreex write, "The best piece of video equipment today may be practically obsolete next week."[5] Today, this could not be truer. Untold hordes of video artworks are under threat of becoming locked into physically bulky obsolete formats, forever inaccessible, and destined for use as doorstops or computer monitor risers. (Consider the fate of your own VHS collection.) Yet, the utopian task of transferring "everything" is still in development. Parties within broadcast video and preservation fields have, for years, engaged in passionate discourse over how exactly to go about preservation. Even now, community debate persists over the adequacy of various target digital formats, codecs, wrappers, sampling rates, and metadata schemas, amid an absence of standardization. In this milieu, "XFR STN" enacts a provocative and proactive get-it-done approach, not dissimilar to the model of nonprofit community-based video preservation centers recommended in a 1997 Report of the Librarian of Congress on the state of video preservation.[6]

The goal of "XFR STN's" free access to newly digitized material also muddies the waters of the complicated art market of editioned moving image works. As media scholar Erika Balsom's research demonstrated at a recent Light Industry lecture, the videotape editioning model that matured in the 1990s did so by echoing a late-nineteenth-century art market rearguard impulse for "reconstructing rarity in a climate of proliferating copies."[7] While "XFR STN's" free digitization could be seen as reifying the manufactured value of editioned canonical video and their "certificates of authenticity," conversely these transfers also publicly de-commodify video work—through free access to digitized material and in circumventing the expensive process of long-term preservation. This can place artists in a strange interstice between the lucrative desire to be collected, albeit with the potential corollary of limited public access to their work, and the innate desire to have their work seen by as many audiences as possible, even if less money enters into the pockets of creators. Here, "XFR STN" complicates marketplace notions of scarcity and value, but moreover the barrel-aged contentious debate over access (making sure that works can be seen) and preservation (making sure that works are ensured longevity, before granting access to them).

Tied to the marketplace, the artificial scarcity of moving image editions is understandable, but from a preservation perspective, the logic can be dystopian. (Save for the wonderful promise, perhaps, of employment for those working as media conservators.) Specifically, this is the case with the common practice of editioning DVDs—the format heir to videotape—whose longevity has been scientifically demonstrated as fractionally that of videotape's.[8] The reality of increasingly shorter media format life spans across the history of moving image carriers (from film, to videotape, to digital and web-based platforms) makes the high value placed on content held on fragile, short-term, and near-dead media formats a paradox.

This last point reiterates the most undoubtedly important component of "XFR STN": migrating born-digital artists' works trapped on obsolete computer software and hardware. A chronological quandary, these are the most precarious media formats requiring the most immediate care and attention. And as a recognized leading entity in the field of digital and internet art, the New Museum affiliate Rhizome's crack squadron of digital preservation experts come to the exhibition's forefront with an ambitious plan to accommodate migration and emulation of already antiquated materials held on floppy, Jaz, and zip disks, and a host of other computing formats.

~~LIFE AND~~ DEATH AND THE DIGITAL SÉANCE

To conclude, I want to return to the morbid hauntological paradigm that Kneale's *The Stone Tape* addresses regarding media formats. Comparing the format obsolescence of all sorts of media to death is hardly a new perspective. The fact that videotape's binder, onto which signal information is magnetically encoded, is made up largely of ferric oxide (aka rust) even technologically invites this viewpoint. And, the fragility of digital supports as replacements for physical tape and film has lead many to suggest that much of what is created today—on the internet and with new digital technology—will ultimately become lost, imposing a "digital dark age" for historians studying our current age.

Having grown up in a funeral home, I often think that I unintentionally followed in my father's footsteps by becoming something of a funeral director for media. Indeed, analogies of death are ripe in this exhibition: arranging appointments with artists to send their material to a final resting place, releasing that material's spirit/signal from its physical bonds, etc. (Videotapes even come with their own coffin-like cases!) But, if critics and artists in the 1970s and '80s pointed to analog video's most distinct ontology as being its immediacy, its capability for real-time transmission, and its "live-ness," then perhaps the best way to understand "XFR STN" is as a life-giving act.[9] "XFR STN's" accessible engagement with now-antiquated technologies through gallery-centric transfer and preservation, via a host of public symposia and panel discussions, and by the porting of artworks to the internet, ultimately stands to ask: How did these works once live, and how can they live on?

Walter Forsberg

[1] Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 15.
[2] "Audio and Video Tape: An Industry Status Report," *Tape/Disc Business*, 1 August 1995.
[3] Tom Sherman, "Transvideo," republished in *Explosion in the Movie Machine: Essays and Documents on Toronto Artists' Film and Video*, ed. Chris Gehman, (Toronto, ON: The Images Festival and the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto, 2013), 73–9.

[4] Martha Gever, "Pressure Points: Video in the Public Sphere," in *Art Journal* 45.3 (1985), 238–43.
[5] Videofreex, *The Spaghetti City Video Manual* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 113.
[6] Murphy, William Thomas, *Television and video preservation 1997: A report on the current state of American television and video preservation: report of the Librarian of Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1997), n.p.
[7] Erika Balsom, "Original Copies: The Limited Edition in Film and Video," lecture delivered at Light Industry, Greenpoint, NY, April 23, 2013.
[8] Jennifer A. Wade and Michele Youket, "Characterizing Optical Disc Longevity at the Library of Congress," in *The Electronic Media Review* 1.1 (2012), 97–105.
[9] See: Bill Viola's tracing of video's pre-videotape roots and broadcast television in his essay, "The Porcupine and the Car"; Rosalind Krauss's critical investigation of the live video "loop" in her widely read essay, "Video: the Aesthetics of Narcissism"; and Marita Sturken's discussion of video's role in creating cultural memory and that relationship with its inherent aesthetic connotation of the immediate, instead of the past, in her essay, "The Politics of Video Memory: Electronic Erasures and Inscriptions."

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MWF

View of the shelf of U-matic videotapes in the MWF Video Club. Photo: Pam Payne. Courtesy Colab

During the winter of 1986, a small knot of artists opened a "salon" called the Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club in a tiny studio apartment on Houston Street near the Bowery. The apartment was to house a home video rental project. But it was different from the other video stores opening up around town then. We had only artists' tapes—nothing commercial, and nothing that'd ever been on TV.

The twin communications innovations of home video and cable TV were supposed to change everything for artists in the 1980s. Eager to reach a larger audience with more popularly accessible work, visual and performing artists turned to video in ever-increasing numbers.

It was from this moment of hope that the MWF distribution project was launched. It was also a response to art-world conditions. The artists who started MWF had been shut out of the few commercial and institutional outlets for artists' work. The ideology behind the MWF project was populist, and the intentions opportunist. Art should be accessible to as many people as possible, so we elected to sell videos at low prices directly to whoever wanted to buy them.

Artists' video was (and is) generally available only at high prices. This is largely an artifact of the decision by Leo Castelli Gallery in the 1970s to sell video as signed, limited edition artworks, along the lines of artists' books. Today MWF lists over a hundred tapes at consumer prices, between $20 and $50, in its online catalogue.

The paradigm of the limited edition has recently reasserted itself with a vengeance, however. Today, international art stars' video work sells for thousands as "single-channel installations." The situation still irks many artists. In 1999, RTMark sponsored a project called "Video Aktivist $29.95." This videotape called on people to illicitly tape artists' videos in galleries and forward them to RTMark, which would distribute bootleg copies for $29.95.

The parent organization of MWF was Collaborative Projects, aka Colab, a group of some forty artists that began meeting in 1977. In 1980, this group of shifting members pulled off two important exhibitions in New York, do-it-yourself blockbusters called the "Real Estate Show" (opened January 1) and the "Times Square Show" that summer. The first, in which a group of artists took over a vacant city-owned building in a protest exhibition, excited political artists and led to the formation of the ABC No Rio cultural center in the Lower East Side. In the much vaster "Times Square Show," Colab artists working under teams of artist curators made over a three-story building as a broke-down palace of art and installation, and it caught the attention of both the popular media and the art press.

These were followed by a number of other artist-organized mega-shows in the early '80s. Some were in Brooklyn, like the "Coney Island" show (forerunner of today's "hysterical society" action) and the Gowanus Memorial Artyard. In the East Village, there was the building-wide "Ninth Street Survival" show at CHARAS, and the "Ralston Farina Memorial" show at CUANDO. All of these big events created small sensations, generated popular interest in art that engaged social issues, and networked the NYC art community. Significantly, they also regularly included artists from the new wave of the graffiti movement, who came from the street.

Graffiti had first been seen in a formal gallery context at the Fashion Moda art space in the South Bronx. After the "Times Square Show," downtown venues—mainly nightclubs—vied to show graffiti artists, together with the nascent hip-hop culture of rap and breakdance. (Perhaps because of graphic reproducibility, graf artists were then in the lead of the hip-hop wave.) Charlie Ahearn's indie feature *Wild Style* (1982), with a climax filmed at the East River park amphitheater, represents the meeting of downtown hipsters and early hip-hop. The heady populist confluence of gallery, street, and club led to the East Village art scene of the mid-1980s, with venues like the Fun Gallery on 10th Street, Gracie Mansion, and the graf-friendly 51X on St. Mark's Place.

While Colab is known as the cauldron of the '80s big show, the group came into being because of the requirements of media work. Several members had participated as junior artists alongside SoHo heavyweights in the satellite broadcast projects of Liza Béar in the late '70s. These newbies were also making Super 8 films, and some started "punking out." Diego Cortez moved into the bubbling music scene in the Lower East Side and started haunting CBGBs with the star-crossed glamour-puss Anya Phillips. Amos Poe was already there. He and Ivan Kral documented the early CBs scene in *Blank Generation* (1976) and screened his feature T*he Foreigner* (1978) in a vacant lot at Cannes.

In 1978, the New Cinema screening house opened on St. Mark's Place. Here Colab filmmakers like Eric Mitchell, James Nares, John Lurie, Tina Lhotsky, Betsy Sussler, and Becky Johnston showed video transfers of their 8mm synch-sound feature films on an Advent projector. Subjects included terrorists, astronauts, Roman emperors, strippers, and disaffected butchers.

The New Cinema crowd, many of whom lived on East 4th Street near the NYC Men's Shelter, cleaved to a Warhol-tinged vision of beat life and glamorous pose. Other artists in Colab formed the All Color News (ACN), a documentary-oriented group working on public access cable TV, a new outlet for artists. These included the Ahearn twins, Charlie and John, the team of Scott and Beth B, Tom Otterness, Virge Piersol, and me. Together with Michael McClard and Coleen Fitzgibbon, ACN produced live cablecasts at Experimental Television Center (ETC) on 23rd Street, a low-cost commercial TV studio. One emergency cablecast featured our Congressman Ted Weiss. Clutching his messy briefcase under his arm, he spoke against the draconian criminal code called S-1 proposed by Congress during the European antiterrorist fever; this early move toward total state surveillance was defeated.

After Colab formed, All Color News dissolved. Soon *Potato Wolf* formed to make a cable TV show, a whimsical name assigned by first series producer Cara Perlman. *Potato Wolf* (PW) cleaved to an open, artist-driven, and eclectic mix of programming, most of it fictionally based, and parodic of the forms of mainstream television. PW often pre-taped at the Young Filmmakers studio on Rivington Street, but did most of their work live at the ETC studios. Shows like the memorably chaotic "Nightmare Call-In Theater" and "Call to Wobulate" frightened Jim Kladdach, the usually imperturbable manager of that venue. For the latter show, upstate hardware maven Terry Mohre plugged his homemade "wobulator" synthesizer directly into ETC's main board. Among PW's producers was the team of girlhood friends Ellen Cooper and Kiki Smith. They made *Cave Girls* (1982), a collaborative work of research, re-enactment, and creative anachronism about a prehistoric tribe of techno-savvy women. Scenes for this were taped in SoHo and filmed in New Jersey and in the weed-filled backyard of the new cultural center ABC No Rio.

Potato Wolf shared sensibility and some personnel with other artist-run cable TV series, most notably "Communications Update," a project run by Liza Béar, and the still extant *Paper Tiger Television* (PTTV). PTTV also adapted the practice of making live TV and for a while emulated the tacky painted paper look of *Potato Wolf* productions (an aesthetic which PW artists called "cardboard consciousness") as a backdrop to their critiques of contemporary media hosted by academics and cultural critics.

MWF was the last media project of "old Colab" before the membership turned over. As such, we could consolidate previous years of work for public access cable TV. Much of this work is included in the MWF catalogue under the category "Artists' Television." Other artists' cable shows of the period included Glenn O'Brien's late-'70s "TV Party." Hosted by the *Interview* writer, the show tapped the underground music and club milieu as it shaded into punk and new wave at bars like the Mudd Club. O'Brien's crew included Walter Stedding and Chris Stein in the band, and guests Debbie Harry, David Byrne, and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

The *Willoughby Sharp Show* was a more lavishly produced series, actually funded by Manhattan Cable. The show followed the avant-garde curator, journalist, and animateur into the dense cultural mix of mid-'80s nightclubs like Danceteria, Kamikaze, and Limelight, and their East Village counterparts Pyramid, 8BC, and Limbo. The show also featured clothing and jewelry designers, and art from the second wave of East Village galleries like Civilian Warfare, Piezo Electric, and James Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook's Ground Zero.

Colab and its projects had been sustained by funding from state art agencies. Though money contracted in the Reagan years, the MWF venture continued to put something into the pockets of artists, even if only nickels and dimes. By then, MWF represented work by once-inimical factions of Colab in its video catalogue. Soon other experimental film- and video-makers who had worked with Colab were persuaded to pitch their fruits into the pushcart. These included "Erotic Psyche," the neglected mystical erotic work Bradley Eros did with sequential collaborators Aline Mare and Jean Liotta. While we didn't distribute much from them, MWF occasionally showed work by the Naked Eye Cinema group, centered around Jack Waters and Peter Cramer, the managers of ABC No Rio.

Though MWF grew out of video art and artists' television, we also sold low-budget "artsy" narrative features, including at first some of the New Cinema productions. The documentary category included performances, readings, and art bands, most local to the East Village and Lower East Side. In addition to its distribution, MWF mounted frequent shows, theme-related video salons at various EV venues—Phil Sanders and Joanna Dawes's RYO, Bert Ball's Art & Commerce Gallery (in the premises; he was gone), Jon Gerstad Gallery on 1st Street, the 2B Gas Station, bOb ("Trailer Trash and Porn" night at ex-Rivington School-hand Jack Vengrow's bar on nearby Eldridge Street), the (old) Knitting Factory, and most recently at the now-defunct Scott Pfaffman Gallery.

In the late '80s, the most popular MWF titles were Nick Zedd's. Nick championed a group of filmmakers he called the Cinema of Transgression in his photocopied zine *Underground Film Journal*. This group worked in the East Village and was committed to narrative fiction filmmaking in the crowd-pleasing genres of crime, horror, and pornography.

Like the punk rock musicians, the Transgression cinema crowd made underground stars of themselves. Although most were men, the movement included Cassandra Stark and Tessa Hughes-Freeland. Punk singing diva Lydia Lunch spun elegant foul-mouthed rants and won Zedd's heart. His *Wild World of Lydia Lunch* (1983) is a kind of Super 8 love poem, albeit unrequited. Southern-born filmmaker Richard Kern's humor is callous and direct. His stark and startling short films, cleanly filmed Larry Clarkish vignettes of the low life, featured lots of drugs, guns, and chicks sucking tattooed cock. This led him to a photo gallery career and recent books with the Swiss art and sex publisher Taschen. *You Killed Me First* (1985), his collaboration with David Wojnarowicz, was shot and shown at Ground Zero on East 10th Street, and features performance artist Karen Finley as Lung Leg's ma (David is her pa). Zedd, crucially influenced by Jack Smith, continues to produce uncompromising hardcore art films. He recently published a picaresque journal of his tortured life, *Totem of the Depraved.*

MWF's art films and social documentary chart changes and upheaval in the neighborhood over the last twenty years and chronicle its bards, performers, and eclectic denizens. Franck Goldberg's early films exude the harsh realities of the pre-gentrification EV, as in his short piece on the killing of graffiti writer Michael Stewart—mourned by Madonna—by subway police. Phillipe Bonous and Marie Martine's *11th & B* was made during the early days of Life Cafe. It's a music video, really, including artists, local characters, and police on horseback during Operation Pressure Point, all cut to soundtracks by Suicide and the False Prophets. Jim C, who ran a gallery near the Rivington School, shot footage of the DIY gallery hubbub and club hijinks, as well as a classic 1984 reading by Miguel Piñero. Arleen Schloss's *Art Around the Park* (1992) documents a creative and joyous event—the encirclement of beleaguered Tompkins Square Park with paintings during a time of strife around that turf.

MWF has also collected video describing the artistic subculture of Lower East Side squatters and their resistance to gentrification. Clayton Patterson's videos of Tompkins Square during the police riots of 1988 and the Tent City and "Dinkinsville" that sprang up afterward capture key moments in the district's recent past. Goldberg's angry documentary *How To Squash a Squat* (1990) records the heavy-handed eviction of artists living in city-owned abandoned buildings by NYC police. And Rik Little's *Home Invasion* documents the climactic violent eviction of the 13th Street squatters in 1996.

ABC No Rio inspired the creation of the No Se No social club and Nada Gallery, which spun off the Rivington School. This group of sculptors built a succession of huge collaborative junk metal constructions on the vacant lots they squatted. The group was scorned by the New York art world for their rowdy drunken ways, so very little was written on them. By default then, MWF has principal documents, like sculptor cowboy Ray Kelley and Ed Higgins sitting around jawing during the "99 Nights" performance events shared between No Se No and Storefront for Art & Architecture (1984). And, finally, the Neoist artist Monty Cantsin filmed the bulldozer destruction of the Rivington School sculpture garden. The most substantial of these documents is Rik Little's 1999 work exploring the group, a carefully researched personal retrospective. Little also shot an extraordinary tape of cowboy Ray and the painter Richard Hambleton in the Gas Station 2B days before its demolition. The reflective comments of these two old hands are almost totally inaudible over the sounds of construction.

Once the playground of junkies and muggers, and the seedbed of New York City's creative bohemia, this neighborhood's real estate has become favored by the young bourgeoisie. The color and texture of the East Village has been radically altered. The Houston Street building with the studio apartment was sold to a large well-heeled bank. The eviction went ahead, okayed by a crooked judge (now serving time—small consolation), and MWF lost its Manhattan home. The club relocated out to Staten Island where the idea of an extra-institutional independent creative sphere is pretty foreign.

MWF came back to the EV to mount two summers of screening events on East 1st Street in '00 and '01, really good ones with Walter Wright and friends, new music and media makers from Boston, a Henry Hills night, a Rockets Redglare tribute, and a night of custom-made image machines and programs. It was all free and visible from the street through a plate glass window. But the EV's bistro-bound crowd passed by without even looking in.

NYC is a new world it seems, and DIY doesn't seem to cut it. We lost a bundle on the 1st Street shows, but with so little capital and a part-time work ethic, MWF has been able to persist, even if in a sometimes Frankensteinian state of hibernation. Despite falling Bush-era sales, we may even last out the digital turn. Right now, MWF has gone retro. We're archiving the more than one thousand tapes that have sedimented from the distribution project, seeking to do our part to save the legacy of the area's recent past. MWF Video Club continues in its dual purpose of dissemination of aesthetic media and information and its preservation.

Alan W. Moore, with editorial assistance by Michael Carter
July 2003

MWF
MONDAY/WEDNESDAY/FRIDAY
VIDEO CLUB

MWF Video Club logo, designed by Mary Campbell, ca. 1986. Courtesy Colab

WHEN YOU'RE A JET, YOU'RE A JET ALL THE WAY

ANDREA CALLARD & COLEEN FITZGIBBON

We met in the early days of Collaborative Projects, Inc. (aka Colab) while making and showing art and films. As a group of artists working together, we kicked in small amounts of our own money to make things like *X Magazine*. We both received individual fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and we knew our group could have a bank of art as well as its own money. We developed a way to work together more closely when we became officers of the group and we pushed Colab toward a democratic structure. We wrote the documents and incorporated Colab as a 501(c)(3), a legal not-for-profit. Richard Savitsky, an entertainment lawyer who also worked for Yoko Ono, was Colab's lawyer. There was enough faith among the group to share seed money and collectively fund projects.

During 1978–79, Colab began a weekly public access cable TV show called the *All Color News*, broadcasting from Jim Chladek's ETC Studios on 23rd Street. ETC was later renamed Metro-Access Inc. and then became Manhattan Neighborhood Network. Individuals claimed a time slot in advance, then a group would come together to show films from the streets or write scripts and act, videotape, edit, and enjoy the social interaction. The *All Color News* was the earliest iteration followed by *Potato Wolf*. Both were live TV, or mixtures of live TV and pre-recorded segments made with Super 8mm film, video, slides, and hand-painted sets. *Red Curtain* followed (1979–83), a way to show more "theatrical" artist films and tapes completed outside the TV studio. As members flowed in and out, new programs were created and collaboration evolved to include more member artists.

Alan W. Moore, Sophie Vieille, and Michael Carter started the MWF Club in the mid-'80s with Colab funds to distribute Colab programs. MWF expanded to include many other artists. About ten years ago, we each began archiving and digitizing our own early work. We wondered what happened after the "Times Square Show." We began digitizing Colab TV tapes from Moore's massive storage in Staten Island.

At first, archiving seemed like a way to see the content, the context, of work we had made, and to see Colab cable TV made by the larger group. In fact, we found ourselves watching things we had not seen before and seeing people who came to Colab after us in new, fuller ways. We had not really known the cast of artist members who later developed a set of TV shows as a social group, with nutty narratives and costume dramas around social issues. We remembered Mitch Corber re-editing Colab material in a crazy, fragmented way. Now the material looks fresh and inventive. We look forward to sharing this all with you.
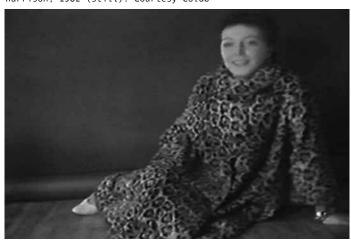

Sally White singing on unknown *Potato Wolf* TV show, 1984 (still). Courtesy Colab

Mitch Corber, *KGB*, ca. 1984 (still). Sound, color, 7 min. Part of the exhibition "Moieties," curated by Mary McFerran, 1984. Courtesy Colab

Flowchart by Andrea Callard, ca. 2006. Courtesy Colab

Potato Wolf TV show "The Birthday Show," produced by Julie Harrison, 1982 (still). Courtesy Colab

Sophie Vieille (aka Sophie VDT) in *Cave Girls* by Kiki Smith and Ellen Cooper, 1982 (still). Sound, color, 28 min. Courtesy Colab

I HAVE NO MEMORY OF MY APPEARANCE...

WALTER ROBINSON

The early 1980s were a golden age of public access TV, an era when the information superhighway was still science fiction, before iPhones and YouTube and all the rest of it—a time when there was actually something on worth watching.

Public access cable had some brilliant if obscure stuff. I remember the insouciant, Buddha-simple *Blue Bootie*, for which some serene East Villager simply trained his camera out his second-story window on the cute young women passing by on the sidewalk below. Mesmerizing.
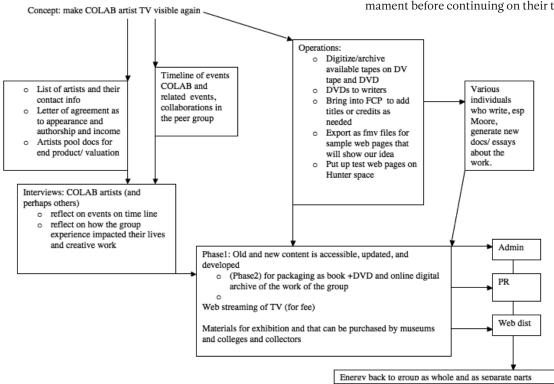
I remember the brilliantly hard-working syncretism of *Concrete TV*, which featured a cacophonous montage of car crashes, karate kicks, pinups, and all sorts of other action movie highlights. A better waker-upper than your morning coffee.

And I remember *Potato Wolf*, the surrealistically named variety show produced, scripted, and performed by the ragtag bunch of young artists associated (more or less) with the early '80s art cooperative Collaborative Projects.

So we'd been watching the stuff our whole lives: *Captain Kangaroo*, *Soupy Sales*; we knew how it was done inside-out and upside-down; Jack Benny, Johnny Carson; we could make our own television because, as reality TV has proven with a vengeance since, anybody can. Still, it was a big deal for a motley gang of half-baked artists to roll into a rudimentary television studio and at the drop of a hat produce a thirty-minute-long live broadcast. It was *La Bohème* in a linoleum space on East 23rd Street, with cardboard sets, homemade costumes, and a pantheon of loudmouthed stars who were too young to realize how beautiful they were. It was radical politics and absurdist comedy, fervid and amateur, and not altogether sure whether it should pretend to be real or not.

The other day, I got a Facebook alert from a friend who runs Bullet Space way over on East 3rd Street announcing that they were going to show an old *Potato Wolf* episode and that I was in it. It was thirty years ago, and I hastened down to take a look, consumed by curiosity about my own past, since I had no memory of taking part in the broadcast. It was some kind of skit about an anarchist insurrection—the noise of the gallery opening drowned out what I imagine would have been a largely notional libretto. But the staging was exceptionally fine, marked by a telephone and surveillance room fabricated from painted cardboard. I played both a straight-laced newscaster, with tie and careful comb-over, and a jailed anarchist, with a red bandana headband screaming protests from behind bars. Other players included Mitch Corber, Gregory Lehmann, Cara Perlman, Christy Rupp, Kiki Smith, Jim Sutcliffe, Sally White, and Alan W. Moore, who I believe spent the entire show playing a drunk, passed out with his head lying on a table.

Most of all, I was pleased to see how young we all were, television stars without pedigree who would briefly sparkle in the cable firmament before continuing on their travels into the light.

THE PRINCE OF THE STANTON STREET VIDEO PALACE

MITCH CORBER

The curse was being creative. Creativity can be a hidden vault, a screen. I found creativity isn't everything. Socializing and sizing up your fellow student/artist, being liked, that's the plan; heels clicking to a step, believing in mutual futures . . . these were things I could not visualize nor actualize from a darkened room in my mind.

For me, there is one stepping-stone that stretches as long as the River Nile, and that is public access cable TV. I have produced three cable arts series since 1978. Namely, *Original Wonder* (1978), *Grogus* (1980–81), and the current *Poetry Thin Air* (1989–present), and helped produce Colab's *Potato Wolf* (in which series I got married on live TV in '84).

In '78, *Original Wonder* had me videoing everyone who came by 10 Stanton Street (off the Bowery)—my one-bedroom abode that became the Video Palace, with live video recordings the moment you set foot in the joint. There was no pay phone, no buzzer in front, so you had to shout up. I'd drop down the key in a sock. My sometimes-companion Sally White, and later wife, was the perfect hostess to my friends.

In *Original Wonder*, I videoed myself many times, hoping that an ad-lib monologue a little stoned would be the achievement for the day. About 30 percent of these attempts did carry through to a final video or cable show. The rest found itself on the "cutting-room floor."

MY FIRST CABLE SHOW

Being a UCLA film/TV grad, I focused on capturing East Village artists and poets, plus my own stuff in my studio. I was now able to capture live improvs, and was equipped with half-inch reel-to-reel Panasonic video editing decks to quickly turn new footage into cable possibilities.

I became part talent scout, and gobbled up friends one after another in my cable schemes. Whether interview, or magic trick, or conversation, or impromptu theater, whether song or poem, I was ready to capture everyone with a wide-angle lens handed down to me by Willoughby Sharp. You could say I was obsessed, and at times avoided by those who couldn't quite get my act.

Video artists' portable arsenal was the PortaPak in the late '70s–early '80s. PortaPaks, with their numbing weight and bulk (unlike the portable ease of Super 8 cameras), surely gave one pause before going out and launching a video shoot on the streets of New York. I persisted, though, because I believed that multimedia was the real avant-garde.

Video suffered the stigma of a bastard second cousin to the medium of film at that time. I also shot the smaller format Super 8, not 16mm. However awkward it may have been, the medium of video did provide things that Super 8 film could not: (1) the ability to record up to ten times longer than a Super 8 cartridge; (2) the ability to achieve effortless synch-sound; and (3) instant video playback—no need to send your footage to be developed at a lab.

Colab's new three-quarter-inch video editing equipment was the important next step. Sony's newly streamlined editing decks (with auto-controller) far surpassed old half-inch open-reel clunkers. I soon became one of the several Colab video artists who volunteered to house the valued editing decks. As long as I agreed to provide most of our waking hours per week to a host of ravenous Colab video artists, I could certainly sharpen my video editing skills....

Redacted from Mitch Corber, "How I became NY Poetry Video 'Kingpin,'" in Patterson, et al., eds., *Captured* (2005), 423–8.

REMEMBERING *POTATO WOLF*

CARA PERLMAN

I wanted Colab to have a live show, to project a more intimate part of our spirit. We were a tight-knit group of diverse talents and we knew how to function in small spontaneous arrangements. We were clever, talkative, silly, sincere.

I came up with the title for the show when I was a bike messenger. Riding a bike was a good way to consider things. One of my deliveries was to someone with a similar name. I nudged it a little into something more mismatched and hence *Potato Wolf*.

At that time, being in a TV studio was very exotic and considerably more mainstream than most of my encounters. But once we got rolling, it was playtime. I was learning how to express myself in front of other people. It was a chance to loosen up and project my ideas, be entertaining, even illuminating, try things out. I wasn't very invested in being the leader. The idea was to set up a give-and-take situation. I was laying the ground for an opportunity in which we could all expand our horizons and have fun, go every which way as long as we went live.

Potato Wolf logo, designed by Becky Howland (name by Cara Perlman), 1979. Courtesy Colab

DIGITAL NEWBORNS

PHILIP SANDERS & JOANNA DAWE

The history of RYO starts partly as a polemic and partly as an alternative to an alternative.

In the early '80s, when one of us applied for an artist's studio at PS1 with computer art, the application was dismissed with the question, "Aren't computers a part of the military industrial complex?" How was an Apple II, a tape recorder, and a television in a storefront in the East Village, in any remote way, connected to the military industrial complex? Misunderstanding, fear, and dislike of technology were fairly widespread at the time...

Since it was so hard to see or participate in technological art shows, we decided that someone would have to start a place and it might as well be us. We called the gallery RYO. The name came from the phrase "ryo atari" in the game of Go, a warning to your opponent that means, "already completed." So in 1984, RYO began with a computer installation and an ad in the *Village Voice* that simply read "West Store 1984." We then invited everyone we knew and put up a lot of posters.

Formally, RYO was a not-for-profit artists' space in the East Village from 1984–92. It provided a place where artists who created art and technology could exhibit their work. Experimental work based on technologies was encouraged and included film, video, computer, book arts, mechanical, optical, installation, performance, and conceptual, political, social, aesthetic, and psychological works. We were not focused on running a commercial gallery, but on creating a place where artists and people in general could investigate interrelated aesthetic, technical, and social issues. It was one of the few places available for artists working with technology to show their work in a dedicated DIY space in the East Village—a mini-Bauhaus with an East Village sensibility. RYO sponsored a number of theme shows and was a center for artists and viewers interested in art and technology. It supported interactive computing art during the field's early development, including programmers, engineers, and artists. It showed inter-media art performance, digital cartoon art, digital and analog processed video, dance, construction, mechanical art, installation....

RYO was in a half-basement storefront and openings were pretty informal. One time, we made it onto Mr. Sexy's Atomic Hot List, an underground newsletter for EV cognoscenti (put out by Aristides Duval). A bevy of scene lovers showed up at the door, took a look at the fairly funky nature of the place with its black painted tin ceiling and crumbling plaster walls, and paused. Someone took a deep breath, exclaimed "I love it!," and everyone trooped in. They were later convinced that the middle room, a kitchen where an inebriated friend was holding forth from the claw-foot bathtub, was in fact the VIP lounge....

RYO advertisement, *Village Voice*, 1984. Courtesy Phil Sanders

MWF GOES ONLINE

PAM PAYNE

I knew the MWF Video Club in the 1980s when I lived in the East Village, socializing and collaborating with fellow video artists. At some point in the '90s, Terry Mohre and I began hosting the web version of the MWF Club catalogue. A relic for posterity, it can still be found on my website at brickhaus.com/amoore. From 1999–2001, Scott Pfaffman offered his gallery space to MWF at 35 East 1st Street. There, Alan, Michael, myself, and others produced a series of screenings and exhibitions. We showcased MWF's video collection as well as new works from Colab members and satellite participants (see brickhaus.com/pixelnation for a record of these events). As time went on, the fragility of the videotape collection became an increasing concern. In 2007, I obtained a Swing Space grant from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council to transfer a selection of the three-quarter-inch videos to mini-DV. Significant among this group of tapes is the *Potato Wolf* cablecast of "The Real Estate Show," documenting Colab's 1980 art exhibition in the NYC-owned/abandoned Delancey Street building, which led to the establishment of ABC No Rio, the now-renowned center for music, art, and activism. I obtained a second Swing Space grant for MWF in 2008/9, which enabled me to remaster and produce DVDs of a few more of the titles. The 2008/9 grant also provided a venue for the lively resurgence of a few Colab-affiliated activities! For information on these and other activities, see brickhaus.com/mwfclub.

Alan W. Moore and poster for the "Real Estate Show" on *Potato Wolf*, 1980. Courtesy Colab

CAN'T REPEAT!

FRANZ VILA

Video art was a phrase that referred to the art of artists, mostly in the '80s, who used video as a medium, due to the advent of accessible portable video gear, for expressing themselves and conveying meaning.

I consider video art the charcoal of the digital art era.

The exploratory process was characterized by an interest in the technical potential of hardware, software, and the process alike. The idea was not to do film in video, but to uncork personal and intimate evolutions that made the work look like public voyeurism or an imagination high as though on a psychedelic trip.

Nam June Paik pioneered the manipulation of hardware as a means to obtain visual results not yet reached at the time. I particularly enjoyed his *Wobbulator* when I was given a residency to do my own work at the Experimental Television Center.

Some, like Juan Downey, devoted their interest to the quality and innovation of the image through editing and processing. While Gary Hill developed very sophisticated interactive pieces of great taste and elegance.

This kind of work found a niche in galleries and museums. But video art, as such, did not. Leo Castelli bought one of my music mini-docs, *Art on Balloons* (1983), in his joint effort with Sonnabend—the only known collection of video art at the time. It ended up in Danceteria, and I was amazed when I saw thousands of people dancing high, drunk, or excited while my piece was blowing their minds even more. Video has remained a frequent ingredient in my artwork—even as a surveillance item, as in a later joint installation with Shalom Gorewitz.

After-hours Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club (MWF) was the one establishment to collect the largest variety of video—and not only video art—in all its flavors, and that's how I ended up being one of its members and unconditional supporters.

While partnering with Dieter Froese, who specialized in video installations and fine video processing, I edited three pieces of video that became part of MWF. They are an example of the intimacy and boldness of video art, and my take on the hypocrisy of mainstream sex, where there is a fake division between the privacy of sex and the wide advertisement of porno.

Sex is an animal, mammal, biped human thing—the cling of joy and reproduction. Most people prefer the joy to the reproduction. Therefore, porno is the commercialization of the joy, but the joy itself cannot be criminalized. The crime is punishable, the addiction treatable; sex must be respected.

All of us use our genitals for peeing. Joy comes second, but for many people it is indistinct, and reproduction is last. We pee more often than we beget kids. The joy is political and religions are managers of that department. They penalize sexual joy and try to dismantle it, leaving sex as reproductive and excretory only.
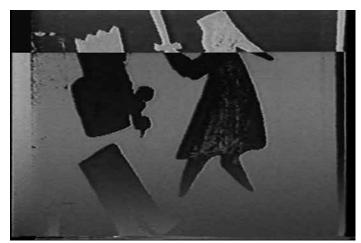
VIDEOS PERDU:
A CLASSIFIED AD

ILONA GRANET

This is not a submission about the *Potato Wolf* series for the "XFR STN" catalogue, but instead a call in the wild for a segment of *Potato Wolf* hosted or organized by Christy Rupp and lost or hiding for how many years? In it, I, Ilona Granet, appear as the Weather Reporter with the dismal declaration of the "End of the World" in song: "Where's Albania? Slipped into Armenia," etc. The song first appeared in a performance *Is it War or is it Work, or are we all waiting for the Good Fairy?* at Irwin School, NYC, organized by Lucy R. Lippard sometime around 1980. It was a roaring and dramatic song never written down and only recorded that one time. Can I ransom it? Otherwise, you can see a milder and more tongue-in-cheek performance with Peter Fend (on another *Potato Wolf* show), and another with Julie Harrison and friends.

A second, lost (original, and only) tape made with Susan Britton and her crew was made on the Gold Coast at Yacht Haven, where we puttered around on a small powerboat sharing all known facts about the yacht owners and their yachts as we passed by them—moored and docked, or on a cruise or in a race. I was introduced as the Queen of Belgium as we docked at the nearby yacht club. Is this too in someone's secret collection? We will pay!
Thanks,
Ilona Granet

Julie Harrison, *Cartoon Tape*, 1984 (still). Sound, color,
4:30 min. Part of the exhibition "Moieties," curated by Mary
McFerran, 1984. Courtesy Colab

CINEMA OF TRANSGRESSION MANIFESTO (1985)

NICK ZEDD

We, who have violated the laws, commands, and duties of the avant-garde, i.e., to bore, tranquilize, and obfuscate through a fluke process dictated by practical convenience, stand guilty as charged. We openly renounce and reject the entrenched academic snobbery which erected a monument to laziness known as structuralism and proceeded to lock out those filmmakers who possessed the vision to see through this charade.

We refuse to take their easy approach to cinematic creativity, an approach which ruined the underground of the '60s when the scourge of the film school took over. Legitimizing every mindless manifestation of sloppy movie-making undertaken by a generation of misled film students, the dreary media arts centers, and geriatric cinema critics have totally ignored the exhilarating accomplishments of those in our rank—such underground invisibles as [Nick] Zedd, [Richard] Kern, [Tommy] Turner, [Richard] Klemann, [Manuel] DeLanda, [Bradley] Eros and [Aline] Mare, and DirectArt Ltd, a new generation of filmmakers daring to rip out of the stifling straightjackets of film theory in a direct attack on every value system known to man.

We propose that all film schools be blown up and all boring films never be made again. We propose that a sense of humor is an essential element discarded by the doddering academics, and further, that any film which doesn't shock isn't worth looking at. All values must be challenged. Nothing is sacred. Everything must be questioned and reassessed in order to free our minds from the faith of tradition. Intellectual growth demands that risks be taken and changes occur in political, sexual, and aesthetic alignments no matter who disapproves. We propose to go beyond all limits set or prescribed by taste, morality, or any other traditional value system shackling the minds of men. We pass beyond and go over boundaries of millimeters, screens, and projectors to a state of expanded cinema.

We violate the command and law that we bore audiences to death in rituals of circumlocution and propose to break all the taboos of our age by sinning as much as possible. There will be blood, shame, pain, and ecstasy, the likes of which no one has yet imagined. None shall emerge unscathed. Since there is no afterlife, the only hell is the hell of praying, obeying laws, and debasing yourself before authority figures, the only heaven is the heaven of sin, being rebellious, having fun, fucking, learning new things, and breaking as many rules as you can. This act of courage is known as transgression. We propose transformation through transgression—to convert, transfigure, and transmute into a higher plane of existence in order to approach freedom in a world full of unknowing slaves.

Nick Zedd's "Manifesto of the Cinema of Transgression" was first published in *The Underground Film Bulletin #4*, September 1985. It is posted at: ubu.com/film/transgression.

FILM TO TAPE

TESSA HUGHES-FREELAND

At the time when Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club (MWF) emerged, I was fully committed to programming, making, and writing about film. The New York Film Festival Downtown founded by Ela Troyano and myself in 1984 had become a showcase for the work of many avant-garde and underground filmmakers downtown. These filmmakers were primarily producing short films. A wave of real estate gentrification, which identified one as either living in Loisaida or the East Village followed rapidly on the heels of the explosion of East Village art galleries. In this explosive art frenzy, film was only tangentially embraced. However, those who did embrace film, not so strangely, happened to be progressive programmers from Berlin. At the time of MWF's inception, a selection of films from this festival had been touring throughout Germany, and were already beginning to enjoy international exposure.

Throughout the early '80s, several of these filmmakers had started to self-distribute videotapes of their films, often advertising them through self-produced fanzines as well as selling them to independent video rental stores. The tapes were usually compilations of several shorts on one VHS tape. VHS had become the dominant consumer format over Beta I and II, and transfers were not particularly cheap. It was necessary to make one expensive film to three-quarter-inch master and then strike multiple VHS copies from that. Nobody actually owned a tele-cinechain transfer machine, so the video part of Rafik Film & Video (formerly O.P. Studios) began to take off. Not only did Rafik make transfers, but also had editing suites for rent, with late-night rates available for those who never woke before noon. Before long, the use of these suites transformed from a place to compile films onto one master, to actually being used to edit film that had been transferred straight to tape before editing. An unknown factor then was just how this was the start of a technological snowball whose velocity would change the face of filmmaking and every other method of artistic production imaginable.

As proposed by Alan W. Moore, MWF was an opportunity to have otherwise hard-to-distribute films distributed. I had just finished *Rhonda Goes To Hollywood* (1985), which only existed on tape, so this seemed like an idea full of promise. Now, years later, MWF has some rare gems within its catalogue that cannot be found anywhere else. The digitization of these and other pieces will help provide research and exhibition materials of an increasingly obsolete downtown culture.

COLAB TV AND THE MWF VIDEO CLUB

MARY MCFERRAN

I met Alan W. Moore at ABC No Rio one night in the early 1980s, and he invited me to join Colab's artist cable TV show, *Potato Wolf*. It sounded like great fun but I was more interested in closed circuit video at the time. When *Potato Wolf* lost its public access cable slot, we developed a new video project called "Hundred Year Old TV" that hosted closed circuit TV shows in nonconventional spaces. One venue was a Laundromat on Ludlow Street. If you brought your laundry, you could attend the show for free. We set up monitors on top of the washing machines and showed artist videotapes. I remember that I showed my *Homage to May 19th* (1984) video and there were many more artists in the mix, including Hank Linhart, Lily Lack, Dara Birnbaum, Mitch Corber, Betsy Newmann, Matthew Geller, Julie Harrison, Cecelia Condit, Bradley Eros, and Aline Mare. We later hosted a video show in a beauty parlor on 4th Avenue. For *Beauty and the TV*, the vanity tables and beauty chairs supported video monitors and decks.

We did a good amount of public relations for these shows, always submitting to the *Village Voice*'s highlighted event for the week and mounting posters on the street around town. We always had a great turnout, including artists who worked in other mediums. To be able to show the tapes seamlessly without changing reels, we would collect the three-quarter-inch video masters from the artists and then make compilation reels at Film Video Arts (FVA), then located on Rivington Street, or if someone had a three-quarter-inch video deck, we could do it at their place. (I think Albert DiMartino had one.) We also rented video monitors from FVA for the exhibitions. Colab would pay small artist fees to the artists and fund the FVA expenses for the compilation edit, as well as the rental fee for the monitors.

Alan eventually had the idea that we could create a business for distributing the tapes. He called it the Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club (MWF). I think initially there were actual screenings at his apartment on Houston Street on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights. But the big thing was to get the tapes into distribution. Some of the artists we contacted were a bit nervous (maybe suspicious too) about giving up copies of their work. The whole idea of distribution was very novel then, so we had to persuade the artists that this was to their benefit. Anyway, it wasn't like there were so many other ways to get your video work out there, so many gave in. This was in the early days, before YouTube and Vimeo. Alan was always very committed to getting fees for the artists and it was always a pleasant surprise to get a $30 check in the mail from MWF.

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

LIZA BÉAR

Communications Update cable TV series, spring 1982 (stills). Segment title: "A Matter of Facts"; written, directed, and produced by Eric Mitchell; in collaboration with Squat Theatre, NY, based on their play "Mr Dead & Mrs Free"; executive producer: Liza Béar

Klara Palotai in *Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free*, 1982. Courtesy Squat Theatre

Stephan Balint in *Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free*, 1982. Courtesy Squat Theatre

Boris Major and Stephan Balint in *Mr. Dead & Mrs. Free*, 1982. Courtesy Squat Theatre

Cover of the first issue of the Colab-sponsored publication, *X Motion Picture Magazine*, edited by Betsy Sussler (Volume 1, Number 1, December 1977). Courtesy Colab

WHEN THINGS GET ROUGH ON EASY STREET

JOSEPH NECHVATAL

Static vibrating video was the perverse idea for my video *When Things Get Rough on Easy Street*. I got the idea when I first presented *When Things Get Rough on Easy Street* as a large photo blowup in 1981, in a show called "The End of the World," which had originally started out as an eleven-by-fourteen-inch graphite on paper drawing in 1980.

At the time, I was interested in processing my small scratchy gray drawings through the magnifying lens of reproductive technology and its presentational modes. In 1982, Howard Halle, then curator of the gallery at The Kitchen, arranged for a show there titled after my photomural. For the show, I videotaped this drawing and a few of my other drawings (not moving the fixed camera à la Andy Warhol), and exhibited the videos on various monitors as well as a large projection (which was huge for the time).

Sometime between 1984 and 1986, when I was working with the composer Rhys Chatham on our "XS: The Opera" project, where I used very large projections of drawings for the set, I had the idea to add Chatham's almost static, but intense, Guitar Trio music onto the master videotape. This tape was aired as part of the Colab *Potato Wolf* cable television series. (The Nechvatal-Chatham collaboration "XS" was presented at the Dannheisser Foundation in 1984.)

Ovid is a long puppet show that I staged for a video camera. Using stop-action, I animated the central figure of Lazarus, who I had covered in Xeroxes of my drawings after purchasing him at a Dominican voodoo magic shop downstairs from me on Ludlow Street. This Lazarus figure went on to star in many of my large early computer-robotic paintings. I built the sound track for *Ovid* around Jane Smith's reading of Ovid's epic poem "Metamorphosis." I have gone on to use a bit of the *Ovid* soundtrack in my more recent audio work "viral symphOny" (2006–08).

All of the video sections on *When Things Get Rough on Easy Street*, *Ovid*, and other shorts were produced (and reproduced) in a certain context of collaborative distribution idealism. Myself, and many other artists, were interested in the distributive capacity of art based in reproduction, inspired by a 1968 essay "The Dematerialization of Art" by John Chandler and Lucy R. Lippard, which argued that Conceptualism had a politically transformative aspect. The other inescapable text at the time was "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," by Walter Benjamin. My interest in Colab's Fluxus-like low-priced multiples (the A. Moore Stores and the Artists Direct Mail Catalogue), newsprint publishing (*X Motion Picture Magazine*, *Spanner*, and the later independent *Bomb*), No Wave film production and screening, video and cable TV (*Potato Wolf* and MWF Video Club), and audiocassette publishing (*Tellus Audio Cassette Magazine*) came from my belief in the capacity of politically charged collaborative distribution ideas.

James Chance performing at the *X Motion Picture Magazine* benefit, ca. 1978. Courtesy Colab

ANXIETY AT THE "PLAY" BUTTON

NEIL ZUSMAN

A *Fusion Arts Presentation, Time Witness* (both 1986). Is this the stuff I wanted to forget? Old and dull and slow? It's the stuff I've forgotten anyway. This was once my life. I can only listen and watch my old releases when I unpack them from the shelves I've kept them on in the sixteen places I've lived in since 1977.

Moving boxes of video, audiotapes, floppies, and cassettes up and down stairs, twice on sixth-floor walkups, all because I knew they might rot unless shelved. They were once my life. I am the procrastination artist—a suspected hoarder. I'll probably rework *Time Witness*, but that's what I said twenty-seven years ago! I'm glad I handed Shalom Neuman the tape I had shot (and edited in-camera) of the 1986 Fusion Show on Rivington Street because he needed it. But I didn't even remember that I had recorded it.

"XFR STN" is a great idea, but I get superstitious around my own transfers. I'm just getting started in 2013. You need to be lucky. I've learned what I can about the process. I paid Bill Seery of Standby to bake one of my twenty-minute U-Matics because I didn't think I could do it and I still don't know if it's survived. (Come on Bill!) One of the performers I worked with in that 1986 videotape hasn't survived. During my transfer process, I'll go through the many rituals of cleaning and setting up because I know I may only get one pass at running the tape through the machine before the mechanism tears it up or leaves it in an unplayable state. How best to calibrate? Even though the deck was just working, I always run a test tape at the start of each session just in case the deck is suddenly going to chew things up.

I love the frozen snow, the analog sounds I put on tape. Why did I hit the record button when I did? What was I thinking then and can I honor those thoughts now with digital formats and maturity? Alan W. Moore thinks we all ought to have the opportunity to see what we set out to do. Thanks Alan. Mind-boggling.

Poster for the Colab-based "Income & Wealth" exhibition, February 3, 1979. Courtesy Colab

Call-in number for All Color News, ca. 1978 (still). Courtesy Colab

Joseph Nechvatal plays guitar as Leonard Abrams emcees the live show at the Inaugural Reaction, 1980. Photo: Tom Warren. Courtesy Colab

Colab meeting at Peter Fend's Broadway loft, 1983. Photo: Albert DiMartino. Courtesy Colab

Kiki Smith and Ellen Cooper, *Cave Girls*, 1982 (still). Sound, color, 28 min. Left to right: Ilona Granet, Kiki Smith, Cara Brownell, Julie Harrison, Virge Piersol, Ellen Cooper, Marnie Greenholtz. Photo: Teri Slotkin. Courtesy Colab

SPIRAL VIDEO: MWF AND THE EAST VILLAGE UNDERGROUND, 1987–2003

MICHAEL CARTER

My involvement with the Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club (MWF) dates from about 1987 or '88. I knew Alan W. Moore from his brief tenure as art editor of the *East Village Eye*, to which I had contributed a couple of articles—most notably on David Wojnarowicz's painting exhibition at Gracie Mansion in 1986—and less directly from his involvement with ABC No Rio and Colab. As a fledgling performance artist (though my first billing was literally as a "bullshit artist" at Club Armageddon) in the early to mid-'80s, I was part of a burgeoning cadre of club performers who careened nightly between venues like No Rio and No Se No (both on Rivington Street) in the Lower East Side, and Limbo Lounge and 8BC in the East Village. Later, it was venues like Hotel Amazon and Fusion Arts in the Lower East Side and Darinka, 2B/The Gas Station, and Dixon Place in the East Village. This multifaceted and multidisciplinary group drew upon and freely mixed musical, literary, dance, theater, cabaret, film, and conceptual art performance, and often participated in each other's works and visions. Video documentation of almost all of these artists' works were listed in MWF's distribution catalogue.

I was also the editor and infrequent publisher of an East Village zine called *redtape*, which published static visual documents by many of these performers as well as plums, and yes a few stinkers, from the overflowing cauldron (cynics might say cesspool) of gallery artists, comic artists, poets, and fiction writers primarily located in the East Village and Lower East Side. In addition, I was writing articles about art, performance, and music for other publications like the *Eye* and *Cover* magazine, promoting performance shows at clubs like Danceteria and later Hotel Amazon, and fronting the Vacuum Bag, a rock band that crossed over into multimedia performance hijinks. In those pre-internet, pre-Facebook days, I was a little like a lightning rod that was constantly connecting to widely varied groups of artists/performers, including the Rivington School, the Cinema of Transgression (whose leading lights were Nick Zedd, Richard Kern, and Tommy Turner), and what would later become Naked Eye Cinema (centered around Kembra Pfahler, Peter Cramer and Jack Waters, and Bradley Eros). As a consequence of these varied involvements, I was also on friendly terms with a number of video documentarians of these scenes, including David Blair, Jim C. [Cornwell], Mitch Corber, Marie Martine, Clayton Patterson, Arleen Schloss, Willoughby Sharp, and others.

In addition to these mostly nocturnal activities (and often nocturnally as well), I worked freelance in what was quickly becoming a dying industry as a typographic proofreader. (Alan also moonlighted in this industry as a typesetter.) Depending on one's perspective, the Tompkins Square riot of August 6–7, 1988, signaled either the high- or low-water point of the Lower East Side. The economy certainly was in the toilet, and it was during that time that I started working for Alan and MWF to fuel my nightly forays into darkness and light. Although Alan was already distributing the Cinema of Transgression anthology and works by a number of these artists or videographers, I was pleased to reach out to many of them with the aim of expanding the MWF catalogue's scope and breadth. I developed new titles (like Turner's and Wojnarowicz's *Where Evil Dwells* trailer [1985], in which I had a bit part), and worked with commercial retail outlets (remember Tower Records and Kim's Video?) and wholesale arteries like Facets in Chicago, and acted as a hands-on attaché to video and visual artists in real time, as well as all-around factotum and fetch.

These activities became more vital after Alan moved the operation to Staten Island, first using his tiny one-room loft on East Houston Street as office and pied-à-terre, and later, after he moved the entire operation to Staten Island [in 1993]. For me, this involved frequent, sometimes late night sojourns on the ferry. As with the typographic industry, this DIY distribution vehicle was eventually outmoded by the internet and the even more DIY means of individual artist's websites and sales portals, and the focus of the MWF project increasingly became the cataloging and preservation of the tapes themselves (some of whose creators were already deceased). We also tried to develop and showcase performative expressions of new video technologies at a series of screenings/performances at Scott Pfaffman's storefront gallery in the early 2000s, patterning MWF's involvement with many of these filmmakers, videographers, and performance artists in general in an outward spiral.

Miguel Piñero reading at Magic Gallery, 1984 (still). Courtesy James Cornwell

STUFF VS. TALK OR STUFF AND TALK

TERRY MOHRE

As I remember, the MWF collection did not stand up to the importance of the actual video club meetings (although for years we hosted the catalogue on brickhaus.com). I also do not recall it ever happening on Fridays. For a number of years, Alan W. Moore and Sophie Vieille, acting as regular hosts, enlivened a festive gathering where we smoked, drank, and looked into video matters. East Houston Street was a place of weekly mystical revelations. Where else was one to encounter face-to-face occurrences with Mr. Jack Smith (with talks about his father and growing up in Ohio), beginning a thirty-year discussion with Franz Vila about the nature of art and image, or wrestling with Nick the Fence about the power we were consuming from the serendipitously collected basement tap. No one went to get fucked, some went to party, but mostly we were there to extend a substance we found important.

RESEARCHING ARTISTS' TELEVISION

BENJAMIN OLIN

My PhD dissertation focuses on cable television shows produced by artists in New York City during the 1970s and 1980s. Artists' television constituted an important part of downtown culture, a collaborative mode of art praxis, which involved filmmakers, video artists, performance artists, and poets. This eclectic body of work includes poetry readings, art gallery and nightclub reportage, soap operas featuring Warhol superstars, experimental news bulletins, vaudeville talk shows, inter-media jams, and punk performances.

Despite the recent surge of interest in the cultural life of Lower Manhattan during the 1970s and 1980s, artists' television has persistently evaded historical accounts of the period. Unlike downtown film, this work has rarely been chronicled, exhibited, or archived, and remains largely unavailable outside of private collections. Researching my dissertation has involved scouring the footnotes of histories of underground film and No Wave cinema, examining extant journals such as the *East Village Eye* and *SoHo Weekly News*, and conducting numerous interviews with the artists involved—many of whom have generously loaned me videotapes of the shows.

From a contemporary perspective, these broadcasts are reminiscent of "user-generated" online video, reality television, and MTV. And yet, by virtue of being produced and exhibited within a relatively restricted locality, artists' television generated markedly different structures of sociability than contemporary global media networks. The screening of these shows constituted a local media event that occurred in a shared time and place. Few of the artists had cable television—or even TV sets—and viewing parties were regularly held in independent art spaces, nightclubs, and bars.

By digitizing the artists' television shows stored in the MWF Video Club collection, "XFR STN" will render visible a vital aspect of downtown culture. Via the adjacent online platform, these shows will be transferred to the digital media commons, some thirty years since they left the airwaves of public access cable television.

VIEW FROM A BURNING DECK

SHERRY MILLER HOCKING

In 2013, the state of video preservation remains precarious, despite more than two decades of effort. It is a problem faced by alternative media projects, individual artists, and major museums alike. One can take some hope from the multiple strategies that we have created to digitize obsolete and endangered tapes, relying on the occasional guerrilla preservation tactic. Based in Western NY, Migrating Media is a collaborative project of Hallwalls, Burchfield Penney Art Center, Squeaky Wheel, and ETC, among other groups. The goals are to provide digital preservation services and education programs to media arts collections upstate. Prior to using the service, an organization must demonstrate readiness by cataloging and prioritizing the collection and developing a plan to assure proper storage, regular migration, and, notably, accessibility to the public. ETC has placed our archive at the Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media at Cornell University, with similar goals in mind. Organizations may also take advantage of an exhibition to digitize works as a prerequisite for inclusion. "Wish You Were Here: The Buffalo Avant-Garde in the 1970s" was a large survey exhibition at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery that depended partly on this strategy. ETC took advantage of a special digitization funding opportunity to create a five-DVD set, *Experimental Television Center: 1969-2009*, which provides an overview of the history of image-processed works at ETC. "XFR STN" (Transfer Station), an open-door artist-centered media archiving project, is another model. Regardless of the model employed, it is critical to build avenues of access for individual artists holding personal collections.

Further hope is inspired by the leadership provided by the Association of Moving Image Archivists and Independent Media Arts Preservation, as well as the Standby Program, Bay Area Video Coalition, Video Data Bank, and Electronic Arts Intermix, all of which provide services ranging from information and workshops to distribution as a preservation strategy. Organizations like Hallwalls, Electronic Arts Intermix, and ETC's Video History Project have established searchable archives to present historical documents surrounding the history of media to provide context to the works. Web-based and born-digital works present their own set of problems, which organizations like Rhizome and the New Museum, among many other organizations, are addressing.

Unfortunately, there is still very little financial support for the preservation of electronic moving-image works, and our contemporary cultural understanding and heritage hang in the balance. Preservation is an ongoing process requiring active stewardship involving multiple file copies, proper storage, regular migration with data verification, and the organization of the ephemera surrounding collections to establish accurate context for the works. We must continue to imagine solutions for these problems or the artistic and cultural heritage, which now exists on obsolete video and new media formats, will cease to exist.

Terry Mohre at the Newsroom desk, Studio Melee, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo, NY, ca. 1985. Courtesy Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center

Potato Wolf TV show "The Birthday Show," produced by Julie Harrison, 1982 (still). Courtesy Colab

Police beating victim Ken Fish wandering the streets with a fractured skull, filmed by Clayton Patterson, Aug 7, 1988 (still). Sound, color. Courtesy the artist

©clayton patterson 1988

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

7/18 | 6 PM | NEW MUSEUM THEATER

MOVING IMAGE ARTISTS' DISTRIBUTION THEN & NOW

An ersatz assembly of participants from the MWF Video Club and Colab TV projects includes opening remarks from Alan W. Moore, Andrea Callard, Michael Carter, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Nick Zedd, and members of the New Museum's "XFR STN" team. Followed by an open discussion with the audience, facilitated by Alexis Bhagat.

9/7 | 1 PM | NEW MUSEUM THEATER

ALWAYS ALREADY OBSOLETE: MEDIA CONVERGENCE, ACCESS, AND PRESERVATION

Beyond media specificity, what happens after videotape has been absorbed into a new medium—and what are the implications of these continuing shifts in format for how we understand access and preservation? This panel considers forms of preservation that have emerged across analog, digital, and networked platforms in conjunction with new forms of circulation and distribution.

Participants include Joanna Phillips, Associate Conservator of Contemporary Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Maurice Schechter, Chief Engineer, DuArt Restoration, and others. Moderated by Walter Forsberg, Audio-Visual Conservator of "XFR STN."

9/7 | 3 PM | NEW MUSEUM THEATER

BORN DIGITAL: CONSERVATION IN THE COMPUTER AGE

This panel brings together artists and leading figures in the digital preservation field for a discussion on the theory and practice of preserving the fragile cultural artifacts and artworks of the computer age. Participants will include digital humanities scholar Matthew Kirschenbaum and Lori Emerson, and computer art pioneer Lillian Schwartz. Organized by Rhizome, a New Museum affiliate. Moderated by Ben Fino-Radin, Digital Conservator, Rhizome.

GALLERY TALKS AND SCREENINGS

7/19 | 3 PM | FIFTH FLOOR CLASSROOM

WILLOUGHBY SHARP AND THE MWF VIDEO CLUB

Pamela Seymour Smith Sharp screens videos by Willoughby Sharp and Susan Britton, and discusses Sharp's work with Alan W. Moore and Michael Carter of the MWF Video Club.

7/19 | 7 PM | NEW MUSEUM THEATER

FILMS OF NICK ZEDD

Nick Zedd's commitment to DIY artists' film distribution helped sustain the MWF Video Club project. He will present and speak about his film work with Michael Carter of MWF. The program will include: *The Bogus Man* (11 min); *Thrust In Me* (8 min); *Police State* (18 min); *War Is Menstrual Envy* (excerpt; 9 min); *Why Do You Exist* (11 min); *Ecstasy In Entropy* (15 min); and *Tom Thumb* (3 min).

7/25 | 7 PM | FIFTH FLOOR

LIZA BÉAR & MILLY IATROU, COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

The weekly artist public access *Communications Update*, later renamed *Cast Iron TV*, ran continuously on Manhattan Cable's Channel D from 1979 to 1991. Filmmakers Liza Béar and Milly Iatrou present individual segments cablecast in the *Communications Update* 1982 series: "The Very Reverend Deacon b. Peachy," "A Matter of Facts," "Crime Tales," "Lighter Than Air," and "Oued Nefifik: A Foreign Movie."

8/1 | 7–8 PM | FIFTH FLOOR

MITCH CORBER, THE ORIGINAL WONDER

Mitch Corber has dedicated his career to production for NYC public access cable TV, working closely with Colab TV and the MWF Video Club. Corber will present a selection of early work, as well as videos from his long-running program *Poetry Thin Air*.

8/8 | 7 PM | NEW MUSEUM THEATER

CLAYTON PATTERSON: FROM THE UNDERGROUND AND BELOW

Short documentaries on art, performance, and popular struggle in the Lower East Side by Clayton Patterson and compiled by Elsa Rensaa, including an excerpt of Patterson's video of the 1988 Tompkins Square Park riot. Followed by a discussion with Clayton Patterson.

8/15 | 7 PM | FIFTH FLOOR

MICHAEL CARTER, RIVINGTON SCHOOL

The MWF Video Club codirector will present a selection of videos from the Rivington School, a collection of artists and poets associated with the sculpture garden built on squatted vacant lots, and the adjacent galleries on Rivington Street—No Se No, Nada, Fusion Arts, and others.

8/22 | 7 PM | FIFTH FLOOR

MoRUS & THE LOWER EAST SIDE SQUATTING MOVEMENT

Bill Di Paola and collective members from the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Spaces (MoRUS) will present selected videos and images from the squatting movement in the Lower East Side, including important period documentaries by Rik Little and Franck Goldberg from MWF Video Club.

8/29 | 7 PM | FIFTH FLOOR

NAKED EYE CINEMA NIGHT

Members of the Naked Eye Cinema group will present a selection of their films from the MWF Video Club collection, including *Corrective Measures* (Peter Cramer, 1986), *Nocturnes* (Peter Cramer & Leslie Lowe, 1987), *Brains by Revlon* (Jack Waters, 1986), and *Hystery* (Bradley Eros & Aline Mare, 1985).

9/5 | 7 PM | NEW MUSEUM THEATER

COLEEN FITZGIBBON & ANDREA CALLARD, COLAB TV

Colab members Andrea Callard and Coleen Fitzgibbon will share clips from *Potato Wolf*, *All Color News*, and *Red Curtain*, as well as offer their perspective on what social television-making had to say at the time, and why it is important to look at it again.

Jack Waters, *Brains by Revlon*, 1986 (still). Sound, color, 18 min. Background performers in the restaurant set, staged in the backyard at ABC No Rio. Left to right: Richard Hofmann, Adrian Saich, Samoa, Valerie Caris, Gordon Kurtti, Brad Taylor. Courtesy Jack Waters and Allied Productions, Inc.

NOCTURNES
Leslie Lowe And Jack Waters
A black and white film inspired by Huysman's decadent novel A Rebours. The music is by Chopin.

Jack Waters and Leslie Lowe, *Nocturnes*, 1987 (still). Sound, black and white, 10 min. Left to right: Adrian Saich and Brad Taylor. A study in black-and-white photography inspired by a passage from *À Rebours*, Huysman's nineteenth-century decadent novel. Filmed in the basement of ABC No Rio. With Peter Cramer (credited as Peter Frances), Adrian Saich, Brad Taylor, and Valerie Caris (credited as Contessa Valleé). Courtesy Jack Waters and Allied Productions, Inc.

Willoughby Sharp in 1984. Photo: Tom Warren. Courtesy Tom Warren

Peter Cramer, *Corrective Measures: Politically Speaking*, 1986 (still). Sound, color, 10 min. Photo: Peter Cramer. Courtesy Jack Waters and Allied Productions, Inc.

Original sketch for Colab logo by Becky Howland, 1982. Courtesy Colab

Matthew Geller answering phones during the live call-in segment of Cara Perlman's "The End of the World" show, produced for *Potato Wolf*, a project of Colab TV, ca. 1978

TERMINAL-THAT'S THAT-LAP
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BACK PAGE
MWF Video Club VHS tape covers and posters (top to bottom, left to right):

Nick Zedd, *They Eat Scum*, 1979. Sound, color, 73 min. Courtesy MWF Video Club

Tommy Turner and David Wojnarowicz, *Where Evil Dwells*, 1986. Sound, black and white, 28 min. Courtesy MWF Video Club

"Cinema of Transgression: Volume 1," a collection of works by Nick Zedd, ca. 1984. Courtesy MWF Video Club

Japanese TV and Terry Mohre, *Robert Parker*, ca. 1981. Sound, 20 min. Courtesy MWF Video Club

Monty Cantsin, *Anti-Credo*, 1988. Sound, color, 30 min. Courtesy MWF Video Club

Poster for an MWF Video Club screening at Max Fish, November 15, ca. 1987. Courtesy Colab

Eric Mitchell, *Red Italy*, 1979. Sound, color, 55 min. Courtesy MWF Video Club

"Mitch Corber: Works," a collection of films by Mitch Corber, ca. 1985. Courtesy MWF Video Club

Tina Lhotsky, *Barbie & Snakewoman*, 1977. Two films. Courtesy MWF Video Club

Franck Goldberg, *How to Squash a Squat*, 1990. Sound, 46 min. Courtesy MWF Video Club

Charlie Ahearn, *Twins*, 1980. 50 min. Courtesy MWF Video Club

THEY EAT SCUM

A FILM BY NICK ZEDD

CAST:
DONALD DEATH
ARTHUR WOOD
JIM GIACOMA
JOHN HAMPSTONE
GEOFFREY CAREY
ROY BILLARD
BRETT POWERS
ROBERTA RETTZ
SANDY LOY
and featuring the BLESSED

To call the plot wafer-thin is probably to insult wafermakers from coast to coast.

The New Yorker, Brendan Gill

IT HURTS WHEN I LAUGH

NICK ZEDD belongs to the "para punk" film underground in New York. He wrote, directed, shot and edited the infamous *They Eat Scum*, and then launched his national distribution campaign by hand-carrying the reels from New York to San Francisco. Part punk rock musical, part sci-fi horror film, and part camp comedy, *They Eat Scum* decorously follows the trail blazed by John Waters' *Pink Flamingos*, and jilting it all the way. Waters and Zedd both seem to enjoy raising the image of gross corporality like a heavy club over the head. *Scum* contains demonstrations of humiliating activity easily on a par with easing your own feces; whole new degraded avenues of exploration. In one scene, a woman is stripped, tied down, and forced to swallow a live rat. In another, a roving punk gang cannibalizes its victim and then throws up together in a shared wastebasket. This is fun, I feel quite endearing.

MPAA Rating: [X]
Running Time: 75 Minutes
Color
©1974 Penetration Films Ltd.

VHS
TVC 1082

Distributed by:
MONDAY/WEDNESDAY/FRIDAY VIDEO CLUB
(c/o Moore) 73 East Houston St. NYC NY 10012

THEY EAT SCUM

Where Evil Dwells
by Tommy Turner and David Wojnarowicz

PRESENTED BY MONDAY/WEDNESDAY/FRIDAY VIDEO CLUB

WHERE EVIL DWELLS (24 min., 1980)—This collaboration between filmmaker Turner and artist/writer David Wojnarowicz is based on the infamous "Satan Teen" Ricky Kasso, who killed himself in jail after he and his best friend Gary Lauwers had been accused of murdering another boy in a satanic ritual in Northport, Long Island, N.Y.

This trailer is all that remains of the feature length film, destroyed in a fire in Turner's Lower East Side apartment. Stars Wojnarowicz, Turner, Scott Werner, Joe Coleman, Jack Nantz, Baby Gregor, Rockets Redglare, Richard Klemann, Charlotte Webb, Lung Leg, Devil Doodle; music by Jim Thirwell & Wiseblood.

[Update: More footage from the film, which had been stored at another location, was shown at the Whitney Museum's Punk & No Wave film show in October '96.]

TOMMY TURNER & DAVID WOJNAROWICZ

HELL

WHERE EVIL DWELLS

THE CINEMA OF TRANSGRESSION

JOHN SPENCER   SHITHAUS
LUNG LEG   WORM MOVIE
RICHARD KLEMANN   A SUICIDE
NICK ZEDD   THE BOGUS MAN
    GO TO HELL*
EROTIC PSYCHE   MUTABLE FIRE
TOMMY TURNER   SIMONLAND
RICHARD KERN   YOU KILLED ME 1st
    KING OF SEX
MICHAEL WOLFE   NIGGER NIGHT
MANUEL DeLANDA   JUDGEMENT DAY
    ISM ISM

PRODUCED BY NICK ZEDD
*Co-director: David Rutkolla

1 hour 40 min. VHS

the cinema of transgression Vol. I

Robert Parker
by Terry Mohre and Japanese TV

Robert Parker is a sculptor's sculptor. For years the linch-pin of the NYC hard-drinking, loud-mouthed "Rivington School," Parker works primarily in forged iron, producing elegant primal forms, influenced by tribal art. He is an expressionist in metal, but his work is informed by underlying mathematical theory and architectural intentions.

These two videotapes deal with his work. Terry Mohre's striking video-animation shows Parker's hand manipulating his complex 1981 wire sculpture based on a theorem of Pascal, an apparently chaotic jumble of metal which is, however, limited in the configuration it may assume.

The second videotape here shows Robert Parker in situ, scavenging for metal, and working at his forge. Two other Lower East Side artists are profiled, and the milieu of the Rivington School, a loose group of artists who evolved a huge junk "sculpture garden" on an abandoned lot.

Distributed by:
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(c/o Moore) 73 East Houston St. NYC NY 10012

MWF catalogue at:
http://www.brickhaus.com/amoore

Robert Parker
by Terry Mohre and Japanese TV

そんな事ないね

ANTI-CREDO
by Monty Cantsin

This film describes the birth and death of the "sculpture garden" built on Rivington Street on NYC's Lower East Side by the artists' group called "the Rivington School." Seminal performance artist Monty Cantsin shot this Super-8 visual montage like as the garden was demolished to make way for a development. The Rivington School is a collection of hardcore artists who've been at the center of the Tompkins Square Park resistance and squatters' movement.

1986, 30 minutes.

Distributed by:
MONDAY/WEDNESDAY/FRIDAY VIDEO CLUB
(c/o Moore) 123 Scribner Ave. Staten Island, NY 10301
M/W/F VIDEO (718) 447-1347

ANTI-CREDO
by Monty Cantsin

I LOVE MASS MEDIA

Monty Cantsin

RED ITALY
A FILM BY ERIC MITCHELL

A NEW CINEMA release

Starring GORDON STEVENSON, JOHNNY O'KANE, JEAN McCONNELL, JEAN ASTOR, HAROLD VOGL, SCOTT WADDELL, TOM WRIGHT, JOHN LURIE, ARTO LINDSAY, ERIC MITCHELL and RENE RICARD.

RED ITALY
ERIC MITCHELL

Mitch Corber is a New York City artist. First active as a performance artist in the early '70s, Corber has produced work in film, photography, and painting, as well as audio and video work. An infrequent exhibitor, this is his first video release.

JUAN IN NEW YORK—(11:00, 1980) Hopping on his bicycle to film busy NYC intersections, Corber's trademark rapid-cut style is clearly developed in this early piece mixing film footage from the street with TV soap cuts, and overlaying the whole with a rich soundtrack of rhetoric and sound effects.

KGB—(7:00, 1982-84) Mostly from a live show produced for Cosab's "Potato Wolf" series following the death of Soviet leader Brezhnev, this is a unique meditation on super-power politics.

APARTHEID ASIDE—(7:00, 1985) Colorized display of metro-nuke anti-slavery action with poetic bursts of human & electro imagery. A music video featuring "Black Idol" by the Young Midgets of SF, and "Silver Apples of the Moon," by Morton Subotnick.

QUIVER CITY—(11:00, 1984) This piece combines computer animation and voltage controlled processing with images of children, burns, trapped mice & retired old people filmed in Brighton Beach, NYC. With vibrant Ginsbergesque poetry overlays and artist's original piano score.

Mitch Corber: Works
Juan in New York; KGB;
Apartheid Aside; Quiver City   35 min.
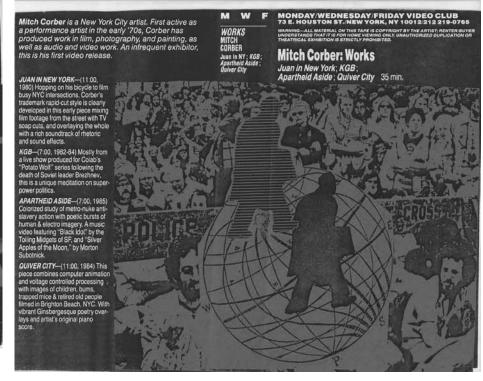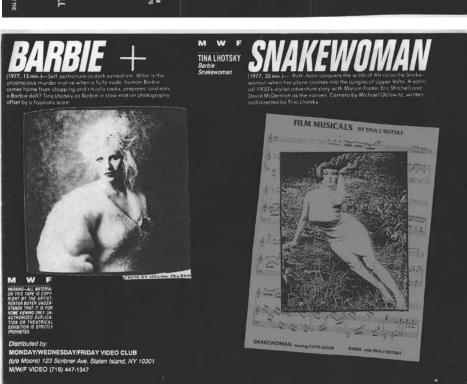

BARBIE
(1977, 33 min.)—In Self-portrait as a dark surreal film. When it comes home from shopping and ritually cooks, prepares, and eats a Barbie doll—Tina thanks us as Barbie in slow-motion photography offset by a hypnotic score.

SNAKEWOMAN
Tina Lhotsky

FILM MUSICALS / TINA L'HOTSKY

HOW TO SQUASH A SQUAT

HOW TO SQUASH A SQUAT chronicles the systematic destruction of a Squatters' building in NYC's East Village by the combined City authorities—Housing and Police—during the last days of the Koch administration (spring 1989).

HOW TO SQUASH A SQUAT documents the Squatters' eviction after an arson fire, their fight to save their building, followed by the night and day demolition of their Squat, surrounded by the police occupation of those city blocks.

HOW TO SQUASH A SQUAT demonstrates how a corrupt city government can use its police force to disregard its role of law and violate the civil rights of its poor.

HOW TO SQUASH A SQUAT
A VIDEO DOCUMENTARY by FRANCK GOLDBERG

TWINS

A comedy of fratricide. This 1980 16mm film by independent Charlie Ahearn (Wild Style) is his second feature. Ahearn uses a deliberate structure and largely stationary camera technique as a throwback to the era of Keystone comedies and Buster Keaton films.

Stars MICHAEL SMITH in the double role as the psychopath Sam seeking to destroy his twin brother Stan, a policeman. ANDREA KOVACS and WILLOUGHBY SHARP play people in blue hanging around Police Plaza downtown.

TWINS
BY CHARLIE AHEARN