

SIGNAL LOSS: SAVING DOWNTOWN VIDEO

Part of the Symposium: Moving / Images: Preserving Downtown Time-Based Works

NYU Cantor Film Center

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Participants:

Marvin Taylor, Director, Fales Library and Special Collections, NYU

Ann Butler (Moderator), Senior Archivist, Fales Library and Special Collections, NYU

Panelists:

Chris Straayer, Associate Professor, Cinema Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, NYU

Jaime Davidovich, Video Artist

Sarah Ziebell, Moving Image Archivist and Consultant

Rebecca Cleman, Distribution Director, Electronic Arts Intermix

MARVIN J. TAYLOR: Good morning. I'm Marvin Taylor, Director of the Fales Library at NYU. I'm pleased to welcome you this morning to part two of our symposium Moving/Images: Preserving Downtown Time-Based Work. For those of you who were here last night for our screening of recently preserved media works, please forgive me for repeating myself. For those of you who are here for the first time, I began last night by saying that in the Fales Library we've taken a rather special approach to how we handle moving-image materials in our collections, and how we intellectually describe those materials within their archival contexts. I hope that today some of the issues that have arisen as we've taken this particular approach to moving-image materials in archives will rise to the surface and that we can have a general discussion about them. Perhaps today's presentations are a bit like our putting forth a manifesto about how we've used the Downtown Collection and its media as a test bed that complicates how archives approach media—we'd like to think we're proposing a new methodology for media materials. I look forward to discussing this with you.

Today wouldn't be possible without the support of New York State Council on the Arts. I'd like to thank NYSCA, and especially Karen Helmerson, for her work in helping to fund today's events. I'd also like to thank Independent Media Arts Preservation and Dara Meyers-Kingsley, who is sitting right here, for your support and assistance with the program. And finally, I'd like to thank the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs who is also making today's events possible.

You know, if you're lucky, once in a lifetime you get to work with an amazing group of people who really push the envelope and constantly challenge you to do better and to think better. I have that luxury and that great honor, because I get to work with two amazing people: Ann Butler, who is our Senior Archivist; and Brent Phillips, who is our Media Specialist and Processing Archivist. We would not be here today if Ann and Brent weren't on the Fales' staff. Ann comes from a background in video art

and has long been a champion of the preservation of moving-image materials. When she came to Fales, she inherited a collection of, at that point, about four thousand videocassettes, and other materials in all formats, which we had not done very much with. I worried about these materials, but like many other archives, I tacit in my attention to them. Because of Ann's background, she was the perfect candidate to come in, take over our media holdings, and create the program we have today. With money from the National Endowment for the Arts, we were able to hire Brent Phillips—first on soft money, and now he's full-time, on hard money—at Fales. We believe he's the only person with the title of "media specialist" in an American special collections repository that's not just a special collection devoted to media. We're very happy to have Brent on our staff. With his expertise, we're able to do amazing things to preserve our media holdings. But, you're not here to listen to me. So, I'm going to shut up and introduce Ann Butler, who will lead the first panel. Thank you very much for coming. I look forward to an engaging discussion of how to preserve time-based works.

ANN BUTLER: Thank you, Marvin. Good afternoon, and welcome to the first of two panels, the Fales Library's Moving/Images symposium, "Signal Loss: Saving Downtown Video." It's my pleasure to moderate this panel of distinguished artists, scholars, archivists, and colleagues representing the contemporary arts and the moving-image communities. The Fales Library's Downtown Collection was established in 1994 by Marvin Taylor, the director of the Fales Library. The collection documents the New York art scene from the early 1970s to the present by actively collecting the archives of alternative art spaces, galleries, experimental theater groups, dance companies, collectives, et cetera, and the personal papers of artists, performers, writers, film- and video makers. The collection currently consists of close to ten thousand linear feet of archives and contains over fifteen thousand film, video, and audio elements. One of the goals of the collection is to document the artistic and literary circles that existed a half-mile to the south of where we are today in SoHo, and to the east, in the East Village and the Lower East Side. The archives and manuscripts that make up the Downtown Collection not only document the careers of individual artists and the histories of arts organizations, galleries, and performance venues, but also the various communities and the social and artistic networks that made up the downtown scene. It's the only collection of its kind in a research library and is a major resource for scholars, students, artists, curators who want to consult primary materials that document this seminal period, when New York led the way for new kinds of art production.

When we were originally planning this symposium about a year ago, we decided to approach a discussion of downtown moving-image media in the most orthodox way: by having two panels—one devoted to video and the other devoted to film. This appeared to be the simplest way to focus on the distinctiveness of each medium and the complex and, in some cases, overlapping ways downtown artists adapted and made use of video and film technologies. The two-panel strategy perhaps seems counterintuitive, though, as the notion of downtown is synonymous with experimentation, collaboration, subversion, and the rejection of traditional forms. But

the downtown film and video communities have basically existed as separate entities, each with their own curious relationships to the larger art world. Equally, film and video embody different technological histories. Each has its own distinctive aesthetic capabilities and behaviors, and, in terms of preservation concerns, magnetic media deteriorates far differently from film.

It's my pleasure to introduce this panel, "Signal Loss: Saving Downtown Video," which will highlight the careers of two artists, Jaime Davidovich and Stuart Sherman, whose collections are included in the Downtown Collection. This panel will also focus on the preservation concerns specific to magnetic media, and ongoing efforts by the Fales Library to preserve—and make accessible—video materials from the Downtown Collection. More broadly, the panel will discuss how communities of downtown artists have used video in a range of ways, including as an activist tool and strategy for political engagement; as a recording device to capture live performance; as a means of appropriating formal conventions of television, thereby subverting and infiltrating mainstream popular culture. And for artists coming out of Minimalism and the conceptual arts, video serves as a unique medium for creating electronic, time-based, single-channel video artworks and multi-channel installation art.

So please join me in welcoming our first panelist, Chris Straayer. Chris is an Associate Professor in the Department of Cinema Studies at N.Y.U. Her teaching includes such courses as Film Theory, Film Noir, Contemporary Women Directors, Video Art, Queer Media Theory, Structures of Passing, and The Body: Sex, Science, and Sign. She received the David Payne Carter Award for Teaching Excellence in 2002. She's the author of *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies*, published by Columbia University Press, about alternative representations of gender and sexuality. Her articles have appeared in numerous academic journals and anthologies, and she has judged and curated multiple programs, including "Lesbian Genders" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. She serves on the directorial board of the Lyn Blumenthal Memorial Fund for Independent Video and New Media, and the editorial board of the *Journal of Television and New Media*. Please welcome Chris Straayer.

CHRIS STRAAYER: Welcome. And thank you, Marvin and Ann. My research and teaching specialty is video art. And I have, you know, watched with great satisfaction the development of the Fales Downtown Collection and all of the wonderful work that has been happening here. But I must say that one of the main questions that has been on my mind throughout this is: "Where and how much does video art fit in with the sort of emerging portrait of the downtown scene?" I think, most particularly, the Lower East Side filmmaking. And so what I want to, sort of, articulate today is just a couple ideas that I have, sort of, foregrounding a couple ideas that I'll put under the title of "aesthetics and attitudes." Because I see that, of course, video art...as, sort of, this body of work that historically has, you know, sort of accumulated under these two words...video art is both part of the downtown scene—absolutely; and yet it does have its difference. And I think that I'm going to just try to point to a few ways—a few reasons why it has its difference.

So I think it's appropriate that we have video and film separate panels, because even though today they've really merged—these mediums have really merged, and you'll note that, you know, MoMA no longer, sort of, distinguishes it in its publicity materials what has been generated in film and what has been generated in video. But in the 1970s, of course, these were very distinct mediums. There was some, you know, overlap, there was some crossing over in use of the mediums, but they were very distinct mediums. And, particularly, we can say that video was a magnetic...it was very low resolution at the time. It did include synch sound, just in its normal production, immediate feedback, and at this time, it was still shown on monitors. So it really did seem like a different art form. But film and video coexisted in the seventies New York City explosion of art and culture. So they were coexisting in this time and space that is so notable. I think that historiography has, until the last decade, really privileged video art. And so much of the work that Fales has done on the Downtown Collection has been a corrective, I think, to the emphasis on, you know, the art of video.

So I think that one way we can think about film and video and try to both appreciate and deconstruct this dichotomy between Lower East Side filmmaking and sort of—sort of—SoHo video art, is to break down both film and video, particularly video. I think that as there's more research being done on the cable-access work, community work in video at that time, we see more of a relationship between film and video in that era. And Jaime's talk later on the panel will get at that. But we can say that the artists who were working in cable, and perhaps maybe wanting access to television art or having an impulse towards television art, whether they were magazine shows, interview shows—you know, shows that were documenting or sort of exhibiting the art world—or whether they were news shows, political shows, whatever—they were seeking a position within a voice and an exhibition to the larger public, in the same way that I think the filmmakers at this time were seeking to be a part of the theatrical feature film, you know, exhibition world. So access is a very important, if not the key term, I think, of this time. But it differs.

And I think that what we can do is we can think about, "Well, what are these various groups? Who are they dialoguing with?" I think that the salient features—for me, as I've looked over the work of the Downtown Collection, the salient features of the Lower East Side filmmakers, for me—were the move to narrative, in both the shorter works and the longer works. And this was...I mean, you have to remember that IFP was 1979. So this move to narrative was a break with the earlier independent avant-garde filmmaking. It was an embracing of maybe the precursors more like John Waters or the Kuchar brothers. It was...despite all of its expressionism and its alienation, there was a desire embedded in that, a desire to be part of a larger public discourse. You know, at the same time as, sort of, like the rejection of conformity and convention, there was still a desire—and perhaps you might think of it as sort of aligned with a B-movie mentality or a B-movie aesthetic. And likewise, within video, particularly those fighting for cable access. And we can remember that Larry Sapadin would be writing about Corporation for Public Broadcast[sic] and public

access in every single issue of *The Independent*—again and again and again and again. This was one of the most talked about areas at the time. So the people who were working in cable were similarly trying to get into this industry, this oligarchy of studios—television studios or Hollywood film studios.

And I think that it was a little bit different for that other part of video that I study, the video art. And what they were dialoguing with and what they were wanting access to was the museum world, or the art world. Let's say the art world, gallery...and at the same time as they were rejecting it and they were, you know, advocating their ephemeral art, protesting the precious art object, they still had that desire to access the art world. So this outsider status, I think, needs to be further thought-through and distinguished from alienation and analyzed in relationship to desire. Now, I don't think it was, in any of these cases, a desire to simply to be included, to simply, like, move upward, you know? I think it was also always a desire to change the existing structures.

So with video art, a key difference was that video art—even though they were outsiders, there were a lot of inroads. There was a lot of support. It may have seemed very slight at the time, but compared to what we think of when we're discussing the Lower East Side filmmakers, there was a lot. There was Howard Wise, there was E.A.I., there was the Whitney Museum, there was the MoMA, already, Rockefeller, and Ford. Nam June Paik had connections with funding agencies. NYSCA was the first public arts organization that recognized video as a medium. And I think that the video artists were sort of in a different relationship to that, you know, higher power that they were negotiating with. Of course, video art was also dialoguing with television, but in a different way than the cable video artists or the television artists were. Video art was more critical of television, more arguing that television was not living up to its potential as an art form, that the limitations of the industry were sort of holding it back, and that artists could make better television. So we have to acknowledge that there is a little bit of a high-low, you know, discourse going on there—even as these artists were sharing a community, sharing the streets, interacting, helping one another, sharing equipment, et cetera, in a way that Steina has described as tribes.

I think another thing is that we need to see how one of the similarities between the filmmakers—and in the next panel, you'll talk about filmmakers; and hopefully, you saw some of the work last night—and the video artists, what they shared was this do-it-yourself mentality. They were part of an antiestablishment, do-it-yourself world, right? But their do-it-yourself took a very different form, and I think moved towards a different aesthetic, than what the Lower East Side filmmakers' do-it-yourself did. And I would say that one thing...well, I would say there are two things that for me, sort of, put video art apart from the emerging portrait of downtown art. One is that video art had a different...well, was not, sort of, influenced primarily by a punk aesthetic. There wasn't...what I'm trying to do is pry apart the do-it-yourself and the punk. Punk, of course, is a do-it-yourself movement. But when do-it-yourself was happening in video art, it was more like creating a machine that would alter an

image, and that one could become, sort of an electronic artist, a machine artist. You could make your own creative tools. You could bring on this medium and this television, what was an industry, and you could grab onto its tools and access its tools yourself as an individual and actually alter what was the definition of the medium itself. So you get psychedelic programs and all kinds of image processing, et cetera. Which I think is an ultimate expression of do-it-yourself, but quite different than the do-it-yourself within the punk music movement.

The other thing is that video was a new medium. It didn't really have...it had the art world to dialogue with, but it didn't have a history—a past history—to move on from. So what we find for video art in the seventies is a very compressed history. And whereas the portrait of downtown art is usually described as postmodern, we find in video postmodernism but we also find modernism. There's formalism, there's structuralism, there's...you know, everything that would have been sequential, say, in film or in the visual arts, is simultaneous in video art. So you find investigations of the resolution, of the scan lines, of all of the properties. You have this modernist investigation of the medium itself, right alongside the more postmodern aesthetic. And so this is why I'm saying that these works look very different. And yet they do come from the same place, and they come from the same time and space, and they come from at least some shared attitudes.

To demonstrate this and to make a point about access and preservation, I've put together a little light show or whatever. And also to give an homage to the times when one would performative in their screenings, I've just put together a little collage to remind you but to also demonstrate not a particular artist, but the aesthetic of the works. And in doing this, I realize that really, it's...well, one can talk about an Oedipal relation between the Lower East Side and SoHo. And one might see that also between punk music and the music that was influencing and driving video art. Because video art, I would claim is, for the most part, responding and inspired by a different music, avant-garde music. You know, we think of John Cage and La Monte Young. And then rock, okay? It's not really...this is not really a punk aesthetic. I will give you a quote from Steina here. She's talking about her work, but within the context of the early seventies: "We were interested in certain decadent aspects of America—the phenomenon of time, underground rock and roll, homosexual theater, and the rest of the illegitimate culture. In the same way, we were curious about more puritanical concepts of art inspired by Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller. It seemed a strange and unified front against the establishment." So if we look at the works themselves from the Lower East Side filmmaking, I think we find alienation, we find nihilism. If we look at these works, we find a playfulness and, you know, a somewhat happy-go-lucky, sort of, light aesthetic. And part of that reflects the music that was influencing them. Part of it reflects the fact that the do-it-yourself is sort of taking different directions, different trajectories; that the artists are coming from different trajectories, and that whereas you have a disconnection in the aesthetic of one, you have a connectedness, or an interest in connectedness. The subject and the object is very foregrounded in this work.

When I decided I wanted to show some clips, all of my clips are on VHS. All of the Avery Fisher Collection at NYU: VHS; all of my department's collection: VHS. You know, I've got some ¾ Umatic tapes that I don't show anymore and I couldn't show them here. So this is also making a point about access. How could I just show some clips to give a general impression? I knew that there was Internet access, so...in fact, it's viewed through YouTube. So, of course, they're not being shown the way they were intended to be shown and they're not even available to us today for this, the way that they should be. So we could say that, you know, one really shared point between film and video of this era is that it does need preservation. Nevertheless, we can get an idea. So let me take you back a few years here.

And also, I don't know if this will work because I'm a Mac person, and this is a PC, and so I'm sort of challenged. Alright, I'll try. I forgot to talk about video art being so different from the Lower East Side filmmaking, I wanted to just show an early work by Tony Oursler. He's a video artist whose work I think is very much in sync with Lower East Side filmmaking. So hopefully you can see that. And now we'll move from that aesthetic of flushing the man down the toilet ...we'll see if this works.

[VOICE FROM VIDEO CLIP from Nam June Paik's Global Groove: "This is a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch to any TV station on the Earth. And TV Guides will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book."]

BUTLER: You had a video wall going there. I really loved it, Chris. Thank you. Our next speaker is Jaime Davidovich. Jaime is an artist whose innovative and multidimensional artworks and art-making activities have produced several distinct professional reputations for him, including painter, installation artist, video artist, public access television producer, activist, and nonprofit organizer. Born in Argentina, Jaime moved to New York in 1963. When cable television emerged in the 1970s, Jaime was one of the first artists to recognize its potential for the contemporary arts. In 1976 he helped establish Cable SoHo. A year later he established the Artists' Television Network, a nonprofit organization established to explore the artistic potential of broadcast television and encourage the dissemination of video art through a commercial broadcast medium. Davidovich is also well known for his work on The Live Show, a weekly public-access television program with a variety show format that appropriated the formal norms of television, along with avant-garde performances, art work, political satire, and social commentary. The Live Show was the subject of a 1991 retrospective at the Museum of the Moving Image. Jaime has been the recipient of several N.E.A. visual-arts fellowships and CAPS grants. His work is part of the permanent collections of many museums, including the Museo Nacional Reina Sofia in Madrid. Jaime's television and video works were most recently the subject of a one-person exhibition at the Mitchell Alpus Gallery. Please join me in welcoming Jaime Davidovich.

JAIME DAVIDOVICH: First of all, I would like to thank Marvin Taylor and Ann Butler for not only remembering the future, but doing something to preserve the future. And

I think it's a great pleasure to be here and talk about the old days, the beginning of this whole thing called video art. And we never had the dream or the idea—the conception—to really become a source of collecting and being part of mainstream institutions. But I would start telling about something about the context, which is, I think, very, very important. The previous speaker talked a little bit about the context, but I want to emphasize the importance of this context that determined the creation of these new art forms.

In the middle sixties, with no hesitation, I would say that New York became the center of the art world. After the war, Paris was still the center, l'Ecole de Paris, and the artists working in the...tachisme and formalistic venues, they were all coming from Paris. But from the Abstract Expressionists...the American Abstract Expressionist artists were the time that the whole center of the art world shifted from l'Ecole de Paris to the New York art scene. And the New York art scene, in those days, was divided in two sections: the downtown artists and the uptown artists. The downtown artists were the artists that...they hung around the galleries on Third Avenue and Tenth Street, very close by. This was the beginning of the nonprofit galleries, that they were showing people like De Kooning and Sam Francis and the second generation of Abstract Expressionists.

But in the early sixties, a lot of people—and a lot of artists from all over the world, they came to New York. Because that was the center that was like Paris circa 1909. So they all came there. And they were artists from different backgrounds, different categories, different styles. But we had one thing in common at that time, that we were working with new ideas, new concepts, and also against the establishment. The establishment was like the uptown galleries, the 57th Street galleries, the mainstream galleries.

At that time also was the beginning of the Pop artists. In 1961, 1962, the big exhibitions of Warhol at the Stable Gallery and the Castelli Gallery—that made a big impact. But at the same time, there were other artists working in other ideas and in other concepts that they were more conceptual. And these artists began to congregate around this area, closer to the Third Avenue area. And that was the time that artists would have places in the Bowery, they would have places maybe downtown in what is called now TriBeCa, and also the places in what is called SoHo.

And this was the creation of an artist, designer, and anarchist whose name was George Maciunas. And in the middle sixties, he started developing what he called a new Bauhaus, the Bauhaus of the late part of the twentieth century. And in that Bauhaus, we would have artists who would have control of their activities, control of their production, control of their sales. And he had all kinds of charts in his loft which would indicate the different styles of art, the history of art, and the different types of jobs and work that the artists can do in order to survive in this Bauhaus type of environment. Also he dreamt to have his own police force and his own supermarket or a food co-op. That was the time. And he started doing that. But anyway, that was the idea.

And he established the first house in the first loft in this area that now is named SoHo—south of Houston Street—that was located in 80 Wooster Street. And he made this house the first Fluxus house. That was part of the Fluxus concept. And in that particular building—in the main floor they have Anthology Film Archives—that was the center of the downtown film scene. And that was created by Jonas Mekas. And slowly, by great efforts of one of the pioneer video artists, Shigeo Kubota, we were able to have Saturday video, Saturday afternoon video screenings. And that was one of the first places that would show video regularly. And at that particular place you would have all types of videos—almost like everybody who would have a video camera was able to use it, they will have the opportunity to show their work. And we're talking about now the early seventies.

When I arrived in New York, I came as a young artist to study here. But at the same time, I was very much influenced by another Argentinean artist, who at that time was living in Milano, Italy, and left Argentina and moved to Italy. And he became one of the most important artists of the later part of the twentieth century. His name was Lucio Fontana. And as a matter of fact, Lucio Fontana was the first artist to use television. And not only that, he did work on television on the Radio Televisione Italiana. But at the same time, in 1951, he wrote the first television art manifesto, in Milano, which is one of the facts that not many people know about the origins of the media, since we don't have so much history. Now it's coming...all these facts are coming to the open and we'll be able to recognize Fontana not only as the major artist that he is, but also he was a pioneer in television art. And so I was influenced by Fontana.

And when I came to New York, I was very interested in eliminating what we called "the frame." The frame—that was a very, very popular concept when we had the discussions about the art...to eliminate the stretcher, to eliminate the frame, to eliminate the gallery system. We were talking about all the different possibilities at the time that the art world was the center of our activities. You know, right now, even the name "the art world" changed to "the art market." We never talked about the art market in those days, we talked about the ideas. And we also were following the concepts of Marcel Duchamp, who said, "The taste of the time is not the art of the time." And I think we were more inclined to the ideas of Marcel Duchamp than the ideas emanating from the popular Pop Art artists like Lichtenstein or Andy Warhol, Rosenquist, et cetera.

So these artists, you know, working in what now is called the downtown scene, was a very amorphous type of group. There were people coming from Woodstock with ideas to start, like, a commune in SoHo. There are other artists that were coming from conceptual art that was derivative of the Dada group. And personally, I came from the school of Lucio Fontana. So I was very interested in eliminating the frame. And I started working with adhesive tapes. And that was in 1967, 1968. And actually, some of you were here last night; I showed a piece that I did with Stuart Sherman in

one of the spectacles, using adhesive tape. I was doing ephemeral work using adhesive tape on staircases, walls, buildings, sidewalks, et cetera.

And when video came to be known, immediately I became interested in video. And I started in 1970. I got my first Portapak in 1970. And actually, that was a Portapak—it was color, the first color Portapak. And actually, it's in the Fales Collection, and also it's in the exhibition. And with that Portapak, I started working in the streets of SoHo. And in 1974, a friend of mine told me if I will be interested in showing the work in this thing called cable. At that time, SoHo was not cable. Cable was something limited to a special area, only Manhattan, and was divided in two groups. One, I think, was below 59th Street, and the other one was above 59th Street. But anyway, that was a possibility, to show on cable. And cable, at that time, made perfect sense because we wanted to get away from the traditional ways of showing video art or the work that we were doing. I think we have a big problem in defining video art. That was a big issue, you know, what we called ourselves—video makers or artists or video artists.

So, the way it was shown was in a room, in a theater atmosphere. People would sit on chairs and we would watch the tapes. And usually, they would start with maybe twenty viewers or twenty members in the audience, and then would end up with only the artist and one or two faithful friends. Because I felt that was not the way to show video. The way you watch video, in my particular case, or to watch television, is to watch it at home, just either lying down or sitting on a couch in a very comfortable situation. And this is the way you watch television. You don't go to the theater to watch television; you go to the theater to have a communal experience and see a movie, but not to watch television. So anyway, when they offered this possibility, I said, "Sounds very good"—to put a work that is very conceptual, that is very ephemeral, that is very postmodernist, and to put it in a context of television, and anybody who had a television set that was hooked to cable television will be able to watch it. So I said it was great idea. So we showed the piece. It was a piece that I did in 1973. And I like it a lot, and I showed it to—I told some friends to watch it at home. And it was very good. It was...to be able to get the people to sit in front of a TV for ten minutes and watch the piece—that was, I think, a great accomplishment.

But after that, there were other artists working on this cable television concept. And I think I should mention...I think it's a good time to mention and recognize, because they are artists that they are not really known by the general art audience, or any audience, that they were pioneers in the field of television art and putting things on cable television. The first artist to have a weekly cable show on Manhattan Cable—at that time, it was called Manhattan Cable, now it's Time Warner—was Paul Tschinkle, and he was the one who had a regular weekly show, the same time, the same day. And it's a way to develop an audience. And he was interested in showing part of the music, club scenes, and also had some interviews with artists.

The other artist that was also a pioneer in using this media was Doug Davis. Doug had the ability not only to produce works...he was interested in having a

communication with television; not to have a one-way television, but have a two-way, that you will be able to talk back to the television. You know, he was one of the pioneers of two-way communication. But at the same time, he was a senior editor of Newsweek. And as a senior in Newsweek, he was promoting cable, and he was promoting the artists using cable. And I know that the subject, it's very, very extensive, and we can go for a long time talking about what happened in those days, but I felt it was very important to recognize the people who started these things.

And just to show you an idea of my concepts, when we got together with these artists, we formed an organization called Cable SoHo. And maybe we can talk later on in the panel discussion. And that was in 1976. We would be able to get cable to SoHo, and we will start cablecasting. And they had two shows: one that was called SoHo Television that aired works already produced; and the other one that was a live show, that was the first live television show. We can show now a clip of a show I did as my alter ego, Dr. Videovich, in Texas. And I think it's very apropos, because it was done in Lubbock, Texas, and produced in Midland, Texas. And this is very, very current. So we can see just a few minutes of this tape. It's from a series of programs commissioned by Texas State University, and the series was called TV on TV. And this satirical—this concept of the low art and high art—was the center of the Dr. Videovich character that I started in 1977, until 1984. That was a crucial time for all these avant-garde artists. That was the beginning of the second term in office of Ronald Reagan, and it was the invasion in the art scene of what they called “neo-figurative artists”—you know, Schnabel and Basquiat and Keith Haring, et cetera. And all these artists that...we were working in ideas that were more ephemeral and art that was against the traditional system in art, that always rebelled against the society—we were basically pushed away. So the new art came and everything dissolves to black. And fortunately now, I guess the ones that survived that, we are coming back. And we are coming back with full force. And this is the ironies of life, that something that was so different, that was so unconventional—just go into access, go into the popular culture, don't be afraid to be ridiculed, don't be afraid to receive telephone calls...the live show was not only live, but we had an open telephone line. And we would have all types of artists, performers, radicals to come to the show and do what they do, and sometimes to prove that they cannot do anything. But that was the whole idea. The whole idea was to have a show that will be an opportunity to be open. And I repeated in my show, almost on a weekly basis, “Don't watch television. Just go and make television. We should make television; we should not watch television.” And this is...we waited long enough, and now we got to YouTube. That is basically what's happened, and taking over the whole television industry. And one thing that I'm doing, just started a few months, putting up the old Dr. Videovich clips—not the programs, because they won't allow thirty minutes, only just ten minutes—is putting the clips on YouTube. Which makes the perfect sense because they were on public access and this is the extreme public access. So I will show you, if I can get into The Live Show promo to get an idea about the show for a couple of minutes. It was shown yesterday, but see it...

[NARRATOR from Davidovich tape: Do you remember the good old days of video art? Repetitive, simple, minimal, predictable? Those were the good old days, before cable TV and the new technologies. Now we're thinking more about TV at home and the nature of TV itself. Since its infancy, television was taken too seriously. And video art was not part of its history. Don't you think it's time we combined the two? Isn't it time we started toying a little with America's favorite plaything? Aren't you ready to watch television from a different perspective? Well, when you're ready, turn off professional TV, and turn on The Live Show. [music] A variety television program, The Live Show is cablecast weekly over Manhattan Cable TV. It features Dr. Videovich, a specialist in curing TV addiction.

MAN 1: I watch too much TV. What can I do for this?

MAN 2: I think that you have a problem of saturation. What you should do is, after you watch two hours TV, cover the TV with a plastic cloth.

NARRATOR: Another character on the show, TV, the poor soul of television, reminds us weekly of the TV set's unique position in...]

DAVIDOVICH: You can go to the Dr. Videovich on YouTube, and you can see the clips. And that was the original concept, to put it in this whole mainstream of works, millions of works. You know, the first [inaudible] of cable television, you know, I predicted that twenty years from now, we would have five hundred channels and nothing to watch. And I guess my prediction was really sure. Now we have in Manhattan alone, we have fifteen hundred channels and nothing to watch. And with this little note, so thank you again.

BUTLER: Thank you, Jaime. Our next speaker is Sarah Ziebell. Sarah's a certified archivist and holds an M.L.I.S. in archival enterprise, with a postgraduate endorsement of specialization in media asset management from the University of Texas at Austin. She currently teaches in N.Y.U.'s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program and works as a consultant and lecturer in the area of collection management for such institutions as Hallwalls, N.Y.U. Libraries, N.Y.U. Film Studies Center, and the University of Texas at Austin's School of Information. From 2006 to 2008, Sarah was N.Y.U. Libraries' moving-image preservation specialist. She also has served as project coordinator for the Robert Wilson Audio/Visual Collection at NYPL and, prior to that, Sarah was director of the collection for the Museum of the Moving Image. She's worked with the archival collections of the Pacific Film Archive, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and Industrial Light and Magic. Sarah is currently Secretary of the Board of Directors for the Association of Moving Image Archivists, and, formerly, she was Treasurer of Independent Media Arts Preservation and member of the Steering Committee of Moving Image Collections, an AMIA-Library of Congress initiative. Please join me in welcoming Sarah Ziebell.

SARAH ZIEBELL: I am here today to discuss broadly the role of the archivist in ensuring the longevity of downtown video art and performance documentation and to relate a few anecdotes based on my experiences working with the audiovisual records of artist Robert Wilson and Fales Library's Downtown Collection.

Most fundamentally, everything begins with the gathering together of work—the assemblage of the archives—by its creator, the artist. We are fortunate that many of the individuals and organizations most centrally involved in the downtown art scene have had the wherewithal to save not only their original pieces but retain supporting records that help to interpret and contextualize them. This is especially significant in a city like New York where storage space is at a premium and many people live transient lives, making it difficult to maintain collections of any sort, large or small.

In addition to the creators who have kept their own archives over the years, we must also credit those individuals and institutions that have assumed the tremendous undertaking of live documentation of downtown music, theatre, dance, intermedia, conceptual, and site-specific art. Because of their ephemeral nature, these works might have been lost forever had not there been the foresight to capture them, often using video technologies.

Video documentation of live pieces adds another layer of complexity to the understanding of the artist's archive since the original "work" is embedded in the performance itself and not in the performance recording. As there is no way to accurately reproduce the live piece, video documentation results in the creation of another version of the "work." And while the video maker's hand is often intentionally more anonymous than is the case with original works of art, this does not mean that she is not making her own series of aesthetic decisions when documenting the live piece. We can see this very clearly in the film of Richard Foreman's Rhoda in Potatoland shot by Kirk Winslow and featured in the exhibition at Fales running concurrent to this symposium. Here, Winslow shot the play on Super-8, and using fast motion and stop action animation techniques condensed the entire performance to six minutes. And what of other scenarios such as "live" performances intentionally restaged for the camera (Mabou Mines did this), or video recordings of site-specific artworks when often that documentation is the only remaining physical trace? Clearly, retaining records concerning the live documentation is just as critical as retaining records about the original "work."

Whether an artist storing her videos in a closet or a venue documenting a choreographer's new piece, both have embedded within them a certain "archival consciousness," a sense that the works being created have a future and thus should be harnessed and safeguarded to ensure their longevity. By the time the tapes get to the archivist, their provenance (the life they have led until then) determines everything about their future. Hence, the more we can do to help artists and those endeavoring to document live performance archive their work while it is still young, the easier it will be for all of us to preserve it on into its golden years. That is where

organizations like Independent Media Arts Preservation can be so helpful; they are connected with active artist communities and can provide assistance about how best to accomplish this mission. There is also a new publication out by Electronic Arts Intermix and IMAP, the Online Resource Guide for Exhibiting, Collecting & Preserving Media Art (available free from EAI's website) that offers excellent guidance.

Another aspect related to a videotape's provenance that definitely impacts its longevity concerns the format on which it was originally recorded. Even though the lives of archival videos can be shortened by such deteriorative factors as biological contamination, chemical degradation, or mechanical failure, in my opinion, obsolescence is the factor that most determines the level of difficulty the archivist will experience in preserving the item for the future. We can understand obsolescence in following ways: 1) format obsolescence (Professional formats used to have a lifespan of 20 years. Now, there are over 30 competing professional formats at one time.) 2) Playback equipment obsolescence [equipment used with obsolete formats becomes harder to obtain (and maintain), whether you are an archive or a lab.] 3) Personnel obsolescence (technicians who can operate/repair obsolete playback equipment are themselves becoming scarce, and very few people are learning their skills to carry this work into the future.) Thus, it is important to think about such factors as the popularity of certain formats at the point of creation of a work; choosing when possible a more widely adopted format can often make a difference in the lifespan of the recording.

It must be noted that for quite some time, there was no clear sense of who would take on the long-term role of safeguarding tapes made by downtown artists and documenting presentations of live performances. Would the burden always remain with the artist? Some established archives, like those of Anthology Film Archives and The New York Public Library, recognized fairly early on the value of collecting in this area and supported a certain number of acquisitions. Also, of course, some of these materials made their way into museums, private collections, and distributor archives. In the early 1990s, the Fales Library began to actively seek out downtown art-related collections, and we can see today how prescient Fales was and what a difference it has made in this regard.

As we know, there were not just a handful of major players but instead a multitude of significant downtown-based individuals, collectives, and organizations that utilized video in their work. Creating a comprehensive "downtown video archive" requires repositories to have a strong commitment to identifying, locating, acquiring, describing, preserving, and making accessible these tapes, no small feat. Complementing these more traditional institutionally-situated archives are the so-called "accidental archives" found in downtown arts organizations that have assumed the responsibility for maintaining and providing access to their own legacy collections (Electronic Arts Intermix is but one example). So, I think we begin to see a downtown video archive partnership developing between long-established

archives, special collections repositories, and specific downtown arts groups. This bodes well for the continued survival of artist and performance tapes!

When you are working as an archivist, you must learn to see past the surface of the materials, to allow the body of records to speak to you. They will tell you of their physiques (the deterioration of the records) and of their minds (the substance of the records). Their words may be frank or, at other times, evasive; often the archivist has to listen quite closely to hear these messages. And yet it is critical to do so because the inherent material, structural, and intellectual complexities found in video art and documentation render these tapes quite often in danger of being completely inaccessible.

Yet, given the bulk of materials requiring attention, we must prioritize. Processing archival videos requires an appraisal based on a combination of factors that can include uniqueness, critical importance, perceived research demand, and material instability. What I have found to be a useful exercise is, once works have been so prioritized, to inventory them on a work-by-work basis (as each piece can often have many elements, versions, and copies associated with it).

When processing artist Robert Wilson's performance video archives at The New York Public Library, I found it necessary to establish certain parameters for intellectual control of the materials due to their bulk and the lack of supporting documentation. I developed a method of distinguishing between a work's myriad versions, presentations, and compilations that I thought it could be helpful to quickly review here. I chose to employ a conceptual model, originally developed by the library community, called Fundamental Requirements for Bibliographic Records. Here is a quick rundown.

A work is a distinct intellectual or artistic creation (EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH)

An expression is a creation of a work (1976 presentation of EINSTEIN)

A manifestation is a physical embodiment of an expression of a work [EINSTEIN (1976) at the Venice Biennale]

An item is a single exemplar of a manifestation [VHS copy of EINSTEIN (1976) at the Venice Biennale]

With Robert Wilson's material, we had to identify the expression to which each item related (in the case of revived works, like EINSTEIN); the manifestation (venue); the performance date within a given venue; and, for multi-camera shoots, even the camera angle. Finally, we had to determine whether the item was unique or a duplicate of something else. I don't think this sort of complexity is limited to Robert Wilson!

However, because the Fales Library collects archives that contain a wide variety of material types (audio/visual records, papers, and artifacts, to name only a few) and does not break apart collections by format (for example, videos or photographs) Fales is able to take a somewhat different approach with its processing strategies.

Fales processes its materials based on their provenance: what this means is that they are able to present records (no matter their what material type) organized in the same manner as they were originally used by the artist. Thus, videos within Fales are contextualized by related records in other formats and are not isolated from the materials to which they originally related. Fales is able to establish the lineage of its videos not only by examining the tapes themselves but also by looking to the surrounding related documentation.

No matter what particular approach is taken, in my experience, myriad problems can arise in processing many archival arts-based video collections. Donor records can be unclear, and numbering systems nearly indecipherable. It can be difficult to identify what exactly you have in hand, especially when you are dealing with formats that you cannot support viewing within the archives, tapes that have deteriorated to such an extent as to be completely unplayable, or videos that have been reused or taped over, as was common practice with $\frac{3}{4}$ " Umatic stock. Also, as I mentioned earlier, there is frequently duplication amongst the holdings (copies of the same thing on different formats), so uniqueness within the collection as well as uniqueness of the recording overall is a vital determination.

It is for these reasons that it is critical whenever possible to consult with the artist or their estate directly when embarking upon a processing effort, since ensuring the longevity of many of these works often demands aesthetic decisions, at a minimum, and often, even more complex choices about the migration or otherwise re-presentation of the work. While the effective archivist is well equipped to supervise the processing of materials, many of the judgments this process demands are best made in conjunction with the artist.

Given the diversity of formats used in downtown videomaking ($\frac{1}{2}$ " open reel, $\frac{3}{4}$ " Umatic, Betamax, VHS, Hi-8, 8mm, DVCAM, and Mini DV, just to name a few) and the level of deterioration that can often plague recordings that have been stored in less-than-ideal conditions over the years, preservation of this material is quite complicated. The essential component of video preservation is that of migration to a more stable tape or (increasingly) digital file-based video format. What is common in my experience is that the archivist has to employ an a-la-carte model of preservation lab selection, choosing vendors for their particular strengths in certain formats or sensibilities toward artist materials, and locating still other labs to handle highly specialized projects.

We have been involved in an interesting endeavor at Fales over the past year relating to the preservation of part of their collection of downtown videos (for those of you who were at last week's Orphan Film Symposium, please forgive me if you have already heard about this project). A company called Media Matters donated a highly sophisticated video digitization system called SAMMA Solo to NYU Libraries on an interim basis. We used the system to digitize over 300 Umatic videos from Fales' Downtown Collection, creating uncompressed Motion JPEG 2000 files as preservation masters, MPEG-2 files as duplng masters, and Windows Media and

Real Media files for access purposes. Using such an advanced technology to preserve these archival tapes proved to be an interesting challenge. There is one aspect of this project that I want to briefly discuss because I think it hearkens back to what I mentioned earlier about appraisal but also may have wider resonance as our collective preservation efforts accelerate.

Traditionally within Fales, because of the costs involved, each archival video has to “score high” on appraisals both for curatorial value and preservation need before it is prioritized for reformatting services. One thing that interested us about the approach that Media Matters took in designing its SAMMA technologies is that appraisal happens at a very different point in its process than in our own. Resulting from its innovations in high efficiency digitization, Media Matters effectively advocates for migration of all tapes prior to appraisal either for curatorial value or preservation need. The concept is: digitize first, get into a format viewable from a computer desktop, and then make decisions about the value of the material. This was an interesting prospect to us, especially since Fales had quantities of tapes that needed to be appraised far beyond its staffing capabilities.

Thus, we decided that to compare our established workflow of curatorial value appraisal, physical inspection and assessment for preservation, and then reformatting with Media Matters’ approach of reformatting and then appraisal of curatorial value could be extremely valuable. Fales’ Downtown Collection videos were appropriate for this project because they were thought to contain a mixture of unique archival material and non-unique duplicate copies (obviously, as I’ve mentioned, this is one of the factors we carefully consider when conducting an appraisal).

Media Matters’ SAMMA Solo technology drives the user to select Motion JPEG 2000 files as its preservation master format. Prior to the inception of this project, this was not a file format we used within the library (really, we hadn’t really moved to file-based video preservation of any kind!). There were significant concerns about the sustainability of the Motion JPEG 2000 format, for there existed at the beginning of our project no reliable means of playing back or transcoding the files once created. We trusted that a solution was on its way, but we opted to also create a backup preservation master on Digital Betacam tape.

This is one point where the appraisal process I discussed earlier came directly into play. We decided not to create a Digibeta tape at the point of ingest (which would have been possible with the SAMMA Solo) but instead to assess the material after migration, determine which tapes had unique content, and then create Digibeta backups of those only. This would keep costs from getting out of control for a project that was intended to be a donation, but even more importantly, this approach adhered to Fales’ established policy of not assuming responsibility for full preservation of items for which master copies existed elsewhere. For these items, Fales’ policy was to provide only access copies. Thus, the method of appraisal post-migration worked very well for these materials.

In summary, I think that it is essential for the archivist to accept that while the tangible videotape forms, the physique of the archives themselves, can seem daunting in their complexity and variability, the mind of the archives – the content encapsulated within the tapes, is really what we are aiming to preserve and make accessible. In archival work, there is consistency in process, and this consistency in process enables a consistency in accessibility. In turn, this accessibility engenders an even more iterative form of repetition, that of researchers turning over and over again the same works, going deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the artist. And this kind of reflective repetition is only possible when we have a body of records that is sound in mind (well organized) and in physique (preserved).

I wanted to leave us with a few questions to consider and perhaps discuss at the end of the panel. What role does artistic intent play in preserving video art or video documentation of live performance? Can related documentation (for example, paper records) play a role in determining the artistic intent of a work? Do we consider there to be an ethical dimension to video preservation and to the archival profession overall? If so, how does it manifest?

Thanks again.

BUTLER: Our final speaker is Rebecca Cleman. Rebecca is the Distribution Manager of Electronic Arts Intermix, E.A.I. She graduated from Bard College in 1997 with a B.A. in art history. Since joining E.A.I. in 2000, she has programmed screenings for the New York Underground Film Festival, Ocularis in Brooklyn, Squeaky Wheel in Buffalo, Union Cinema in Milwaukee, and Smack Mellon in Brooklyn, among others. In the winter of 2007, she traveled to arts institutions in Warsaw, Krakow, Gdansk, and Posen, in Poland, with a survey of video from the E.A.I. collection and a discussion of the emergence of video art in New York City. In October 2007, with Elizabeth Kessenides, attorney-at-law, she organized a panel addressing copyright in the art world. She's currently co-organizing the series All Circuits On, with Andrew Lampert, archivist of Anthology Film Archives. This series is a mutual appreciation of E.A.I.'s and Anthology's history with early video and the pioneers who experimented with it. Please join me in welcoming Rebecca Cleman.

REBECCA CLEMAN: Thanks, Ann. You know, it was really interesting hearing Jaime talk about this history, because E.A.I. now is, literally and figuratively, positioned within the commercial art world. Just as the creative center in this city was shifting, more than a decade ago, EAI moved from SoHo to Chelsea where we, are surrounded by art galleries. We have in distribution such prominent artists as Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, and Joan Jonas, and there's quite a lot of interest that comes from the art world with this. What I appreciated in Jaime's discussion was hearing about the history of the Downtown Arts scene, a history that is integral to E.A.I.'s foundation. Even though video and media are becoming more and more accepted within the commercial art world, it's often in ignorance of this history, which is actually much less cleanly divided, as Ann was saying, between mediums, and did involve a lot of collaboration between, artists who were working in many different mediums. I think that's a good way to introduce a discussion of Stuart Sherman, who was an artist practicing in the avant-garde theater scene, who was also a filmmaker, and a video maker, and a writer, in addition to making drawings

and sculpture and music, defying any neat classification of his artistic output. We're very happy to be collaborating with Fales and Mark Bradford, who is the Executor of Stuart Sherman's estate, in making the documentation of several of Stuart's Spectacles performances available. We have Stuart Sherman currently in distribution, but what we have are his videos from the Eighties and Nineties. We haven't had any recordings of these earlier performances that he's, in many ways, so known for, which are the Spectacle performances that he began doing in the late—or the mid- to late—1970s. I'll end by showing a portion of one of them. If you were here last night, you saw a segment from his Seventh Spectacle. Jaime is seen in this Spectacle, actually, working with adhesive tape. So we'll show that section again.

Stuart was born in 1946 and came to New York City in the 1960s and became involved with Charles Ludlum's Ridiculous Theater Company and Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater Company, and was working as a performer with them before he began to develop his own idiosyncratic form of performance, often performing by himself over a folding table, manipulating objects very quickly, objects that he would carry with him in a suitcase. As we'll see in the Seventh Spectacle, he also would collaborate with other performers and have them carry out these manipulations of objects. They were, as I mentioned, very quick paced and often conceptually witty and carried out in a deadpan manner. Somebody I read on Stuart observed that this was less because Stuart was trying to remove emotion from his performances and more that this was his way of receding into the background, foregrounding what was happening over the card table with these objects. There's a crossover, maybe, with drawing, which Stuart would talk about, or with sculpture.

Actually, the first Spectacle that Stuart did was performed on the set of a Richard Foreman play. And this participation and collaboration with Richard Foreman and Richard Foreman's company was very important. I'm not sure, but I'm guessing that Stuart's use of film and video, his integrating these mediums into his performances, was in part inspired by Richard Foreman or the Wooster Group's use of media at that time. Stuart combined his formative interest in writing and literature with film, which he began with, before he started using video to document his performances. As with the Richard Foreman film last night, there was a visible self-consciousness, certainly in his films, and, I would argue, his videos... a sense of them being more than just performance documentation. He was a very visual artist who was very aware of whatever medium he was working in, and he would take advantage of the syntax of that specific medium. In addition to doing these more intimate Spectacle performances, he would also work on a larger scale, and stage versions of Oedipus and Hamlet, which had these really amazing, elaborate sets. He was traveling quite frequently and was very highly regarded. But, access to his work has often been problematic.. I'm often getting feedback—I think a lot of people are getting feedback—that there is a need to provide access to this material, because interest in him, thankfully, is growing, and this seems to be the time.

Access is at the core of E.A.I.'s mission. E.A.I. was founded in 1971 by Howard Wise, who had directed an avant-garde gallery which he decided to close in order to support the developing scene that was forming in the early 1970s around video and electronic media. Wise's devotion to new forms grew out of an early interest in the Kinetic artists and the New York avant-garde community. This tight-knit scene was also a support system for Stuart's idiosyncratic performances, which were often performed in small performance spaces, like the Wooster Group's Performing Garage or La MaMa, or The Kitchen, a community that EAI was very much a part of. Stuart would go to screenings at the Collective for Living Cinema., he was very much a part of the Downtown Art scene that we're all talking about and was dependent on this community that, at times, was very intimate. As an aside, Jaime and I were talking about Stuart's interest in going on the Johnny Carson show at some point. He wasn't uninterested in going mainstream with his performances. There was, for him, the potential of an intermix of avant-garde and popular culture, which was very interesting. Maybe what I'll do is go ahead and go to this clip. We're just going to show maybe six minutes from Stuart's Seventh Spectacle.

[VIDEO CLIP SHOWN]

So we're currently collaborating with Fales Library and the Bay Area Video Coalition in preserving these videos—and we're also, thankfully, working with Mark Bradford as well—to preserve these videos and make them accessible. We will be adding them to E.A.I.'s distribution in the near future.

Something that I also wanted to mention was our ongoing initiative to digitize works in the E.A.I. collection and make them viewable as previews on-line. Chris's presentation with the YouTube videos raises some interesting issues. There is a conflict with our role distributing those works, sure. In a way, the Internet is the cable television of today. Because of YouTube those works are widely accessible, which as I said is our founding mission. In the 1970s there was great anticipation of the role cable television could play in democratizing television. But the Internet does make it difficult for an organization such as E.A.I., to operate as a nonprofit organization. For the artists, having the work available in such wide distribution makes it difficult for them to control access to their work, and to benefit from the distribution E.A.I. does. At the same time, I think it's very important for us, to be current and to provide access to the work in the best way we can. I'm constantly getting requests for previews, we know it's important to have our work available online and we're working to meet that demand.

But this question of access is—for us anyway also tied to a question of control. I don't necessarily mean control in a commercial way, but historic, academic, or scholarly control. I'm often seeing this specific history being misrepresented in the commercial art world, and I think it's very important to accurately represent a complex history that E.A.I. and a lot of other organizations and individuals have been involved with from the beginning. As Jaime said, in the 1970s, there was a lot of, , idealistic thinking around the rise of cable television, but nobody at the time could've

imagined that we'd end up with fifteen hundred channels and nothing to watch,. The Internet is often discussed in idealistic terms today, and will change as it grows and becomes more common place. Our challenge as a distributor with a history in the emergence of media culture is to participate, but with an eye to the legacy of this culture. That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

BUTLER: I'd like to thank all of our panelists. And I'm really sorry to have to do this, but we have used all of our time, so we do not have time for a discussion right now. What I'd like to do is to ask all of you to stay. Stay for the next panel, stay for the reception. And hopefully, we can continue discussion during the reception, which is going to be held back at the Fales Library at four o'clock. Thank you.