

New York State
Council on the Arts - VIDEO PRESERVATION HEARING --
MARCH 19, 1996, SHERATON HOTEL

Good morning. It is a welcome opportunity to speak to this distinguished panel. The issue of television and video preservation is dear to me personally and as the Chairman of the New York State Council on the Arts.

--- about personal history on television---

And now, speaking in my role as the Council. Perhaps a bit of history will clarify why the Council is concerned about television and video preservation.

The Council was an early and ardent supporter of independent video.

As early as 1966, the Arts Council had already helped experimental artists present video in a variety of performances and exhibitions. In 1969, the New York State Council on the Arts provided a grant to start a series of video production workshops for young people with the public television stations around the State. When the Council's budget increased in 1970, video flourished. Community video centers were established around the State from Buffalo to Port Washington. Other groups emerged to the creative potential of the medium in the hands of performing and visual artists. A study was commissioned to create the Television Lab at WNET.

This was a time of tremendous possibility and experimentation. Artists like Nam June Paik and Shirley Clarke were creating a new artistic medium. A small investment of public funds would create a weekly rural cable series in the Catskills or in Jamestown. Partnerships with public television brought the arts in homes throughout the State and around the country. Innovative documentaries were being produced in ways not possible with film.

By the early 1980s, The Council was funding over 80 organizations involved in video in New York State. Hundreds of productions had already been created. The Council was not alone in its investment in independent video. Other public funding agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, public television, arts councils in other states, were deeply involved in funding the production and acquisition of this work.

Within the next few years we would hear from museums and from the distributors that their collections needed to be transferred to another video format. In a very limited way that Council began to assist with the conservation of videotapes at the Museum of Modern Art and in the collections of several distributors. The Council felt that it was vital that work

continue to be available to the public, in the present and in the future.

Where are all of these tapes today?

Very little is in traditional archives. Work of the most influential community workshops is stored in barns, attics, in public library stacks. A few organizations have made heroic efforts in providing safe haven to whole collections, like the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester. A variety of institutions, scholars and curators are coming forward to ensure that the very different creative uses of video are catalogued, conserved and brought to the attention of the public.

Working with the Media Alliance, the Council has helped bring these organizations and individuals together to share their knowledge and foster collaborative efforts.

Deborah Silverfine, the Director of our Electronic Media & Film Program will be submitting a statement of our activities along with some recommendations for future steps.

To touch on some of our efforts, the Council has provided some support for cataloging so that regional and specialized collections are reflected in the

National Database being created. The Council has funded lab costs and storage fees. But we can't do it alone.

We hope that the study being undertaken by the Library of Congress will point towards new partnerships, new solutions and an increased awareness of television and video preservation needs. As so much of our contemporary culture and our history is being recorded on video, by choice or by necessity, it is critical that we find ways for those images and sounds to endure.

I will end my remarks here. Do you have any questions?