



MEMORANDUM

Post Production
East Coast Production Dept.

TO: William T. Murphy

FR: John Craddock

DT: 3/25/96

RE: **Study of the Current State of American Television and
Video Preservation**

A statement from Home Box Office by John Craddock, Director of Post Production and Post Delivery Planning and Operations.

INTRODUCTION:

By way of introduction let me give you my credentials for representing HBO today.

I am a graduate of the Library School at Loughborough College in Britain and of the Film School at New York University, a member of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, the British Kinematograph Sound and Television Society and the Association of Moving Image Archivists. I am also a former, Emmy award winning film Editor with twenty years of experience as a Post Production Specialist in the production and distribution of films and videotape to non theatrical, television and feature film markets both domestically and internationally. For the past four and a half years I have been Director of Post Production for HBO's East Coast Production unit and head of its Post Delivery Planning and Operations team.

STATEMENT:

Home Box Office, a Time Warner Entertainment company, is a pay cable television service, first established in 1972, on which subscribers can see first run theatrical movies uncut, uncensored and uninterrupted by commercial breaks within a few months of their first theatrical release. This concept revolutionized cable from being simply a way to improve reception into a completely new medium, and remains the core of HBO's programming today.

From the beginning, HBO also licensed the transmission of live sports events. It's very first transmission was a Vancouver - New York hockey game in 1972. Other early highlights included such major events as the Mohammed Ali - Joe Frazier fight in 1975.

However, to create a unique identity HBO has also produced original programming to support the feature film presentations licensed from the major studios and independent producers.

In 1976, we produced our first original. "Robert Klein, on Location", the first of 444 standup comedy programs which helped revolutionize the presentation of comedy on television in this country.

In the past 20 years, we have produced almost 3,500 programs, to which we still hold rights to over 2,800. In addition to the previously mentioned comedy specials, these include nearly 200 documentaries, 135 feature length dramas, 720 sports specials and over a thousand episodes of series of various kinds, ranging from Not Necessarily the News to Inside the NFL and the Larry Sanders Show, plus nearly a thousand music and family specials.

A quantity of production, and I might add a quality of production that is unrivaled in the cable industry. And if our recent record for producing Oscar and Emmy award winning programs is any indication, then perhaps in the television industry as a whole.

In the documentary field we may now be the largest single producer of long form socially conscious programming outside of the grant supported sector, using some of the finest documentary film makers working today, tackling controversial subjects in a depth that you will not find on the magazine formats of commercial television. Our original feature films have, through the strength of their scripts, attracted actors and directors who do not normally work in television, creating a niche of quality programs such as "The Affair," "And the Band Played On,"

"Indictment," "Citizen X," "Truman," and "Tuskegee Airmen" that could not have been made for commercial television.

It is these programs with which we are concerned here today.

Having produced such a remarkable body of work, the question that we must now ask, is what steps are being taken to preserve this heritage, for future audiences.

It can be safely said that HBO has a copy of every program it has produced since 1976. This includes much of the pre-print film, audio and video material that goes into the making of the program.

Many of these programs are produced under license agreements, under the terms of which we are delivered a videotape which remains the property of the copyright holder, but from which we can make as many copies as we need. We also have the right of access to other preprint materials in the producer's possession for the duration of the license, which is generally the copyright term.

We now have eight different production units: HBO Original Programming East and West, HBO Pictures and HBO NYC which produce feature films, HBO Sports, HBO Independent Productions and HBO Downtown which produce programming for other networks, and HBO On-Air which produces our promotional material, each functioning with a great deal of autonomy. The rapidity with which HBO expanded its production capacity led to some inconsistency in delivery and retention policy from unit to unit.

24E3

It was in response to this, that a Post Delivery Policy and Planning report was prepared last year, in which the materials that are essential to the retention of a title were evaluated, and a company wide archiving policy was adopted. For example, original cut negatives, final sound masters and the separate pre-mix tracks generally known as stems will be kept in perpetuity, or for the duration of the license, whereas the disposition of negative out takes and production sound tapes will be reviewed after five years, that being considered the period during which any changes to meet marketing or creative interests are most likely to occur. Working elements that can be easily reproduced from the originals will be reviewed after one year.

I should add that in the case of documentaries the license agreement usually precludes the re-use of the out takes in any other program, so they are not available as a stock footage resource.

We acknowledge that the explosion of interest in American television programming overseas has stimulated interest in preserving these assets for use in other markets. It now makes good business sense to plan more carefully for international use, so that elements such as fully-filled music & effects tracks for dubbing into other languages and textless backgrounds for titles and subtitles are now a standard part of our delivery requirements.

It was with this need in mind that we are expanding the data base created by HBO Studios, which bar codes and tracks all the elements that have passed through its doors, to include elements that are in storage in our name in other parts of the United States, and other countries, or to which the producer has given us the right of access.

Our interest in preservation was further accelerated by the problems involved in re-mastering the Time Life Films catalog which we now administer. This consists of 192 feature length films, 6 documentary series, including 5 seasons of Wild Wild World of Animals, all made originally for broadcast by the commercial networks in the early 70's, and licensed to Time Life for domestic syndication and international distribution. Time Life originally took delivery of 16mm reduction negatives, which was the medium for television distribution at the time, but had the right of access to the 35mm originals. The 16's no longer meet today's television standards, and the existing 1" Masters made during the early 80's are equally unacceptable.

Time Life Films went out of business in 1980, and its files lay dormant for some time. Tracing the whereabouts and availability of the original film elements today is paper chase requiring determined research.

When we do locate the originals, we frequently find that following common practice at the time, there is no interpositive, placing the aging original negative at risk.

This experience has been an object lesson in the importance of maintaining constant vigilance over both the records and the materials themselves.

I am pleased to say that we now have allocated funds to make protection interpositives for all these pictures, which also serve as a source for re-mastering to digital tape in order to service the renewed interest in their distribution.

With our consciousness raised by the problems attached to the Time Life Film collection, we are also addressing issues of protection and longevity for HBO's own productions.

We now recognize the importance of keeping copies of programs in separate locations. Current air masters and their back ups are kept at our Transmission Center at Hauppauge on Long Island and at the HBO Studios on 23rd St. in Manhattan.

The main library of our backlist of videotapes is kept at a storage facility in Manhattan a few blocks away. Still more material is at vaults in New Jersey, and the bulk of our West Coast inventory is in storage in North Hollywood. We also have materials in storage in London and in Toronto. The bulk of the film negatives are held by the labs that originally processed the film. All of these facilities are fully professional industry recognized vaults that conform to the temperature and humidity standards recommended for the short and midterm storage of film and videotape. We are now addressing the issue of long term storage of film negative and are considering options for the refrigerated storage of this material. We are also transferring older negative originals and magnetic sound masters to inert plastic containers to further ensure their future stability.

In all, there must be nearly 100,000 film and tape elements in storage between our various facilities.

Although we can rest comfortably with the knowledge that videotapes of all our programs do exist, we cannot be as secure about their future.

In looking forward, we face two formidable obstacles to long term preservation.

First, the deterioration factor of the videotape itself. We know that its life is limited, and that some 2" tapes made 20 or more years ago may have already

deteriorated to the point of being unplayable, although samples we have tested so far are still in good shape.

The other factor is the obsolescence of the formats themselves. Regardless of condition, the number of facilities that can play back 2" today is limited and in time the same fate may overcome 1" and subsequent formats in use today.

When HBO switched from 2" Quad to 1" in 1980, all our original programs or specials, as they were then called, were re-mastered to the new medium. However, we still have 847 2" tapes of Sports Events, most of which have never been re-transferred.

2" lasted roughly 20 years. 1" maybe ten. Five years after its introduction D1 and D2 appeared on the market. In the past five years we have seen the introduction of D3, DCT, D5, Digital Betacam, and now the Digital Video Disk has been announced.

As the collection continues to grow, perpetual re-transferring will become a financial burden difficult to bear. At present we only examine and re-transfer as a program re-enters our transmission cycle, which in the case of older programming will become less and less frequent. As sales potential diminishes we will have to determine, what to preserve in a newer medium. As you have been told by other witnesses, the problem of selection is further aggravated by the near impossibility of determining what posterity will find important.

Another serious factor we have to contend with is the rapid expansion of random access electronic editing by means of such machines as the Avid and the Lightworks. For our major, dramatic productions we do still cut negatives, create interpositives and transfer directly from edited film to tape. As film is a longer lasting storage medium, we are fully protected for transfer to new media of transmission in the future such as HDTV.

For documentaries, family programming and series, the future is not as secure. Even though the Edit Decision lists allow for match back to the film negative, the negative is not usually cut. In theory, it can be cut at any future date. However, the rapidity of change in the computer world could leave our successors in 20 years time with no hardware that can play back today's software, and therein lies a further obstacle to re-mastering this valuable material in future generations.

In conclusion, I would like to say that as a former librarian, I am by nature a collector and it distresses me to see anything discarded that one day might be of interest to someone else. However, reality bites. Joni Mitchell once sang that they Paved Paradise and put up a parking lot. Substitute Film Storage, vault and you will recognize our dilemma. However, there is hope. The improvement in compression technologies and the development of new storage mediums such as the digital disc may prove to be the safeguard for this medium that microfilm and microfiche were for the printed page, enabling us to preserve for the future without forever expanding the footprint it now takes to do so.