

# ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES • 32 SECOND AVENUE AT SECOND STREET  
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## Testimony of Robert Haller, Director, Anthology Film Archives

Anthology Film Archives began restoring videotapes in 1983. As time and resources have permitted, we have continued with this work. In 1983 the condition of early video--the first decade of 1965 to 1975--was already a catastrophe with much early important work decayed or lost. Since then videotape materials have been improved by the manufacturers, but they are still not sufficiently stable to be used as preservation material.

Our institutional focus is personal, independent, and experimental video. It is both a form of expression, and a distinctive record of the last third of this century. Independent video is the polar opposite of broadcast, commercial television. Individually produced, made with the expectation of narrowcasting rather than broadcasting across continents, independent video aims at viewers who embrace challenges and questions rather than entertainment and answers.

Decades from now the videotapes made by independent and experimental artists will be at least as important, if not more so, as the product made by the networks and seen by millions. Though the audience for independents is small, they speak with an uncompromised authenticity less frequently found in the mass media.

In this context the fragility of independent video, made on half inch tape, on equipment with a shorter shelf-life and electronics often more idiosyncratic than those used by the networks, is a grim spectacle

that resembles a sandy beach awaiting its annual visit by a Caribbean hurricane. The grains of iron oxide, like the grains of sand, will be swept away unless they are trucked to safety--in our case to a video archive where temperature and humidity will slow the deterioration that will come in the most gentle of climates. Then, if the necessary playback equipment has also been preserved, and if people care and funds exist to rerecord the independent signal onto what is then--and I stress "then"-- the "state-of-the-art" video format, a tape's life will be extended for another decade or so.

Because the technology is still evolving, we are denied the benefits that came to film early in this century when standard gauges (35 mm and later 16 mm, at fixed rates of frames-per-second) allowed films made anywhere, to be shown nearly everywhere, for almost any time (now a hundred years).

What, in summary, am I saying? That tape is so unstable that its care demands extraordinary measures. That personal, experimental video needs even more care than that produced by commercial sponsors. That financial support for this restoration is tiny and likely to stay that way. And that because the technology is evolving with a velocity which exceeds 24 frames-per-second, but will not--and probably should not--be standardized, our task is impossible. But of course we keep trying, because we have no choice. Never give up, never, never, never.