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07/17–09/08/2013

X F R
S T N

Published by

NEW
235 BOWERY
NEW YORK NY
10002 USA
MUSEUM

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ARTISTS' TEXTS

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), as 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.

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.

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.

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

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 Loisaia 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 super-highway 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 co-operative 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 Perlmán, 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.

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....

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 *Wobulator* 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.

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.

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.