Results You Can’t Refuse:
Celebrating 30 Years of BB Optics

Edited by Andrew Lampert
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Results You Can’t Refuse: Celebrating 30 Years of BB Optics

Screening Series

Bill Brand started BB Optics, a one-man film laboratory, out of his loft in April 1976. Already a well-respected filmmaker, Brand began by doing optical printing jobs for friends in the experimental filmmaking community and eventually evolved into a full-fledged preservationist. Today, Brand works with major museums, institutions and independent producers to blow-up small gauge film and to perform often complicated restorations of major and minor artist films. His list of customers reads like a very hip phone book. And, of course, he continues to be one of our most esteemed avant-garde moving image artists.

This 8-program series is intended to represent a cross-section of the films he has worked on or preserved over the years with a particular focus on creating unexpected and surprising connections between works. Accompanying these screenings is a new publication from Anthology featuring articles by Brand and a number of scholars, critics, aficionados and clients. Artists, please take note that this book includes an article by Brand and small gauge guru Toni Treadway on how to start taking better archival care of your films works. Please join us for these programs, you are in for a surprise and are sure to learn a thing or two.

Organized by Andrew Lampert and Bill Brand.

This series and publication supported by the Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program in the Department of Cinema Studies at Tisch School of the Arts, NYU.
Tuesday, April 4
Films by Saul Levine and the Richard Nixon Staff

NEW LEFT NOTE
1968/82, 27-3/4 minutes, 8mm on 16mm.
Boston-based filmmaker Saul Levine was a political activist as well as an experimental film pioneer, and with NEW LEFT NOTE he married these two driving pursuits. Levine's rapid fire editing has never been as mesmerizing as it is here in one of his most meaningful and overwhelming works.

THE NIXON WHITE HOUSE STAFF SUPER 8 MOTION PICTURE COLLECTION
1969-73, approx. 45 minutes, 8mm to 16mm on video.
The Nixon White House Staff Super 8 Motion Picture Film Collection contains FBI-confiscated films recorded between 1969 and 1973. The films were found in the office files of John Ehrlichman after he resigned his post as Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs on April 30, 1973. Tonight’s generous selection of clips and segments was compiled by Brian Frye for the occasion.

Saul Levine and Steve Greene, of the National Archives and Records Administration, will be on hand to discuss the films, the era and exactly what they think of seeing these movies side-by-side. A one-time only event, for sure.

Approx. running time: 90 minutes

Wednesday, April 5

Three works that explore the psychological underpinnings of sexual identity, personal trauma and the cathartic release of filmmaking. Three exceptional and deeply personal statements.

Jennifer Montgomery HOME AVENUE (1989, 17 minutes, super8 to 16mm on video.)
Amy Taubin IN THE BAG (1981, 19.5 minutes, 16mm.)
Marjorie Keller MISCONCEPTION (1977, 43 minutes, super8 on 16mm.)

Total running time: 70 minutes
Tuesday, April 11

While the filmmakers in this program did not all run in the same artistic circles, they were all at one time or another members of the larger downtown arts community. These works represent some of the most honest, lyrical, personal and playful examples of the New York 70s/80s scene at its best. Thank you to The Fales Collection at NYU, Bob Fiore, the David Zwirner Gallery and the Whitney Museum of American Art for their cooperation with this show.

Jeff Preiss BOY TOWN (1987, 13 minutes, 8mm to 16mm.)
David Wojnarowicz THE FIRE IN MY BELLY (1987, 13 min, super8 on 16mm.)
David Wojnarowicz HEROIN (1981, 3, super8 on 16mm.)
Lewis Khlar HER FRAGRANT EMULSION (1987, 10.5 minutes, 16mm.)
Jim Jennings CHINATOWN (1978, 5 minutes, 16mm.)
Gordon Matta-Clark OPEN HOUSE (1972, 45 minutes, Super 8 on 16mm.)
Jack Waters BERLIN/NY (1984, 20 min. 16mm.)

Total running time: 100 minutes

Wednesday, April 12

Two films from the Human Arts Association

Paula Longendyke CONTINENTAL DRIFT (1977, 30 minutes, 16mm.)
Geophysics goes modern; the earth’s shifting crust explained through entertainment. A wild and amusing guide to plate tectonics that is filled with animation, actors, intermediate science and all that good stuff...

Jacki Ochs LETTERS NOT ABOUT LOVE (1998, 59 minutes, 16mm.)
Two contemporary poets, one from America (Lyn Hejinian), the other from Russia (Arkadii Dragomoshchenko) are asked to begin a correspondence based on a list of ordinary words such as ‘home,’ ‘book,’ ‘poverty,’ ‘violence.’ They reflect on each word, considering its conventional meaning and what it means to them personally. Both poets move seamlessly from present to past, a move echoed by the use of striking new and archival footage from both countries. As the film progresses and intimacy grows, both the similarities and differences between Russian and American ways of grasping the world are revealed. Letters Not About Love becomes both a revealing portrait of two cultures and a compelling expression of the art of mutual understanding.

Total running time: 90 minutes
Tuesday, April 18

A revelatory show of optical printing effects, disrupted and disturbed images, sound and image interference and some top notch verbal jousting. De Landa will be on hand to introduce his rarely screened RAW NERVES and to discuss the creation of this now infamous film. This is a very rare screening as the print has been taken out of distribution.

Manuel De Landa **RAW NERVES** 1980, 30 minutes, 16mm.
Bill Brand **SPLIT DECISION** 1979, 15 minutes, 16mm.
Bill Brand **BEFORE THE FACT** 1974, 6 minutes, 16mm.
Hollis Frampton **CRITICAL MASS (HAPAX LEGOMENA III)** 1971, 25.5 minutes, 16mm.

Approx running time: 90 minutes

Wednesday, April 19

A wildly diverse program that moves between the realms of performance, punk rock and patricide. The JFK footage was originally shot for the Warren Commission investigation and was, many years later, preserved by Brand. Seen out of context, it is a mystifying document that raises more questions that it answers. The other works in this program speak to ideas of the ritual, mysticism and transformation. Also included is a guided tour through various documentaries that Bill has worked on as well as outtakes and mishaps that have happened along the way. Expect some very special surprises.

Martha Colburn **HEY TIGER** (1996, 2.5 minutes, super8 on 16mm.)
Bradley Eros **OSMOSIS** (1972-2002, 10 minutes, super8 on 16mm.)
Bruce Nauman **ART MAKE UP** (1967-68, 10 minute excerpt, 16mm on video)
**JFK ASSASSINATION REENACTMENTS** (approx. 1963-64, 35 minutes, 8mm to 16mm on video)

Approximate running time: 80 minutes
Wednesday, April 26

Films by Bill Brand

A tribute to BB Optics would not be complete without a small survey of Bill Brand’s sublime works. Long recognized as one of the key filmmakers of his generation, this program brings together vintage and recent film and video pieces. Brand is surely a technical whiz, but at the heart of it all he has the sensibility of a painter.

- **MOMENT** (1972, 25 minutes, 16mm.)
- **MY FATHER’S LEG** (1996, 3 minutes, video.)
- **ANGULAR MOMENTUM** (1973, 20 minutes, 16mm.)
- **SWAN’S ISLAND** (2005, 5 minutes, 16mm. Co-directed by Katy Martin.)
- **COALFIELDS** (1984, 39 minutes, 16mm.)

Total running time: 92 minutes

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Tuesday, April 25

Four filmmakers, four very different styles, conceptions, approaches, intentions and results. From hand-painted to pounded with a hammer, these films have an underlying sense of physicality and an almost dance-like relationship to motion.

Robert Huot **BLACK & WHITE FILM** (1968-69, 12.5 minutes, 16mm.)
Robert Huot **SOUND MOVIE** (1972 completed 2005, 9 min., 16mm on video.)
Katy Martin **SILKSCREENS** (1978, 19 minutes, 16mm.)
Katy Martin **DRAWING BREATH** (1979, 4 minutes, super8 to 16mm.)
Tony Conrad **4X ATTACK** (1973, 1 minute, 16mm.)
Tony Conrad **CURRIED 7302** (1973, 2 minute, 16mm.)
Tony Conrad **7302 CREOLE** (1973, 1 minute, 16mm.)
Peter Herwitz **WINTER DREAM LIEDER** (1993, 12 minutes, super8 to 16mm.)

Plus more films to be announced!

Approximate running time: 70 minutes
Foreword

I don’t know what to say about Bill that won’t be said by others in this book. We all agree that Bill is a uniquely talented artist as well as an invaluable resource for a wide community of independent filmmakers. His work as an artist and his work as a preservationist are of equal renown, and if anything I hope that this book and series do justice to both facets of his amazing and prodigious efforts across that wide spectrum.

Bill has been termed the “accidental archivist” and I always find that to be a rather funny and slightly uncomfortable label. Unlike Bill, I am a trained Archivist. I studied at the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at the George Eastman House Museum in Rochester, New York. Even though I had been working with Super 8 and later 16mm since the age of 11, it was at the Selznick School that I learned the ins and outs of preservation. Bill stepped into the world of archiving and preservation as a direct result of his optical printing jobs, yet no matter what he does, there is always an exacting degree of care involved. He didn’t have to go to school to know what to do; it was a natural instinct.

It is clear to me that making 16mm blow-ups from 8mm originals for artists was always a form of preservation. In creating something that was meant for distribution, Bill had to make a new negative that could be considered as a preservation element. It saved the filmmaker from having to show their edited camera original or murky 8mm/Super-8 prints. It is only later that we termed what Bill was doing as “preservation,” but I suspect, on some conscious level, he always realized it.

The fact that we are celebrating Bill is no accident. The work that he has done for the experimental film community almost necessitates this retrospective. I’m no longer a student, but every time that Bill and I get together I feel like I’ve learned something new. If I were smarter, I’d take notes. I don’t believe that any of us are ever truly out of school, and I’m just thankful that whether in the classroom or in the real world there are teachers like Bill to guide us along.

Below are a few different people and groups who should be held directly responsible for this book and series:

Howard Besser and Alicia Kubes of the Moving Image Archiving Program at NYU gave nothing short of their full support on all levels to this project. It would have been impossible to pull it off without them.

Sueyoung Park-Primiano came to the project at a late stage, but having her strong editorial understanding and wonderful attitude allowed us to fine-tune this publication. Her input was vital.
MIAP students Paula Félix-Didier, Natalia Fidelholtz and Bradley D. Campbell were all instrumental in the research and overall conception of the series.

All of the essay writers here deserve an extremely large amount of gratitude for the time and effort they spent on their contributions. They are fellow travelers in spirit and in word. What more can I say?

Wendy Dorsett has been designing Anthology’s publications for a number of years and should be praised for working on tight deadlines with traditionally tardy writers. She always maintains her calm and puts in numerous hours perfecting her work. Similarly, Edward Crouse is an ace copy editor and a remarkably talented singer and stage personality. They are much-appreciated colleagues. Robert Haller consulted on this project and continues to pave the way with his annual Anthology publications and tireless support of film preservation.

I must thank all of the filmmakers, speakers, administrators and archivists who contributed to our effort. Special appreciation is owed to Saul Levine, Steve Greene, Jon Gartenberg, Manuel De Landa, Ann Butler, Brent Phillips, Jeff Preiss, Bob Fiore, Jane Crawford, Angela Choon and the David Zwirner Gallery, Elisabeth Sussman and Christina Kukielski at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Jacki Ochs, Todd Wineke, Mark McElhatten, Peter Hurwitz, Robert Huot and Tony Conrad.

I especially thank Katy, Lucy and Jo for keeping Bill healthy and happy. And for letting me come over to their house as often as I do.

A.L.
2006
Introduction
by Howard Besser

Bill Brand as Preservationist/Artist

Bill Brand has played a pivotal role in avant-garde film since the 1970s, both as a filmmaker and as a restorer and preservationist. In honor of the 30th anniversary of his archival preservation company (BB Optics), Anthology Film Archive and NYU’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program (MIAP) have collaborated on a film series and publication honoring his important contributions.

This publication is designed to serve several purposes: an homage to Bill Brand and his work, a program to accompany the film series at Anthology, and a guide to the preservation of independent and avant-garde films for both filmmakers and preservationists.

Though Brand is well-known as an experimental filmmaker, his substantial work behind the scenes of avant-garde film is not widely recognized. Since 1976 his BB Optics has provided labwork and services to a wide variety of filmmaker-artists and to museums and libraries seeking to preserve their work. Brand’s work has touched a wide swath of experimental filmmakers, including Stan Brakhage, Yvonne Rainer, Todd Haynes, Saul Levine, Bradley Eros, Luther Price, and Jeanne Liotta. And he has worked for experimental documentary filmmakers such as Ross McElwee, Alan Berliner, Pola Rapaport, and Bruce Weber.

Through BB Optics, Brand has provided the technological expertise and equipment to enlarge smaller gauge footage (such as 8mm, Super 8, 9.5mm) to 16mm (the conventional and most widespread gauge size for exhibition of experimental material). But Brand has also used his immense knowledge and background to figure out how to preserve difficult material.

Brand has been involved in the production or conservation and preservation of literally hundreds of films (only a fraction of which will be shown in the film series that accompanies this publication). Archivists and librarians with experimental film material know him as the “go-to” man for archival preservation; his work on projects at the New York Public Library is described in Marie Nesthus’ article, and his work on the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS is outlined in Jon Gartenberg’s “The Fragile Emulsion” (reprinted from The Moving Image). In addition, Brand has done archival preservation work for the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Berkeley Art Museum and the National Center for Jewish Film.

But the skills that Brand has developed in working on avant-garde pieces have proven useful in other types of non-traditional works. As Brian L. Frye shows in his essay here,
Brand’s skills proved useful in the preservation of Super 8 films shot by the Nixon White House staff.

Brand’s 30 years of experience working in this area have led him to be an expert in the preservation of the most difficult-to-preserve types of films. As Brand articulates in his interview with Frye, which we reprint here from Film History, he is an “Accidental Preservationist” who came to the field without formal training or any written resources to consult. One of the goals of this publication is to serve as a written resource that will help guide filmmakers and archivists in the preservation of these more difficult works.

Since the start of the millennium, Brand has been focusing in on various methods for passing his knowledge in this area on to others. In 2001 he helped the Guggenheim Museum formulate and served on a public panel on “Preserving the Immaterial,” and later the same year he served as a panelist on “Restoration of Small Gauge Films” at the Association of Moving Image Archivists’ annual conference.

In 2004 he agreed to become an adjunct faculty member in the NYU MIAP Masters Degree program which I direct. For the past 2 years he has helped inspire and train a new generation of film archivists. Not only has he developed and taught our class in Film Preservation, but he has also influenced a variety of student research projects on topics ranging from issues in preservation/restoration of public art (raised by his 1980 Masstransiscope piece installed in a Brooklyn subway) to issues of preserving scratches, white frames, and special effects in laboratory preservation work on experimental films.

In the academic world, a festchrift (literally a “celebration publication”) is a collection of writings by different authors presented as a tribute to a particularly influential scholar. Though the field of moving image archiving is really in its scholarship infancy, we feel that Bill Brand’s work on preservation of difficult film works is substantial and influential enough to merit such a festchrift.

Spring 2006
Howard Besser
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http://www.nyu.edu/tisch/preservation/

One final note: This publication was a collaborative effort of a number of individuals. Anthology’s Andrew Lampert and I led the effort for our respective institutions. MIAP students Paula Felix-Didier, Natalia Fidelholtz, and Bradley Campbell spent 9 months of diligent work on various aspects of this project. Cinema Studies PhD student Sueyoung Park-Primiano provided editorial services. A number of artists and preservationists helped or influenced by Bill contributed their writings to this volume. And thanks are due to both journals which allowed us to republish works that they originally published. Hampshire College generously reduced Bill’s teaching load in order for him to work on this project. And the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) provided partial funding for a portion of this publication that will serve as guidelines for preserving non-traditional films.

Note: The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of NEH or NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts.
Acknowledgments

This publication and exhibition would not have been possible without the insight and effort of Andrew Lampert, Film Archivist, Anthology Film Archives, and the support of Howard Besser, Director of Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program in the Department of Cinema Studies at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. I am grateful to Sueyoung Park-Primiano for assisting in editing, Wendy Dorsett for designing, Edward Crouse for copy editing and Robert Haller, Director of Collections and Special Projects for spearheading book publications at Anthology Film Archives. I am also grateful for NYU-MIAP graduate students Paula Félix-Didier, Natalia Fidelholtz and Bradley Campbell for spending many hours digging through the records of BB Optics to compile the list of films and filmmakers from which these exhibitions were organized.

I want to thank Hampshire College for allowing me the time to write, program and participate in these exhibitions. I could not have done this without the specific support of Aaron Berman, Dean of Faculty, Susan Tracy, Dean of the School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies and my colleagues in the Film, Photography and Video program. Professors Joan Braderman, Jacqueline Hayden, Baba Hillman, Kara Lynch, Sandra Matthews, Abraham Ravett, Robert Seydel and Faculty Associate Kane Stewart, who have graciously taken up the slack.

While BB Optics operates as a one-man band I could not have accomplished the work without the cooperation of other laboratories and film services, especially and most recently Colorlab in Rockland, Maryland. Russ Suniewick, Colorlab co-owner, has been instrumental in providing consistent, quality services with a vigorous appreciation for film preservation and Chris Hughes, Head Film Timer has brought an artist’s sensitivity to the most unconventional projects. Other collaborators include Fran Bowen, Trackwise at Full House Productions, Janice Allen, Cinema Arts, Jon Gartenberg, Gartenberg Media Enterprises, Bill Seery and Alex Noyes, Mercer Media, and Toni Treadway, Brodsky and Treadway. Through the years I have employed former students as optical printer operators including Carla Bass Conner, Anne-Lise Bruening, Lee Chatametikool, Tara Knight and Maria Fernanda de Alfonseca who not only patiently practiced their craft but became loving members of my family.

There are many artists and clients who for no particular reason don’t appear in these exhibitions and may not otherwise be mentioned in this publication. I am grateful to them for entrusting me with their work. These include, though not exclusively, Vito Acconci, John Ahearn, Ralph Arlyck, Eugenie Balcells, Gordon Ball, Mary Lea Bandy, Museum of Modern Art, Roger Beebe, Zoe Beloff, Alan Berliner, Lance Bird, Brigitte Blood, Steven Bognar, Stan Brakhage, Piere Cahn, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha via Berkeley Museum of Art, Pip Chodorov, Chris Choy, Thomas Comerford, Margarita De la Vega, The Robert Flaherty Film Seminar,
Steve Doughton, Carolyn Faber, Marion Fuller, Bob Fiori, Holly Fisher, Glenn Fogel, Karen Glynn, Silvianna Goldsmith, Karen Goodman and Kirk Simon, Steven Greene, Archivist, Nixon Presidential Materials at the National Archives and Records Administration, Vincent Grenier, Barbara Hammer, Susan Hartnett, Todd Haynes, Sally Heckel, Harriet Hirshorn, Lisa Hsia, Andrew Ingall, Jewish Museum, Ken Jacobs, Nora Jacobson, Jytta Jensen, Museum of Modern Art, Leandro Katz, Pooh Kaye, Peter Kingsbury, Peter Kino and Pamela Yeats and Thomas Sigel of Skylight Pictures, Tim Kirkman, Caroline Koebel, Ellen Kuras, Mark Lepore, Lorna Lentini, Alan F. Lewis, National Archives and Records Administration, Jeanne Lotta, Scott MacDonald, Anthony McCall, Tom Otterness, Mary Patierno, Brent Phillips, Fales Library, NYU, Richard Pontius, Brandeis Jewish Film Archive, Luther Price, Pola Rappaport, Yvonne Rainer, Rachel Reichman, Berenice Reynaud, Liisa Roberts, Susan Rosenberg, Oren Rudavsky, Tom Schiller, Saturday Night Live, Katy Schimert, M.M. Serra, Film-makers Cooperative, Stewart Sherman, Sally Silvers, Peggy Stern, Rene Tajima, Willie Varela, Jill Vetter, Walker Art Center, Rosa Von Praunheim, Brenda Webb, Chicago Filmmakers, Remy Weber and Susan Zeig. Alan Berliner, Larry Gottheim, Peter Herwitz, Lew Klahr, Saul Levine and Allen Ross among others, are obvious choices for more extensive retrospectives but are either excluded or only minimally represented in the exhibition because their work is being shown in auxiliary programs, has been recently exhibited or is subject to significant upcoming programs.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the loving support of Katy Martin my wife and partner in life and art, and our daughters Jo and Lucy whose entire childhood has been accompanied by the metronomic click, click, click of the optical printer.

Bill Brand
2006
Bill Brand and the Avant-Garde: Moving Towards Its Future, Preserving Its Past by Marie Nesthus

Artists create their works as distillations of the world around them, as responses to the artistic practice within which they are working and as irrepressible expressions of their own essential natures.

Among his fellow avant-garde filmmakers, Bill Brand occupies a most unusual, perhaps unique, place. From the earliest days of his interest in avant-garde film, when he was more a student than an artist, Bill has been deeply engaged in the work of other filmmakers. He has written of his early introduction to the work of Hollis Frampton and of his studies with Paul Sharits. As part of his participation in the November 2004 Princeton University convocation, Gloria! The Legacy of Hollis Frampton, Bill remembered his first encounter with Hollis Frampton. Bill had been present at the first public screening, at the San Francisco Cinematheque, of Zorn’s Lemma. When Frampton came to Antioch College a year later, where Bill was studying with Paul Sharits, Bill projected Zorn’s Lemma and Nostalgia and, from the booth, recorded the talk that followed the screenings. At that point, Bill took what is likely his first step toward active interaction with other artists in the avant-garde. In his words, “I quickly took liberty with the recording and with a razor blade and a splicing block made a 10-minute audio composition titled A Formalist’s Dream. I mailed it to Hollis.”

It is this proactive response to another artist’s work that has characterized Bill Brand throughout his artistic life.
In his talk for the panel discussion *Fixing the Moment: Preserving Expanded Cinema*, presented at the AMIA Conference in November of 2004, Bill recalled his work as a studio assistant to Paul Sharits on Sharits’ first film installation *Sound Strip/Film Strip*. Bill describes his work on the piece: “I was involved in nearly the entire process of its creation and traveled to install it, first in Houston and a year later at the Bykert Gallery in New York City. This was really my apprenticeship as an artist and I am grateful for all I learned.” However, it was years later, in retrospect, reviewing the materials that he had in hand as a preservationist, that Bill himself realized the degree to which he had contributed to the work’s creation.

In 1973, as a very young artist, Bill Brand founded Chicago Filmmakers, providing a physical and psychological space for himself and his colleagues to showcase and share their work. Later, after his move to New York City, he would again work to provide a commons, meeting places and support for avant-garde filmmakers. He served on the board of Collective for Living Cinema. He co-founded the Parabola Arts Foundation, where he still serves as an artistic director.

BB Optics, now one of the most valued film preservation services in the country, began with Bill, generous and expansive by nature, doing favors for friends. From the first film blow-ups from Super 8mm to 16mm, his projects grew to encompass optical printing for a very wide range of independent filmmakers. In the 1990’s, his work once again expanded, this time into larger archival projects.

The film preservation process is, to use Bill’s phrasing “not a transparent one.” Preservation requires detailed attention to all the materials and qualities of the work being preserved. It also requires an open-minded empathy with the original artist’s strategies. One cannot preserve a work without learning something from it. A partial list of films that Bill has worked on through BB Optics over its thirty years runs single-lined over nine pages. The list encompasses an astonishing range of artists and films. Through his preservation work alone, Bill Brand has likely garnered a nearly unparalleled understanding of independent filmmaking.

Finally, and most unusually in the avant-garde film tradition, Bill has for over three decades loved and lived with a strong and independent artist. He is married to Katy Martin, a visual artist deeply engaged in pursuing the possibilities of her own practice in painting, photography and filmmaking.

All of these circumstances together, relatively uncommon in the lives of avant-garde filmmakers, have worked together to inspire Bill Brand to create a body of work that is the most varied of any artist in avant-garde cinema.
Coalfields is a wondrous example of experimental documentary—a documentary that uses its uncommon techniques to underline and strengthen its political and social impact. Essentially a collage film, Coalfields begins with the presentation of a powerful painting entitled Black Lung, the work of coal miner David “Blue” Lamm. The film uses fragments of interviews with miners and their families; printed phrases superimposed on imagery, relating in brief narrative passages a woman’s loss of her husband to the mines; Kimiko Hahn’s moving poem; an evocative sound composition by Earl Howard; and throughout the film, scenes from the landscape and the lives lived in these “hollers.”

Coalfields tells the story of Fred Carter, a retired coal miner and black lung activist framed by the government in an attempt to both discredit the movement he selflessly serves and to stop his bid for president of the United Auto Workers. Over scenes of an apparently bucolic landscape and a seemingly endless, gentle arc of coal streaming from a chute, a story is told of unstable dams, formed from mining refuse, giving way and flooding communities. The skills of an experimental filmmaker were central to the creation of this quiet, subtle, ultimately damning, documentary.

After those bravura performances, Bill moved on to produce work that is visually nearly their polar opposite, work that instead bears many of the hallmarks of cinema-vérité documentary. Nevertheless, Home Less Home once again shows the hands of an experimental filmmaker at work. Bill again combines disparate elements. He imports sequences from a Frank Capra film and an array of emblematic photographs (by Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and many other distinguished photographers). He constructs fact-filled

afflicts miners with black-lung disease. Coalfields is a wondrous example of experimental documentary—a documentary that uses its uncommon techniques to underline and strengthen its political and social impact. Essentially a collage film, Coalfields begins with the presentation of a powerful painting entitled Black Lung, the work of coal miner David “Blue” Lamm. The film uses fragments of interviews with miners and their families; printed phrases superimposed on imagery, relating in brief narrative passages a woman’s loss of her husband to the mines; Kimiko Hahn’s moving poem; an evocative sound composition by Earl Howard; and throughout the film, scenes from the landscape and the lives lived in these “hollers.” Coalfields tells the story of Fred Carter, a retired coal miner and black lung activist framed by the government in an attempt to both discredit the movement he selflessly serves and to stop his bid for president of the United Auto Workers. Over scenes of an apparently bucolic landscape and a seemingly endless, gentle arc of coal streaming from a chute, a story is told of unstable dams, formed from mining refuse, giving way and flooding communities. The skills of an experimental filmmaker were central to the creation of this quiet, subtle, ultimately damning, documentary.

After those bravura performances, Bill moved on to produce work that is visually nearly their polar opposite, work that instead bears many of the hallmarks of cinema-vérité documentary.

Chuck’s Will’s Widow is a eulogy shot in the mountain woods where the ashes of Bill’s mother and father were scattered. A meditative quality pervades the work, in part because of the serene landscape, which comprises one plane of the visual field, and in part because of the continuous rapid movements of the myriad shapes that flutter through the frame and hover between the viewer’s eyes and the landscape. Without knowing the film’s elegiac purpose, one can recognize in these quickly moving fragments the busy-ness of the minute-to-minute perceptions that obstruct us from recognizing the longer, steadier views of our lives. The flickering shapes, however, could also evoke the wings of insects or birds (perhaps the bird named in the film’s title) and bring to the viewer’s mind their glorious, transitory activity and the essential vitality of the ongoing natural world.

Coalfields employs essentially the same rapidly moving shapes that waft through Chuck’s Will’s Widow. In Coalfields the artist, through manipulation of both their movements and their coloring, can transform them into the ominous, ever-hovering soot that
inserts providing information concerning the history and the present condition of homelessness in New York City and across America. He combines these elements with long uninterrupted sequences of his conversations with people on the streets of New York City. He does not “interview.” As he states: “I can just talk to people. I can be myself as I go out and ask, ‘Why are you homeless?’” The same openness and unguarded curiosity that spurred him to investigate Hollis Frampton’s lecture and the effects of color changes in film here provide a focus on a devastating social problem. The subjects of his film relax in front of the camera. They speak openly and movingly. The directness of the man and his film provide a privileged view of people who are so often marginalized; the subjects also require thoughtful consideration, as do the implications for each of us on this deeply disturbing problem, intransigent despite decades of presumably good intentions. (Home Less Home was edited and co-written by Joanna Kiernan.)

Over the last decade, Bill has worked in video. Here again he has demonstrated his extraordinary sensitivity to the qualities of a medium. He has understood the capacity of video for intimacy. He has recognized its potential for richly saturated color. He has employed these qualities to create a series of astonishingly personal works.

**Suite** consists of five works—four of which focus upon an inherited disease inflicting Bill’s family: polycystic kidney disease. *My Father’s Leg*, which opens the Suite, is a self-portrait. Brand gazes at his own body and the cysts he bears, as he reflects upon his father’s death at an age younger than the filmmaker’s. In *Double Nephrectomy*, Bill projects images of his sister’s scars from the removal of both her kidneys and her kidney transplant upon, in his words, “my own body and psyche.” In *Moxibustion*, Bill returns to his use of flickering shapes (this time video-generated). These seem to penetrate his body as his sister treats him through acupuncture needling and burning herbs. In *Gazelle*, Bill, ever mindful of the over-all shape of his works and ever vigilant about the toll of intense experience upon the viewer, brings relief. This portrait of his artist wife shows her in her studio, painting directly on her own body while imagining a wild animal. She is preparing her art. **Suite** explores the body as a site of abjection and as a site of beauty, and ends with the hopeful possibilities of art.

In July 1999, a sculptor friend of Bill’s, Ruth Hardinger, was trapped inside her own first-floor apartment by the media frenzy and public attention initiated by the death of a neighbor in her building: John F. Kennedy, Jr. *I’m A Pilot Like You* (2000) is, literally, an inside view of celebrity. Once again, the freedom from stricture and correct form that is a basic tenet of experimental work allowed an imaginative and insightful way to document the events taking place on a New York sidewalk. A camera was placed to shoot out of two apartment windows, revealing the sidewalk and the street beyond. It documented nearly a week of pilgrimages, up-to-the-moment-news reports, police crowd control, and a mounting pile of flowers and souvenirs left in memoriam. Clearly an examination of the affection with which Kennedy was regarded by both New Yorkers and the crowds of people who traveled distances to pay their respects, the film is also a chilling testament to the challenges Kennedy faced in his day-to-day living. *I’m a Pilot Like You* was co-produced and co-directed by Ruth Hardinger.

*Skinside Out* (2002) is a film by Bill Brand in collaboration with Katy Martin. She had produced a series of lushly colored photographs using her own body, expressionistically painted, as the subject. The film, an outgrowth of that project, explores, as did her photographs, the pleasure of looking, the edge of repulsion, and the implication of making public what has long been in the realm of the private. It is both intriguing and inspiring that a long-married couple support and engage with one another in the creation of such personal, revealing work.

Bill Brand has worked in the film community—as a teacher, an organizer, an optical printing specialist, and finally as a greatly respected film preservationist—over a period of three decades. His own wide-ranging body of work has come into being over the same period. In both arenas, one finds the result of the generous open-mindedness and the attentive imagination that he offers to all those who encounter him, as well as the painstaking care with which he protects and restores, and significantly contributes to, the history of his beloved art form.
The Accidental Preservationist: An Interview with Bill Brand
by Brian Frye

Over the last twenty-five years, Bill Brand has developed a well-deserved reputation as one of the finest optical printer technicians working with small- and medium-gauge film formats. Brand specializes in the preservation of 8mm, Super 8 and 9.5mm gauges, and offers a depth and breadth of experience with them few can equal. In recent years, Brand has completed film preservation projects for the New York Public Library, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and other significant cultural institutions. In addition, he has worked on projects for filmmakers including Alan Berliner, Stan Brakhage, Todd Haynes, Ross McElwee and Yvonne Rainer.

But Brand isn’t just a technician. He’s an internationally recognized artist as well, with an impressive list of screenings, publications and awards to his name. It’s Brand’s experience as a fine artist that differentiates him from his peers in the film preservation world.

If there’s a truism about fine artists’ approach to celluloid it’s that there’s just no telling what they’re likely to do to it. Paint, scratch, cut multiple versions, present complicated printing instructions; these aren’t your standard negatives. As a result, preserving films made by fine artists requires a kind of care and attention quite different from that suited to conventional movies. Technicians and preservationists unfamiliar with the history and aesthetic of avant-garde film are at a serious disadvantage in making critical decisions. Bill Brand is an exception. He knows that history and is conversant with that aesthetic. He is well-prepared to work with artists and preservationists to ensure that his results are as true to the original as possible.

Brian Frye: Describe the role you play as an optical printer in the process of preserving films.

Bill Brand: My role often depends on whether I’m working with an archivist or conservator, or whether I’m put in these roles by default. It’s really only in the last few years that I’ve even thought of myself as being involved in preservation and conservation, even though in retrospect I can see that I’ve done it for a very long time. So first maybe I should say what role I played in the past. Someone would send me a film, or talk to me about duplicating a film, and often without much guidance. I found myself having to make decisions about the intent of the maker, and the historical context of the work, in order to evaluate things such as exposure, saturation and film stocks. I also had to make decisions about detailed things, like whether to repair splices, or leave...
them as they are; whether or not to include leader or markings on the film; how much to clean films or not to clean films at all; whether material that seems to be missing is in fact missing or whether it was an intention of the maker. All the issues that a conservator or archivist often face, I was dealing with by default.

**Because there was no one else being placed in that role?**

And because the people who would send me the work wouldn’t think about those things. It seems like a much more transparent process than it actually is.

**Would you say that you have a typical client, or types of clients?**

In the past, it was mostly filmmakers, who were asking to make master negatives or blowups of their own works. Or it was the estates of filmmakers (Hollis Frampton, for example) or distribution cooperatives. And then eventually it became archives, museums and libraries. Sometimes museums, archives and libraries would ask filmmakers to provide masters or prints, and then they would commission me.

**So the role that you play, you’ve found that it’s changed in recent years?**

It changed most fundamentally when Jon Gartenberg asked me to work on the Estate Project [for Artists with AIDS] films. For the first time I had someone who was taking responsibility to be an archivist or conservator. We established a very collaborative working process and he has written about this in his article ‘The Fragile Emulsion’ [in *The Moving Image* 2.2 (Fall 2002)]. It was here that I began to realize that all along I have been doing preservation and that the funny feelings that I’ve had all these years about the kinds of decisions I was making were justified. Before working with Jon, no one had taken on these issues point blank. No one had looked at them directly. A lot of the things that I’ve done, or that we’ve done together, are perhaps setting the standard for how to go about this kind of work.

So you think that starting this relationship with Jon Gartenberg formalized things that you were thinking and doing already? Or do you think that the way you’ve approached the work you’ve been doing has changed since you started working with him?

Well, both. It sanctioned it, and gave a name to it, and it brought it into a discourse. I don’t know how the dynamic works, but since I started working with Gartenberg I’ve also done work with the New York Public Library and with museums, the National Archives and other archives where related kinds of collaborations have been possible.

**Do you think that the trajectory of your work as an optical printer has influenced your clients in choosing you? Or do you think that has played a role, the kind of work you’ve done, or the kind of people you’ve worked for?**

I think what I have to offer, and the reason that people come to me, is that I have the technical wherewithal to produce quality work, and I have both the experience of being an artist and of having been part of the context out of which a lot of the work that’s now being preserved comes. There just aren’t many people in labs who understand the work and its context in the way I do. Most labs are geared towards the film industry in its more conventional sense, so that making critical judgments of the kind that I mentioned is not possible. There is a temptation to try to clean things up and standardize films in a particular way and I’m not as susceptible to that.

These projects are often puzzles. A lot of this kind of work is hard to figure out, because you get a box of materials, and you have to determine where it came from and how it was put together and what it was meant to do. And having been part of making films in that way I can understand when I see something. I know what kind of splicer was used, I know the labs that were used to make the prints, and even who some of the timers were. So I can make a guess as to whether the print—the only remaining print—should be considered the definitive judgment on the part of the artist, or whether there was an arbitrary judgment on the part of the timer who made the only answer print of that negative.

Describe the equipment you use and the procedure that you go through when you’re preparing a film to be printed. How is that different from approaches other people might take? Is the equipment you use different?

I don’t think the equipment is particularly different. The film is re-photographed frame by frame. I don’t have a wet-gate printer, and a lot of the work I do is 8mm and Super-8 blowup. In the last year there are a number of labs that have acquired the capability of doing wet-gate printing in small formats. People who are looking to do preservation have to make a judgment as to whether it’s more important to have a wet gate to reduce or eliminate scratches or whether it’s more important to have someone who can make the kinds of judgments I can about the work, in terms of what I think the film should...
to have a visceral sense of the whole, and make a judgment shot by shot about what it should look like: whether the highlights or the shadows or this color or that color should be the thing to go for. And I think that’s where I’ve just acquired a good sense of the films I work on. There are also films that I’ll take on, and can do things with, that most labs just won’t touch, where multiple layers are physically sandwiched together with scotch tape, or things have been chemically treated or left in puddles and the emulsion is flaking off. I’ve taken those things on as well.

Have you noticed any change in the volume of small-gauge work you’ve received in recent years?

In the last two or three years my volume has increased tenfold, probably, because I did a very large job for the Richard Nixon Library at the National Archives. The New York Public Library also had a large preservation program that I was involved in. I don’t know if this level of work will keep up, but I know that I can handle a lot more volume than I used to. In the 1970s I was using the optical printer only for my own films, but I started doing favors for friends. Marjorie Keller’s 1977 *Misconceptions*, a Super-8 double-system sound film, was probably the first film I blew up for someone else. After that I did the same for other filmmakers, many of them also friends, including Saul Levine’s *The Big Stick*, Notes of an Early Fall, *Bopping the Great Wall of China Blue* and Katy Martin’s *Silkscreens* and *Hanafuda*. Jasper Johns. I blew up many of Lewis Klahr’s early films, most of Peter Hurwitz’s films, and films by Willie Verela and Mark Lepore to name a few. I also did opticals or blew up portions of films for Alan Berliner, Jackie Ochs, Manuel De Landa, Yvonne Rainer, Todd Haynes, Zoe Beloff, Pola Rappaport, Joe Gibbons, Scott Stark, Ross McElwee and many others.

About ten years ago I began working on larger archival projects including the Super-8...
films of Gordon Matta-Clark, a large collection of 8mm films of ballet performances at the New York City Ballet from the late 1950s and early 1960s for the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts, Super-8 films by Storm de Hirsch, and an 8mm Stan Brakhage film for the Film-Makers’ Cooperative. So the volume of work has steadily increased in the last decade, with a big leap in the last few years.

**Can you describe further projects that you’ve done for the Public Library and for the National Archives? What was the material you were working with and what specifically were their expectations?**

The National Archives work was a contract with the Nixon Library to take Super-8 footage that was shot by his top aides in the late 1960s and early 1970s and blow it up to 16mm. It was a lot of footage, but pretty straightforward. It was just a matter of making good preservation negatives and prints. It was a fascinating project, hours and hours of footage of Nixon, mostly in official capacities, around the world. But all shot as home movies from the wings, literally. It is strangely boring and fascinating all at the same time. That was the first government contract I had done, and it involved a great deal of paperwork and following rules, which was instructive. I just finished it up after two years.

The New York Public Library job involved preserving work by Ken Jacobs, his early 8mm stuff as well as 16mm, including *Star Spangled to Death* and *The Sky Socialist*—those were the two big ones—but also some of the smaller films, like *Little Stabbas at Happiness, Window, Jerry Takes a Back Seat*. There’s a whole list of them. Also I did a couple of films by Larry Gottheim, some of my own films from the 1970s, and some Storm De Hirsch films that only existed as prints. I made internegatives, new soundtracks and answer prints from those. Larry Gottheim’s *Mouches Volantes* was very complicated. It took a year to piece it together. Another big job was the Estate Project films with Jon Gartenberg: David Wojnarowicz’s films and Jack Waters’s films. The Waters films were both Super-8 and 16mm. Recently I finished a Bruce Nauman film for the Art Institute of Chicago.

It’s very hard to predict what I’m going to get into when I start doing one of these projects, because it may seem on the surface very simple, but when I start to break it down, it can just explode in complexity and difficulty. If you do a really good job it’s practically endless; making sure that you’re working from the proper elements, that the research has been done to make sure that there aren’t better elements, not glossing over things that would be easier to just leave alone (when did a splice occur? is there missing material? is there a better shot somewhere?). Where my role as lab leaves off and my potential role as conservator begins is often very cloudy. It’s my own pride and interest in the history of the medium that keep me going often.

I participated in the Variable Media Initiative workshops at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and there were discussions about how you go about preserving work that

exists as performance. A lot of the films that we’ve been talking about have that characteristic. Jack Waters’s film, for instance, *Berlin/New York* [1984–86/Super 8] began as a performance, so some of the elements that have been used in the performances were then rephotographed and made into a film that itself then became a performance, in that the soundtrack was on tape and the film was on Super-8 and so was shown in various ways in different circumstances. So, when you fix something by creating a version for the archive, you need to decide what version of it to fix and how to preserve the performative and variable element of it, that is, somehow embed, even in the fixed version, the spirit of it’s performative variability. Much of Ken Jacobs’ work has that characteristic. But Ken is around and active and perpetually tinkering with his work, so there it’s more a kind of dance with him about whether this is the right thing at the right time. And with Jacobs it has been just a matter of getting the material and doing a careful job, according to his direction. I think the fact that the New York Public Library wanted to preserve the work has allowed him to finalize a great deal that never came to completion, that only existed in a tentative, performative manner—not because that was the way that he intended it, but because that was as far as it ever got.

**So as a preservationist, you participated in the completion, or at least were present for the completion, of these films.**

Yes, and I think that it’s important to the artists that I work with that I’m actually interested in them as artists and that I’m interested in the content of their work. With Ken Jacobs in particular it was very apparent that not much has been written about his films, compared to what there is to garner from him. It’s been quite wonderful to screen things with him and have him talk about what he was thinking, and realize that what I’m hearing is not in the literature. But it should be.

**Could you give an example?**

In *The Sky Socialist* [1964–66/1988; 8mm/16mm], which is a very ephemeral piece that involves this kind of childish acting-out on the roof of his Chambers Street loft with [his wife] Flo and Jack Smith and other of his peers in the 1950s and early 1960s, there is a super-narrative that’s not apparent. It’s much more specific in Ken’s mind than has ever been articulated either in literature (as far as I know) or in the versions of the film that have been available. I think when the preservation version of the film comes out, because of the work we’re doing in the soundtrack and in titles and also in his ability to think about and speak about what he was thinking, this will be more apparent.

**Do you think that there are any precepts or rules that a person working in your capacity should keep in mind when working on any film, specifically on films made by artists?**

I think that it’s important, wherever possible. to research the material. The tendency, I think, is for people to preserve whatever works they have. An archive or person comes
across a print, they get money to preserve it, and so they preserve what they’ve got. It’s very time-consuming and expensive to do what should be done, which is to research the history of that particular object (find out the context it was made in, what other elements exist, where they are, and which might be authentic or important ones, whether there are multiple versions, and if so how to preserve the multiplicity of that object) and then to document that research in the preservation process. It’s also time-consuming and expensive to produce something for the archive which has a sufficient record of that process, so that the choices that you make are well documented and whatever choices you’ve made that are arbitrary are understood as arbitrary and whatever choices you’ve made that are just one of the possible variabilities can be understood as such. Often the history of an object is represented by whatever it was last, and that might not be right.

It is important to balance the best technique you can bring to bear in the preservation process with the money and time that you have to bring to it. There’s no end to how much time or money you could spend, because the technology is there to do almost anything but most of it’s probably not appropriate, or that useful, given that that money might be used to preserve something else.

The preservation process is not just about making a long-lasting object and putting it on ice. And here I’ve picked up ideas from Jon Gartenberg. It’s not really preserved as far as I’m concerned, unless it is made available. That means distribution and criticism. Those are the other two elements. But that’s a lot more than I take on. I think that my understanding of all of that as part of the preservation process informs the kinds of decisions and recommendations I make.

An example would be a film that is brought to me that was shot at a non-standard frame rate, say an 8mm film that was shot at 16 frames per second. I have to ask the client, do you want this duplicated frame for frame or do you want it to run at normal speed when projected at 24 frames per second? The purist says, oh my goodness, don’t add frames to it, that’s not preservation. But if the only way this material is going to be seen properly is by doing that, then that’s a more appropriate preservation process than duplicating it frame by frame. And it’s surprising when it’s appropriate and when it’s not. It is not something there’s an easy answer to. I find myself recommending step-printing at times when it even surprises me.

It depends on the client then?

It depends on the client, and it depends on how it’s going to be used. If the purpose of this preservation is to include it in a documentary to be finished on film and projected in a theatre, then it’s got to run at 24 frames per second. If it’s preservation that’s part of making this work available for video distribution of a documentary, then you can preserve it frame by frame. It can go into the archive in a purer form and still be transferred at the correct frame rate in the video transfer. If it’s an artist’s film that has a soundtrack, where the sound was always on tape, and projected at 18 frames per second, that’s not a very viable distribution process. So you might, depending on the nature of the material, want to step print it so that you can produce an answer print with an optical track that runs at a standard frame rate. That’s one example.

**To sum up:** you see your role as being the first step in a chain of events that are involved in the preservation of a film. When your work is done, the preservation itself isn’t necessarily complete.

Right. Also, since I’m often a conservator by default, from my position in the middle I can often make people think about these things that they wouldn’t otherwise think about, both in the pre-printing and the post-printing part of the preservation process. One idea that came out of the small-gauge initiative at the 2001 Association of Moving Image Archivists conference was to discuss how to be more proactive with filmmakers, encouraging them to take steps to preserve their own work. That’s another role I can play. Often when filmmakers come to me I can ask, well have you done this and this and this? Very simple things like getting their films out of acid-laden shoeboxes or separating out material that has vinegar syndrome from other material. Even finding such material.

I’ve been thinking that the approach we should take towards this whole problem is one of harm reduction, taking a page out of the drug addiction world. Because the tendency is to think, well if I can’t really preserve this work then I can’t do anything. But if we think about it more as what steps can artists and filmmakers take to reduce the harm they’re doing to their own work, then we’ve probably gone a long way toward actually accomplishing some form of preservation.

**Something like a filmmaker’s version of the Hippocratic Oath.**

The Fragile Emulsion
by Jon Gartenberg

One of the most vital and richly textured art forms threatened with extinction centers around the history of avant-garde filmmaking. Experimental filmmakers work in relative isolation, creating their films with the hand of an artist, rather than as products for consumption by a mass audience. The style of the films frequently confronts the conventions of the linear narrative. These filmmakers recognize not only the ephemeral nature of the film stock, but also the perilous state of human life in the modern world. They begin with their direct experiences of everyday reality and often move through their films to a process of abstraction. Even though their films may be abstract, they respond deeply to the human condition, to the fragility of human life, to the precious nature of love, health, and the environment, as elegantly as John Ford or Jean Renoir might express similar themes in a more narrative fashion.

These filmmakers treat the film emulsion as a living organism. It is an organic substance, shimmering silver onto which they directly imprint the delicacy of their emotions. They filter found objects from the world around them, and through a wide array of filmmaking techniques, including use of outdated film stock, over- and underexposure, scratching directly on the film emulsion, rephotography, and optical printing—articulate distinct, individually defined processes of creation. They evoke spiritual visions of the world in which their own livelihood is inextricably linked to the life of the film emulsion. Such contemporary filmmakers as Lewis Klahr, Barbara Hammer, Lawrence Brose, and Bill Morrison elegantly reflect this rich tradition.

Lacking the economic incentive created by the profit potential of the commercial filmmaking universe, these films (most frequently shown in such venues as museums and specialized film festivals) are in an endangered state. The filmmakers have rarely had funds to create protection masters from their camera originals. What remains on deposit in most institutions are used prints and, with the filmmakers or their estates, uncataloged originals. Coupled with the complex problems of estate disposition for those experimental filmmakers afflicted with AIDS, their cinematic legacies are the most endangered. Given the ever-shrinking venues supporting the showing of these works, the decrease in exhibition demand has created a tendency toward neglect.

The title of this article, “The Fragile Emulsion,” aptly underscores the status of American experimental films and their makers both in the cinematographic culture as well as in film archives. An entire thread of film history is threatened with extinction, even though many of these films have been created only over the past four decades. The objective of this article is both to articulate the nature of the crisis and to suggest a methodological approach for safeguarding these delicate works.
These observations are based on my accumulated experiences over the past several decades. I have engaged in the study, preservation, distribution, and exhibition of experimental films in a wide variety of contexts. These experiences bear repeating here because they have critically informed my thinking about all the myriad and complex issues surrounding experimental film and the approach set down in this article.

My exposure to experimental film began in formal fashion as a student in P. Adams Sitney’s experimental film course at New York University in the 1970s. It continued in practical fashion when I was a curator in the archive of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) from 1975 to 1991, where I acquired for the permanent collection experimental films of Ernie Gehr, Hollis Frampton, Storm de Hirsch, Abigail Child, Barbara Hammer, and a myriad of other such artists. It continued in the late 1980s when I worked on the preservation of the films of Andy Warhol.1

Following my departure from MoMA, I worked at Broadway Video Entertainment, a commercial production and distribution company, where I restored, for international video distribution, American commercial classic films and television programs such as Underdog, Lassie, The Lone Ranger, and a collection of classic and B films, including those by Anthony Mann and Allan Dwan. Since the late 1990s, I have served in a consulting capacity as the program director for the Film Preservation Program of the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, where I have been involved with the preservation and exhibition of films by Jack Waters, Warren Sonbert, David Wojnarowicz, and Curt McDowell. Recently, I have also consulted with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum on their Variable Media Initiative as it relates to experimental film.2 I also currently distribute high quality video editions of classic films by experimental filmmakers, including Robert Breer, Len Lye, Martin Arnold, Ken Jacobs, Stan Brakhage, and Jonas Mekas.3

**FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Having labored on numerous experimental film initiatives from a variety of perspectives, over time I developed some guiding principles for the myriad technical decisions that must be made when preserving these films. I emphasize case studies surrounding the films of Jack Waters, but also illustrate salient preservation issues for works by other experimental film artists.

**Know the History of the Genre**

As curators, we have a responsibility to fully understand the history of experimental film, especially the study of this genre in relationship to the dominant mode of commercial narrative cinema. Knowing this history well enables a greater appreciation of the kinds of decisions that need to be made when handling the preservation of the actual physical elements.

First and foremost is the fact that these films resemble the work of fine artists, paintings, for example. It is important to inscribe into the preservation of the actual work the revelation of the hand of the artist in its original creation. Thus, filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage who etch scratches directly onto the film emulsion should not automatically have these particular scratches removed in the preservation process. In contrast, the presence of such scratches would be considered a technical flaw in the restoration of a commercial film.

In the commercial cinema, motion pictures are photographed on 35mm negative film from which various intermediates are struck in order to make many multiples of prints for simultaneous large-scale exhibition in commercial theatres. Historically, most experimental films have been shot on 8mm or 16mm reversal film. The filmmakers can ill-afford to strike internegatives; thus, the edited camera originals are frequently projected, and occasionally individual reversal prints are made for distribution in nonprofit cooperatives. Barely able to afford paying for the storage costs for their films, the filmmakers often leave their camera originals in the printing laboratory of their choice. With the slew of lab consolidations and closures that have occurred since the 1970s, a substantial number of these camera originals are now lost.

**Establish a Working Collaboration**

It is of utmost importance to develop a working dialogue between the filmmaker, archivist, and laboratory personnel throughout the preservation process. The Estate Project for Artists with AIDS selected Jack Waters as one artist whose work needed the support of a preservation initiative. As an African-American, a gay man, and someone living with this disease, he often works in film, video, and dance to address issues of identity, gender, and sexuality.6

As a curator, my primary challenge in the preservation of Waters’ first film, Berlin/New York (1986, super 8mm) was selecting a laboratory whose track record and experience would be sensitive to the particular needs of an artist working on the margins of the culture. The selection of BB Optics as the preservation laboratory of record for his film proved to be a good marriage.

BB Optics had already made super 8mm to 16mm optical preservations of work for a variety of experimental filmmakers as well as for museums and other cultural institutions, and was already experienced in the challenges of this process. Moreover, the operator of the laboratory, Bill Brand, is an experimental filmmaker in his own right and thus is acutely aware of the subtle sensitivities required to approach the preservation of every frame of each experimental film.
The first time we met together, Waters, Brand, and I engaged in a lengthy discussion that lasted several hours. We shared our respective backgrounds, reestablished connections in our histories, and arrived at a consensus for our approach to the preservation of Waters’ work. Our mutual understanding was important, even before we handled any of the physical elements.

Two central concerns arose from these discussions, which were woven into the fabric of the preservation of Waters’ films. His life and career is an embodiment of New York’s Lower East Side culture, one that is defined by interdisciplinary work, the collaborative process, and social action. Waters is an engaged artist who creates in a variety of media—a dancer and choreographer, a film and video maker, as well as a writer, curator, and community activist. A number of his artistic endeavors have been produced in collaboration with his life partner, Peter Cramer.

The other major factor to consider was an understanding of, in his own words, his “availavist” aesthetic. That is to say, Waters maximizes the use of the low-tech tools at hand in creating his moving images, whatever format he might be working in at the given moment (e.g., super 8mm reversal, 16mm reversal, 16mm negative, high 8 video), and with whatever equipment is in the offing (cameras, film rewinds and splicers, and homemade video editing systems). The resultant images and sound reflect the imprint of this aesthetic through such artifacts as rephotographed images, serrated splices, and double system projection (the image and sound track are on separate physical elements).

Focus on the Artist’s Creative Process

In approaching the preservation of experimental works, decisions must be tailored in harmony with the artist’s creative process and intent, not just with the product (the “finished” film). Berlin/New York was preserved from a super 8mm reversal original with a sound track on cassette tape. The original super 8mm film was extensively scratched (from repeated projections), and sections of the film were rephotographed from yet other source footage projected onto a wall. Berlin/New York also contains shots filmed through fences and other physical barriers.

Our objective in the preservation of this film was to convey the sense of layering inherent in the work. In the preservation, we minimally reduced the surface scratches but allowed the rough-hewn quality of the major splices and scratches to be reproduced in the 16mm version. As Brand noted, “The object was to simulate not only the look of the super 8 original with its characteristic density and color saturation, but also the quality of super 8 projection allowing for its somewhat unstable registration at splices.”

Another film of Waters, The Male Gayze (1990), was preserved by BB Optics from a 16mm original reversal, also with a separate tape track. The original film was spliced with serrated tape splices, which we decided to leave in rather than to replace them with more invisible splices. Even though these splices interrupt the smooth flow from one shot to another, their visual presence in the preservation materials make manifest Waters’ underlying “availavist” aesthetic, that of his working with a particular kind of splice at the moment of originally creating this work.

Document the Version of the Work Preserved

As curators, we are working not only to preserve the physical materiality of experimental film, but also to inscribe the circumstances surrounding its exhibition. In the commercial cinema, the film is set in a fixed form that allows the object to be massively distributed in order to generate maximum profits for its producers. In contrast, experimental films are created without regard for any earning potential. Because of this economic reality, the form in which these films are presented can readily be changed from venue to venue, as they are repeatedly exhibited by the artist.

Ken Jacobs’s exhibition of Bitemporal Vision: The Sea (1994) from his Nervous System series, personifies this performative dimension of the experimental filmmaking enterprise. In Jacobs’s own words,

The Nervous System brings a pair of stop-motion film projectors into a kind of congress, what the machines do with each other and what issues forth determined moment-to-moment by (mostly tiny hairline-precise) shifts of alignment introduced by the projec-
was at work. *The Chelsea Girls* (1966) is paradigmatic of this interplay between the regular production of reels and the changing order of their exhibition before the film was fixed in a form for more commercial nationwide distribution.12

The experimental filmmaker Jack Smith even reedited physical reels of film during their projection, turning these screenings into performances. According to Jerry Tartaglia, Oftentimes, while the film was screening, he would remove the take-up reel and begin re-splicing the material into a new arrangement. Obviously, this had to be accomplished quickly, before the remaining material had run through the projector. Jack developed an ingenious way of re-editing during a performance. He used tape splices....The bits of tape were just large enough to hold the filmstrips together, and small enough to pass through the projector gate. The visual result of this method was astonishing. The splices were visible, of course, but the material was re-woven into a new tapestry of visual excess with each screening. One hour of film material, in this way, could be transformed into a three-hour film experience.13

Within this context, the preservation of Waters’ films also serves as a case in point. In retracing the history of the creation of *Berlin/New York*, we soon realized that its form had been significantly altered for different exhibition venues. Given Waters’ and Cramer’s histories as dancers before becoming filmmakers, it became important to define the precise status of the version we had in hand and that we were now preserving. According to Waters, *Berlin/New York* was originally created as a backdrop to a dance/performance work I did as a member of the collective POOL in 1986. The piece was about the arbitrary nature of political borders....

After the dance/performance of “A Free Ride,” we were asked by Area, a nightclub in TriBeCa, to perform a piece on the theme of war. We did a routine about urban guerrilla warfare—dressed in army fatigues—and expanded the film to incorporate more footage. When I looked at the film again in this context, I realized that the footage of torched buildings on the Lower East Side looked a lot like the images of bombed-out Berlin. I then added a soundtrack. The completed film is the documentation of two devastated world capitals, one ruined because of real estate speculation and the other because of war.14

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What becomes readily apparent from experiencing one of these wonderful live performances is that no two projections of this film work will be exactly the same. Each movement on the screen is an external reflection of the subtle moment-to-moment shifts in Ken’s own nervous system sensibilities as he “performs” the projections in person. Just as Hollis Frampton has articulated the fragility of film in its physical materiality, so also has Jacobs underscored the fundamentally ephemeral nature of the filmgoing experience.10

From another dimension, artist Anthony McCall dramatically exploits the physicality of the space in which the projection of his film *Line Describing a Cone* (1973) takes place. According to one critic, If the image is seen on the screen, it is nothing more than a white dot on a black background, gradually describing a circular path, and leaving a white circular line in its trace. The total circle is built up in thirty minutes, the length of the piece...It should be shown in a space where the audience can walk about. So what is seen is not a dot forming a circle but a line, running outwards in a space from the projector lens, like a sharp searchlight, very very slowly forming a conical curved plane, which finally forms a complete cone with its apex at the lens....The image is formed on the dust particles in the air...which somehow seem [sic] substantial but resists touch.11

Andy Warhol also altered his films through the exhibition process. Warhol’s filmmaking efforts were at once serial and prolific, yet shifting and elusive. Beginning early in 1965, he regularly shot thirty-three-minute reels (1,200 feet) of 16mm sound film on an Auricon camera. Each individual reel was unedited. These complete reels were then assembled in different arrangements for public exhibition. They were changed from showing to showing of a film or incorporated into other films. During some exhibitions images were superimposed from multiple projectors or projected simultaneously and shown side by side. A deliberate sense of play and experimentation was at work. The *Chelsea Girls* (1966) is paradigmatic of this interplay between the regular production of reels and the changing order of their exhibition before the film was fixed in a form for more commercial nationwide distribution.12
From an economic point of view, these creations of experimental filmmakers are lost between the profit potential of the commercial film industry and the museum-gallery-collector fine art industry. To a great degree, experimental films have fallen into an abyss of financial neglect. Only through aggressive and comprehensive plans to simultaneously collect, preserve, distribute, and exhibit individual works can these films be elevated on any scale to compete with the circulation of works in these other marketplaces.

When I was approached by the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS to create a program for the preservation of experimental filmmakers, I was influenced by models I had experienced in restoring films for distribution in the commercial marketplace. For the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, I developed strategies to properly address in comprehensive fashion the reintegration of these films into the broader culture.

These methods encompassed legal issues (resolving copyright and access issues related to the filmmakers’ estates); storage concerns (moving the original elements from the filmmakers’ personal possession and film laboratories and storage warehouses into qualified archives); cataloging processes (assembling definitive filmographies of the filmmakers’ oeuvre, both through previously assembled lists and through newly researched discoveries); preservation programs (creating protection master internegatives and interpositives for each film); distribution outlets (making extra prints to be circulated on a worldwide basis via film co-ops, boutique distributors, or other agencies; and exhibition venues (curating screenings so as to establish a system of research and study to further nurture these other objectives).

Patrick Moore, former director of the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, was enormously successful in generating financial support for our initiatives. The infusion of significant sums of money for the preservation of these filmmakers’ works provided incentives for public institutions to collaborate in proactive and timely fashion on the conservation and dissemination of these works. Instead of the source materials laying fallow in archives for years, these artists’ works have now been preserved and are being actively disseminated.

**METHODOLOGY**

Here then follows a schema for the technical restoration of experimental films, based on the guiding principles just described.

1. Assemble and study detailed documentation about the artist’s career and related individual works. In the case of Berlin/New York, we documented three iterations of this film. This procedure also led me to discover, when restoring Warren Sonbert’s oeuvre, the existence of three different versions of his magnum opus, Carriage Trade (1968-1972).17

2. Track down all camera originals, prints, and related production elements (from filmmakers, laboratories, and archives, as well as film cooperatives and libraries). We located the only extant copy of Sonbert’s The Tuxedo Theatre (the first, short version of Carriage Trade) in the London Film-Makers’ Co-op, where it had remained unrented for many years.

3. Perform detailed physical inspections for each individual element. For the David Wojnarowicz project, before we began preserving any film, we created a detailed cataloging sheet in which we recorded myriad technical details about each of the more than 150 physical elements in the collection, documenting such aspects as length and frame rate, surface abrasions, splices, and sprocket condition; film stocks and exposure; and audio formats and sound quality.

4. Perform detailed comparisons for all elements of a given film. When we restored the “epic trailer” for Where Evil Dwells, we found forty-five seconds of missing footage in the super 8mm camera original that was not present in the super 8mm print. By working from the camera original rather than the reversal print, we were able to produce more subtleties in the flesh tones and detail than were apparent in the existing 8mm print version and video copies. For the additional picture material, which lacked the corresponding sound track, we restored the missing audio using the track from the super 8mm print as a guide. Cofilmmaker Tommy Turner supervised the reconstruction of the missing audio.
When we cataloged the elements for Curt McDowell’s *A Visit to Indiana* (1970, Ted Davis and Curt McDowell), we discovered the existence of slightly different 8mm and 16mm versions of the film. The filmmakers had shot the film in single 8mm and had made an 8mm reversal projection print. At some later point, McDowell projected this 8mm version and rephotographed it onto 16mm reversal, consequently introducing increased flicker into the image texture of the film. He then slightly reedited the 16mm film. This version was then put in distribution in Canyon Cinema. In order to fully trace McDowell’s career from a university student making 8mm films to a 16mm filmmaker of some commercial success, both versions need to be considered for preservation.

The workprint was transferred to Beta SP with timecode for the audio mix. The original sound track was transferred to DAT from the cassette tape, remixed and synchronized to the picture, and mastered to DAT by Bill Seery at Mercer Street Sound. A “b-wind” optical negative was made at Du Art Film and Video. The answer print, corrected print, and release prints were made by Du Art Film and Video.

Until the involvement of the Estate Project in their preservation, Waters’ films were only available for showing in film format on double system (the picture on a separate element from the track). The filmmaker had made a low-cost transfer from these elements together onto video, but this resulted in a severe loss in the quality of the picture and audio. In order to make these films more accessible to a wider audience, one of our overarching objectives, we created composite prints from the preserved film and audio elements. In the case of *Berlin/New York*, which was originally shot and projected at 18 fps in super 8mm, this necessitated step-printing the film (doubling every third frame) in order to allow the film to be projected at 24 frames per second in 16mm. (The camera original was of course kept intact.)

The original sound track was taken from the cassette tape and then sweetened at Mercer Street Sound in the presence of the filmmaker in order to approximate the quality of the original wild sound as closely as possible. The track was synchronized to the picture, using the video transfer as a guide as well as supervision by the filmmaker. The resultant audio track was then mastered to DAT. An optical negative was made at Du Art Film and Video, from which the optical track on the composite print was generated.

Throughout the project, BB Optics created detailed technical matrices that governed the frame-by-frame optical printing of the films, all decisions being made in accord with the intent of the filmmaker.
CONCLUSION

Only through a more aggressive, systematic approach on the part of curators and archivists to the preservation of experimental films will this body of work be recognized for its critical position in the evolution of film history. We will succeed not only in recapturing the full history of the avant-garde cinema, but also in more readily tracing the stylistic influences of the avant-garde cinema on more mainstream moving image products, including narrative cinema, television advertising, and MTV. Through this enterprise, we strive to do justice to the distinct visions of each individual experimental filmmaker. Only in understanding the evolution of his or her process can we more fully pay respect to their marvelous creations in the act of preservation.


NOTES

For help in shaping my thoughts for this article and in facilitating its publication, I would like to thank Bill Brand of BB Optics; filmmaker Jack Waters; Patrick Moore, former director of the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS; John Hanhardt, senior curator of Film and Media Arts at the Guggenheim Museum; Jon Ippolito, developer of the Variable Media Initiative at the Guggenheim; Toni Treadway of Brodsky and Treadway; Karan Sheldon of Northeast Historic Film; Mona Nogai, curator at the Pacific Film Archive; and Chris Horak, editor of *The Moving Image*.

1. I gave a presentation about the role of film archives in preserving experimental works at the 1993 annual congress of the International Federation of Film Archives in Athens, Greece (an apt site, given ample evidence in that city of the preservation of antiquity). The organizers happened to mistranslate the title as “*The Fragile Emotion*,” which perfectly fit the aim of my presentation to directly link the experimental artist’s interior emotional world to the delicacy of the imagery he or she fixes on the emulsion. This article is also an expansion on some of the core ideas I presented then, seen from the added experiences I have accumulated over the last decade since that presentation. This article is also a refashionsing of the panel I chaired with Bill Brand and Jack Waters at the 2001 AMIA conference in Portland, Oregon, entitled, “Curatorial Challenges: Restoration of Small Gauge Films.”


4. John Ippolito, a curator at the Guggenheim Museum, has developed the Variable Media Initiative. For more information, see www.guggenheim.org/variablemedia.

5. The ReVoir collection was started by Ptp Chodorov, an experimental filmmaker and founder of the Frameworks listserve. I have partnered with him in the production and release of this video line in NTSC format. For more information about these video editions, see www.re-voir.com/us.

6. For more information about Jack Waters, his life, work, and the preservation of his films, see my online interview with Jack Waters and Peter Cramer, “Escaping ‘Mediocrity’s Vast Columbarium’” at www.artistswithaids.org/artery/artist/artist.html. Also see the citation of *The Male Gayze* (1990) in Bill Stanford Pincheon, “Black and Queer Visual Culture: An Annotated Filmography and Reference Guide,” *The Moving Image* 1, no. 1 (spring 2001): 176-77. Note, however, that even though this work was distributed by Frameline on video, it was originally shot on 16mm reversal film.

7. Waters’s films are preserved in the Fales Library at New York University. Marvin J. Taylor, the Fales Librarian, has made a significant effort to collect, document, preserve, and exhibit works created by Lower East Side artists. For more information about the Downtown Collection at Fales Library, see www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/fales/.


10. At an exhibition and conference organized by John Hanhardt, “Researches and Investigations into Film: Its Origins and the Avant-Garde,” at the Whitney Museum of American Art in November 1979, experimental filmmaker and photographer Hollis Frampton gave a fascinating talk entitled “The Invention without a Future,” about how the film stock itself is constructed from organic substances—i.e., the gelatin layer is manufactured from animal bones, skins, and hooves—which will eventually disintegrate over time.


Three Great Filmmakers: Haldeman, Ehrlichman & Chapin
by Brian L. Frye

The most famous home movie in American history features President Kennedy. But Richard M. Nixon was the home movie president. Abraham Zapruder’s thirty-second threnody made Kennedy an icon. But Nixon starred in more than 40 hours of home movies, a comprehensive account of the hubris, tragedy, and banality of his presidency.

Nixon’s obsession with documentation was his Achilles heel. But it was also a historian’s dream. Everyone’s familiar with the secret tapes that doomed Nixon’s presidency. But they’re only the beginning. Nixon recorded everything, and his aides collected whatever he missed. Three of the most dedicated—Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John D. Ehrlichman, Chief of Staff Harry Robbins Haldeman, and Deputy Assistant to the President Dwight L. Chapin—moonlighted as amateur documentary filmmakers. Or rather, they shot home movies. Hours and hours of home movies.

But the movies weren’t just memorabilia. Nixon’s circle—especially Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Chapin—were devoted to a presidency they deeply believed was epochal. So documenting it wasn’t entertainment, it was a duty. And each had his own peculiar way of recording impressions. Arguably, “the Oval Office bugging stemmed from the same Haldeman mania for historical documentation that made him a home movie camera fanatic.”

Ehrlichman not only bugged his own office, but also “took to sketching on White House stationary during the endless meetings that were part of his job, drawing objects in the meeting rooms, views of the White House and Capitol Hill and imaginary architectural views.” And Chapin “kept a minute-by-minute log of the 48 hours before and during election day, stating precisely what Nixon wore, what he said every minute, who came in and for how long, etc.” Anyway, they were right, in spades.

Still, the establishment found all the movie-making absurdly amusing. And the press ridiculed it from day one. “The White House machinery is so well oiled that, in public at least, when President Nixon is on the road, his key staff men can behave like tourists on a lark. Like ordinary vacationers photographing the sights and their families for the folks back home, the White House staff men are busy taking pictures of the official family on tour.”

The most dedicated amateur filmmaker of the lot, Haldeman took the most razzing. A wry profile listed “taking and showing home movies, whose only subject is Richard M. Nixon on tour,” among his “off-hours enthusiasms.” And a satire suggested alliance with Japan “flows from the President’s close adviser, H. R. Haldeman, who is an ardent amateur photographer and does not want to be cut off from the Japanese cameras.”
A devout Christian Scientist, Haldeman didn’t truckle to district mores, and his squareness was ripe for caricature. *The New York Times* rather snarkily described his “red brick house in suburban Kenwood, Md.,” as “the only place in the United States where dinner guests don’t come down with instant indigestion when the host inquires: ‘Would anybody like to see home movies?’ For the movies have all been filmed in the White House, or wherever else Richard M. Nixon, Mr. Haldeman’s boss, has lighted during his presidency. By the end of this month, chances are, at least one more canister containing an insider’s view of Mr. Nixon’s journey to China will take its place with the others stacked in the closet in Kenwood.” And the caricature stuck. A sketch of the Watergate Seven characterized Haldeman as “famous for taking home movies on his history-making trips with the President.”

Ehrlichman also received plenty of potshots. “On airport runways, when the President debarks from Air Force One, Ehrlichman can be spotted fussing with a hand-held camera which he uses to take the movies that, someday, when he returns to private life, he will show in his living room in Seattle.” And after Watergate hit, an upstate New York art teacher raised a ruckus with a painting of Ehrlichman filming John Dean astride Attorney General John N. Mitchell with Nixon looking on, all of them stark naked.

Reporters even noticed that Dwight Chapin, the “third shutterbug in the Nixon entourage...still finds time to snap still pictures with a miniature camera he keeps tucked away in a jacket pocket.”

Regardless, they kept up the movie-making to the bitter end. Weeks after Watergate broke, Ehrlichman and Haldeman, “who had been expected by many Washington observers to resign or be dismissed, were aboard the President’s plane for yesterday’s trip, and Haldeman as usual carried his home movie camera to record the presidential day.”

Haldeman was the most prolific of Nixon’s three documentarians, ultimately shooting about 27 hours of film on his “$80 Canon super-8 camera.” He was an aggressive photographer. “Frequently Haldeman, who uses a movie camera equipped with a zoom lens and carries a black case full of accessories, competes with the professional photographers for good positions.” But still he took a holistic approach to filmmaking, would “duck away from the presidential party for a few seconds to take pictures of the sights rather than his boss. When Mr. Nixon toured a trade fair in Jakarta, the capitol of Indonesia, Haldeman left for a few minutes to pose and then photograph some Balinese dancers.”

When Haldeman resigned, he kept his movies. And in 1982, James Devaney and James Hanley co-produced *The View from the White House*, six one-hour programs based on Haldeman’s home movies and narrated by Haldeman. The footage was remarkable. “Everyone assumed Haldeman would always be there with his camera.” And so they ignored him. As a consequence, Haldeman captured events otherwise impossible to record. The film showed “the emotions and smiles we didn’t see with news cameras and captures the moments when Nixon was human and then transforming himself into who he felt he should be.” Later, Haldeman included about 45 minutes of clips from his home movies on the CD-ROM version of his book, *The Haldeman Diaries*.

But Ehrlichman was a close second to Haldeman. After he resigned on April 30, 1973, the FBI confiscated 204 rolls – about 14 hours – of Super 8 film from his office files, dating from 1969 to 1973. The U.S. Navy Photographic Film Center had provided Ehrlichman with cartridges of Super 8 film and processing. Apparently, it also struck workprints of 55 rolls and edited them into themed compilations.

Ehrlichman was a more reflective cinematographer than Haldeman. A journalist described Ehrlichman filming South Korean President Park Chung Hee’s arrival at the Presidio in San Francisco in 1969 as follows: “With deliberation, Ehrlichman would select a camera angle, pose the picture in his mind and then lift his movie camera to his eye to run off the footage.” Surely, their styles reflected their personalities. According to Haldeman, “my competence is in the art of getting things done. I’m not a great original thinker. I haven’t written any slogans or dreamed up any great ideas. I get excited by specific things. Satiation is not pleasure. Working toward a goal not yet achieved is.” By contrast, “at his office in the Presidential Complex at San Clemente (two doors down from Nixon’s own), Ehrlichman’s only visual affectation is a hummingbird feeder. In December, when the small finback whales migrate southward in the waters off the California coast, he will occasionally interrupt his labors and stare out to sea in search of them.”

The FBI kept most of Ehrlichman’s home movies. Under the Presidential Recordings...
Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Chapin: Why are they great filmmakers? Perhaps Jonas Mekas puts it best. “In reality, all my film work is one long film which is still continuing... I don’t really make films; I only keep filming. I am a filmer, not a filmmaker.” And there you have it. Their greatness is their humility, in this one sphere if no other. They were filmers. And what they filmed was worth preserving.

NOTES

10 “Nixon and Aides Stripped of All Dignity,” Los Angeles Times, 8 February 1974, p. 2.
15 Ibid.
"From my position in the middle I can often make people think about these things that they wouldn't otherwise think about..." - Bill Brand, from "The Accidental Preservationist: An Interview with Bill Brand" by Brian Frye

I am neither a filmmaker nor a film historian; this brief essay therefore sits in and rises from an uneasy authorial "pickle," as Bill Brand terms his own dilemma as preservationist in an article published in this volume. Rather than from expertise, my authorship here extends from my position as colleague and friend of Bill's at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. There I teach my own brand of photography, which contains in equal measure specific devotion to collage, literature, and the broken and inspiring codes of the past. Bill himself opens vertiginous spaces as maker and teacher; his position is one of mixed determinations and multifarious skills. I suppose I'd nominate for myself a like, if alternate, positioning. I'm not really a photographer anymore, although I love its scroll of images, which can consume a three-hour lecture in front of a room of sleepy students. And I have worked as a curator for more years than was perhaps wise.

As Bill has said, his practice evolved to this point from a "position in the middle," between maker and preservationist, historian and archivist, student and master. This position in the middle is central to his effectiveness on the numerous fronts he works. It characterizes as well the positioning of his own artistry, which multiplies and forms a dense tracery through a variety of discourses. We both author a practice and a teaching that enunciates a perhaps tangled and idiosyncratic method. We both engage
Bill Brand’s career as filmmaker, preservationist and educator opens, I want to say, to the plenitudes of making, and to the various devotions that his numerous roles enact. What he intends for himself as artist and for his students, is what I’d model, and how I’d proceed as well. The central mark of his endeavor, thinking through place, history, the inheritance from forebears and the simultaneous push to forward his medium’s excellences, manifests itself as a complete engagement, with depths both his peers and students need answer to. In opening labor and study to passionate regard, in fastening on image and nailing it to the vulnerable body, that body that represents the core of his cares, Bill moves in a humane, post-abstract, and highly wrought visual and intellectual space that encompasses the arts of the possible, and forwards an ethics of mortality and the political that I both admire and find necessary.

“The body is a site of both beauty and abjection.” -Bill Brand, from Suite (1996-2003)

In an earlier film, Coalfields (1984), terms and genres already mix and collide, fashioning a space that is multiple in its inspirations and affects. The investigation of body and the political in concert with and against it is already there as well. In the West Virginia mines, coal dust congests and cancels a sovereign selfhood. His camera’s moves from ground to hillock to gray, snowed sky, and the falling forms it captures—rain and snow, coal from the tipple, and the abstract biological shapes recalling nothing so much as Dubuffet’s strange viral-like Hourloupe drawings or the sanded shards of fellow New Yorker Ray Johnson’s moticos-delineate a psychic, social, economic, and political space. Entropy and longing both look this way. The relation of this work to his later film Home Less Home (1990) is obvious. Both enact a cinema of mixed codes, both gaze on the body as subject to (mostly) invisible powers, both reside uneasily and fruitfully between documentary and poetic territories, enunciating a vision as complex as any I know.

In Bill Brand’s work the body is resurgent. It is simultaneously striated canvas, sovereign location of the self, cipher and sign of history, family, and economics, and central possible field of resurrection. For someone who lives and who makes his art from within the thick and dusty library in his head, this concentration on the vulnerable body strikes me as both exhilarating and somewhat unnerving. Yeats’ “mortal coil” is everywhere on display. Film, that invisible chain of light and of coded digits, carries a kind of metaphysics of the body here. Bill’s movies insist that the body is perception, and is film’s perceptive frame. In present time, the body sits as location of trauma, art, and the cynical politics of government and big business. It reveals itself as well as history, personal and familial, and as history of representation, from the archival frames in Home Less Home to the snapshots in Interior Outpost (2003), one chapter in his Suite series.

Suite needs to be viewed as a totality. It’s here that the linked terms of time, water, memory, blood, film, and the body’s wounds are most clearly enunciated. Film in Suite migrates from dematerialized abstraction to shape and source of physical meaning. Image is water; the body is held in it as in a bath. Art is resurrectionary technology, is fashioning of both visible holes and wounds, a making tangible the mark of mortality, and an accounting of the body’s history and healing. The wound oscillates and migrates in these films, from family member to family member, and across time and screen. Laughter, as in Outpost, fades into musics of loss, yet remains as undertow. “Jimmy, you are so pudgy!” a track exclaims. With such voicing comes nomination of person, and the light and heavy ambushes of memory. The sound of the film projector in Double Nephrectomy (1998) reveals this same boiling: film is body remembered and revealed, painted or punctured. Water is key; which film is like, and which together in these pieces form a rhyme. The wound is bathed in it and traverses through it, like the construction barge that moves through the waters of New York in Skinside Out (2002), produced in collaboration with his wife, the artist Katy Martin.
“We need to examine the sources of our imagination.” -Bill Brand, from Home Less Home

In Home Less Home, Bill’s voice-over speaks of “the spectacle of pain.” I want to suggest that the archivist and preservationist in Bill is likewise marked by the terrain of the wound. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the history of avant-garde film and moving image installation, and their physical survival, represent a wound similar to that explicit wound found throughout Brand’s work. Against immateriality and disappearance, the preservationist locates the central concerns of his endeavor. The counterstrategies he practices here are as complex and require as deep a knowledge and care as the originating artist’s. In collegial discussion recently, referring to his archival work, I said to him (he reminded me recently), “How do you know that this work isn’t also your work?” Thinking about that conversation on this more formal occasion, it strikes me that I was perhaps more prescient than I knew. Bill’s films and his archival and preservationist work are of a piece. They align through care and devotion to a body of work and to the work of the body.

I can’t speak specifically to this aspect of his career—my own “pickle” as regards this dear man and superior artist—but in its diversity, from the Nixon footage to the reinvention of the work of his teacher, Paul Sharits, to the David Wojnarowicz projects currently underway, I find a splendid record of accomplishment, and an oscillation of forms and terms as complex and mixed as those in his own work. Hampshire College’s Film and Photography (now Film/Photography and Video) Program was founded in such discursive, resonant spaces in 1970, by Jerome Liebling and Elaine Mayes. Bill and I are relative latecomers, I even more so. But the program still enacts a complex legacy, training students simultaneously in craft and their crafts’ various and divergent technical and aesthetic histories. The educator, in the arts particularly, moves between terms. Maker, historian or critic, the territory sways sometimes beneath one’s feet. At Hampshire, many of our courses open a specific, sometimes seismic, movement between such mixed determinations, and force a reckoning from students and often, I suspect, from their professors as well. A “position in the middle” is not easy to maintain. But Bill does this I think with lucidity and certain grace. I witnessed him recently, in a class we taught together, extemporize for an hour on the “sources of his own imagination.” His performance was a marvelous, deft examination of the multiple centers of his poetics, one that in equal measure inspires and challenges.

The Artist as Archivist
by Bill Brand

There are distinct advantages to being an artist and archivist in the same medium. There are also unique perils. I bring to the role of film preservationist my knowledge of the craft; my detailed experience with the nuances of artistic practice; and, perhaps most importantly an understanding of the conditions, conversations and context of particular cultural discourses. In the realm of avant-garde or fine art moving image-making, much of this relevant information is undocumented and exists only in a combination of physical evidence and living memory.

Even though I bring to my artistic practice the experience of an archivist, I am not really much better than my artist-peers in helping preserve the legacy of the work I create. I have made dozens of films, videos and mixed media works over a period spanning, so far, more than 35 years. But if I were the archivist in charge of me, I would be horrified by much of what I’d find! Without considering the psychoanalysis of this split condition, I want to present here several examples where my role as artist overlaps with my work as preservationist in ways that are both revelatory and problematic.

Pong Ping Pong is a film installation I created in 1971 in Ohio at Antioch College, where I was studying with Paul Sharits. The work is influenced by the contemporary and historical ideas he brought to me, including minimalism and constructivism in art, phenomenology in philosophy, structuralism in anthropology and linguistics, and information theory in communications—all applied, or perhaps misapplied, to what became known as structural film.

For preservation, Pong Ping Pong presents a fairly ordinary set of challenges. First, there is a 16mm film that requires a standard preservation treatment: Polyester internegative, reference and study/exhibition prints and proper archival storage, cataloguing and information retrieval. The same goes for the audio elements. The piece also requires what the Variable Media Initiative categorizes as storage—distinct from the strategies of emulation, migration or reinterpretation.

Storage here is for the physical elements of projection: the mirror machine and a 16mm projector. The screens, which are made of painted cardboard, require only a clear set of instructions placed in the archive, including a note permitting alternatives to cardboard should this material become obsolete or a more permanent installation be desired.

Of course, no one so far has proposed that Pong Ping Pong should be preserved, but if that were to occur, and I was asked to be the archivist, I would find myself in a familiar
The third consideration is public use. When a work has been in the public sphere it no longer belongs solely to the artist or the collector. If the work has been viewed, written about, or responded to in the works of other artists or privately by individuals, then the public has earned a stake in the work it knows, even if what it knows is divergent from either the artist’s original intention or retrospective intention. Famous examples of conservation efforts in painting where public use was perhaps undervalued are the cleaning of the Sistine Chapel and the removal of the cloud layer in the Turner painting *Rockets and Blue Lights* at the Clark Museum of Art.

When I am the archivist of my own work, the conversation between me and myself can get ugly with tactics of deception, confrontation and high-handed avoidance freely employed.

Paul Sharits is considered a major figure in the history of American avant-garde film. He was a pioneer of the “flicker film,” an important member of the Fluxus movement, and his work was a prime example of what P. Adams Sitney dubbed as the “structural film,” that is, “a cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film.” During the time that Sharits was my teacher, he received significant public recognition with articles in major art magazines and was included in books on the history of film and animation and his work was exhibited in major museums and commercial galleries.

Preservation pickle. In this case, the artist is still living and I have exquisite access to what the artist knows and to the objects and artifacts of his poorly considered and ill-maintained personal archive. Nonetheless, even here my archival decision-making would need to be governed by the same set of principles they would if I weren’t both artist and archivist.

Here I want to suggest a conceptual framework for this problematic. The Variable Media Initiative has proposed a program for artists to write a kind of “living will” for their artwork. I have reservations about this notion, in part, because it gives too much authority to the artist. Now this is a funny thing for me to say, since as an artist I’m as much a control freak as the next, but I think that a preservation project needs to consider the object from three perspectives.

First is the original intention of the artist: What did the artist actually make? What was the context of its making and the ideas that informed it at the time?

Second is the retrospective intention of the artist. The artist, myself included, will always want to revise the work either to create something new or to bring to the old work acquired experience and perhaps advances in technology and materials. The artist does this to make the work more in tune with current concerns and fashions, to do a little historical rewriting in order to make a heightened or altered claim on the work’s originality and historical precedent, or simply to walk down old paths in new shoes. None of this is “forbidden,” but a responsible archivist will balance this tendency against original intention and the third category of consideration.
In 1972, while still his student, I served as Paul Sharits’ studio assistant and helped create his first film installation. *Sound Strip/Film Strip* was commissioned for the opening exhibition of the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston, Texas. I was involved in nearly the entire process of its creation and traveled to install it first in Houston and a year later at the Bykert Gallery to New York City. This was really my apprenticeship as an artist and I am grateful for all I learned. But I also contributed significantly to the work’s creation.

*Sound Strip/Film Strip* consists of four related super-8 film loops, projected sideways, one next to the other, simulating the look of a strip of film frames. The soundtrack consists of one word split into four syllables with each coming from a different speaker associated with one of the film loops. The loops are 10 minutes long and because they are unsynchronized, the work as a whole will almost never repeat its initial cycle. Sharits described this work as “a ‘location’ rather than a ‘theatrical event’; its ‘subject’ (is) the passage of celluloid through a projector and the passage of a word from time into space.” His description here will be important when we consider preservation 30 years later.

The image for *Sound Strip/Film Strip* was initially photographed as a 16mm color reversal film. For his flicker films, Sharits used “Coloraide” paper, a brightly colored silkscreened paper used by graphic designers. He filmed these frame by frame to orchestrate color frames into miraculous symphonies of color flicker. For *Sound Strip/Film Strip* he used just one particular pink color and varied the exposure so it faded from white to black and all levels of pink saturation in between. He then took the processed roll of 16mm color reversal film and scratched it with a stylus (actually the point of an inexpensive pencil compass) so that the scratch was at a diagonal to half the entire 100 ft. strip and then a diagonal back for the second half of the roll. It was quite a trick to make a straight line that was 50 feet long that moved exactly 16mm wide, but I invented a device to do that and scratched the film for him.

Sharits had a projector he had altered by taking out the shutter and claw mechanism so that it projected the film sliding through the gate without any intermittent motion and the normal illusionary motion it allows. This he projected onto a translucent rear screen and rephotographed with a 16mm camera from the other side of the screen. The projected image was of the filmstrip itself sliding past the gate. Next he filmed, with negative film stock, a performance of the filmstrip passing through the projector at varying speeds—fast and slow. This resulted in a film that has an illusion of a scratch and an illusion of a filmstrip sliding past the screen. From this negative he then produced a series of positive super-8 magnetic-striped reduction prints.

On each of the super-8 prints, he then scratched a real scratch parallel to the illusion of the scratch on the 16mm filmstrip. Each super-8 print was placed in a Fairchild loop cartridge. When projected, the illusionary scratch speeds up and slows down with the illusion of the moving filmstrip but the real scratch on the super-8 prints is steady because it is on the real film passing through the super-8 projector with intermittent motion at 24 frames per second.

The installation consisted of four boxes containing the Fairchild projectors, each of which projected its film vertically. The Fairchild projectors were designed for salesmen, so they looked like briefcases when closed, out of which a rear screen emerged when
opened. The film actually passed through the gate sideways and through a series of mirrors that was turned 90 degrees and projected onto the screen in the normal horizontal fashion. This is similar to the arrangement in a flatbed editor such as a Steinbeck. Since the projectors were initially on loan from Fairchild, I built into each of the black installation boxes another set of mirrors that could re-rotate the image and send it out to the wall vertically rather than back toward a rear screen horizontally. Sharits eventually purchased the projectors and so in the later installation he was able to bypass the mirrors altogether by cutting a hole in the projector case, allowing the image to pass directly out with the vertical orientation.

On the magnetic strip of each film was recorded a different syllable of a single word. Each box had a speaker associated with it. The boxes were placed in the middle of the room, not in the back. The whole mechanism of the illusion, the projectors included, was the subject of the artwork. Beanbag chairs were placed between the boxes and the screen inviting the audience not just to look, but to lounge.

As Sharits’ assistant, I invented and carried out many solutions to practical problems faced in the creation and installation of the work. In return, I got to witness an important artist wrestle with the existential and esthetic problems confronted in his creative process. For me, this was truly an education and this alone was sufficient reward for my efforts. But Paul was generous and in the exhibition catalogue credited me as a collaborator.

I am currently trying to reconstruct this work for an exhibition on Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton and their colleagues at the State University of New York at Buffalo in the 1970s, including Tony Conrad, Woody and Steina Vasulka, James Blue, Peter Weibel and Gerald O’Grady, a classics scholar who was the head of the program. Peter Weibel, an Austrian artist, is now the director of ZKM, (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie) in Karlsruhe, Germany and it is there that the exhibition is expected to take place in 2005 or 2006. As the preservationist for Sound Strip/Film Strip. I am not quite the artist but I am more implicated in the work than I’d remembered.

When I started to explore the reconstruction of Sound Strip/Film Strip, I discovered that I probably knew as much as anyone about how it is supposed to be assembled since I was involved in its creation. The original materials belong to Anthology Film Archives in New York City but Sound Strip/Film Strip is not a very well known piece because it hasn’t been seen for years, perhaps not since the early 1970s. Before Anthology gave me access to the original materials, I wondered how to reconstruct the work since all that is left are some super-8 cartridges for projectors that are no longer available and I doubted Anthology would let me take the films out of their cartridges. So I didn’t get very far in my thinking.

My wife, Katy Martin is an artist, writer and filmmaker who made super-8 films up until 1980. Recently, around the time I was thinking about the Sharits reconstructions, she was rummaging through a box looking for some of her own work when she ran across a small film can with a piece of masking tape with faint lettering in pencil. I switched glasses to get a closer look and discovered that it said “Sound Strip/ Film Strip for Bill Brand 1972 Paul Sharits” in Paul’s handwriting. He had given me a reel of the film and I’d totally forgotten. It’d been in the box for decades.

So I took the film to work at Hampshire College where I transferred it to video on a super-8 telecine so I could study it. I thought perhaps in video I could simulate the original installation by assembling it on the computer by rotating the image vertically to be repeated four times side by side. When I was transferring the film I was reminded of the soundtrack as I heard “mis, miss, miss-s, miss-s-s, miss-s-s-s...” coming from the speaker. And I remembered that the soundtrack was the word miscellaneous broken into four parts. I had a thought—not quite formed—that, since the only sound this one reel had was “misc” that I could reconstruct the other parts of the word with my own voice. Now I don’t know what gave me the idea that I could do that. As a preservationist I would never fake something this way! The thought quickly faded and I returned to hoping that the other reels could be found at Anthology and that some day I could get the other sounds from them.

A few weeks later, by chance, a friend offered me a 4-track reel-to-reel tape deck. I remembered that I had a box of reel-to-reel tapes that for years I intended to migrate to a more contemporary format. So I was happy to be given this deck and I made a project of transferring my old soundtracks and audio compositions onto the computer in a contemporary digital form. As I was going through the box of tapes, I found a reel with a label in my handwriting that read, “misc-cell-lane-eous stereo constant volume, fading volume!” It was the whole soundtrack for Sound Strip/Film Strip.

More surprisingly, I listened to it on the tape recorder and discovered it was my own voice. I’d made that sound track! I had no recollection! And I hadn’t recognized my own voice when I transferred the film to video because the telecine I’d used ran too slow and changed the pitch of the sound.

So finally I was able to reconstruct the piece, or at least a simulation of it. Of course it is NOT the actual piece but it does allow the work to be visualized in some fashion for the first time in 30 years. Currently there are some promising leads for getting this work more fully restored. However, one potential sponsor for this project is only interested in presenting it in digital form, while the other will only consider restoring it on film.

This example points us to some of the problems one faces with similar multi-screen film installation reconstruction. First, in this single screen version the synchronization of
Wide public exposure alone, however, does not guarantee that a work of art will be preserved. My films are usually seen by small audiences in one-time screenings at film festivals, universities, museums or micro-cinemas. 

\[ \text{Masstransiscope} \]

is one exception. This public artwork was installed in the unused Myrtle Avenue subway station in Brooklyn, New York, on September 17, 1980. It is a 300-foot–long permanent installation that looks like an animated movie when seen from passing trains. It works on the principle of the zoetrope, a 19th century optical toy. The piece has been seen by millions of commuters for nearly 25 years and by millions more around the world through television reports. It has been included in numerous publications and exhibitions on public art, but it has brought me neither fame nor riches. While the piece is well known, its creator is anonymous for most viewers.

Though the work still exists in the subway tunnel, it is no longer visible as a moving image. It is unlit and needs cleaning and repair. The working model, the original paper scroll drawing and other items used for gallery exhibitions in the early 1980s are in non-archival storage in rural Massachusetts and I am fearful of their condition after two decades of their being in an unheated facility without temperature or humidity control. Unfortunately, there is no agency, organization or community to take responsibility for their preservation. You might say I should take responsibility myself, especially since I probably know as much as anyone what a restoration and preservation of this work should entail. But this would be a major project keeping me from the studio where I need to spend what time I can to create my next artwork. At this point, when I should be at the peak of my creative life, I am instead given the devil’s choice between being an artist or an archivist. I can preserve the work I’ve already completed

the four images are fixed and it was really important to Sharits that they were not fixed. Even if one doesn’t sit for a year to see that the film doesn’t repeat itself, the very idea that it doesn’t repeat is very significant. So one way I could reconstruct the piece without the fixed relationships would be to make four separate video tracks or DVDs, use four different projectors, put them in four different boxes and reconstruct the whole setup with video instead of film. This might be a fair replication of some aspects of the piece. But it ignores other equally important aspects of the piece.

According to Sharits’ own descriptions, \text{Sound Strip/Film Strip} is specifically about the material and physical substance of the film medium. Are we preserving it, then, if we migrated it to video? It was very important to Sharits that there was both a real scratch on the film and an illusion of a scratch. If we present the piece in video, we’ve got an illusion of a real scratch and an illusion of an illusion of a real scratch. So in video it’s not really the original piece. But it’s not even possible to reconstruct the piece in film as it was because we can’t make super-8 reduction prints anymore and we can’t get the Fairchild loop projectors either. Even if we could get the projectors, we can’t use the existing super-8 reels, which are the authentic original artwork with the authorized scratch, because these prints are faded and wouldn’t survive an exhibition even if they weren’t.

Now, \text{Sound Strip/Film Strip} could, perhaps, be reconstructed in 16mm film with 16mm loopers but this raises another problem. Each 16mm print has to be scratched and on whose authority is this to occur? Is it right for us as exhibitors or preservationists to create a 16mm version with fresh scratches? Is this the same as a conservator repairing a damaged painting or is this an \textbf{interpretation} of the piece? Would the meaning of this work be lost if it were migrated to video? Hence, will the piece itself actually be lost? Or is it more that, if video allows the work to be reconstructed and exhibited, this preserves the work by subjecting it to \textbf{public use}? Does my personal involvement in the making of the work enhance its chances for preservation? Or because I know too much, am I unintentionally blocking its preservation by insisting on retaining too much of its \textbf{original intention}? Finally, even though I’m not really the artist here, am I unwittingly engaging in acts of \textbf{retrospective intention}, inserting my place in the work’s history in greater proportion than I deserve?

Perhaps I can have my pickle and eat it too.

Recently, Chrissie Iles, an art curator with a specialty in film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art, has casually expressed an interest in exhibiting this piece and other Sharits installation works in 16mm. The Whitney already owns the 16mm loop projectors that they used for the \textit{Into the Light} exhibition. Perhaps interest from both the Whitney and ZKM will allow this work to be preserved under the best circumstances.
An algorithm is a procedure or formula for solving a problem. That Hollis Frampton’s work is algorithmic is obvious to anyone who knows it only a little. He conjures the algorithm in his writing about narrative and on composing for film. Many of his earliest titles—Information, Heterodyne, Maxwell’s Demon, Surface Tension and of course Zorn’s Lemma—are metaphors of the principles of mathematics and physics even when he uses them superficially or as an intellectual shield. It is likewise obvious to anyone who knows the period when Hollis worked that he was in step with contemporary artistic and intellectual trends in America. As a young artist in New York City, Hollis found himself in close proximity to the rising stars of the art world, and like his peers, responded freely in adopting ideas from structural anthropology, generative grammar and semiotics. As we’ve heard, and will continue to hear on this panel, his influences were by no means limited to these trends and they may have even been minor compared to his study of the classics, the poetry of Ezra Pound or the proponents of high modernism in the visual arts. Still, Hollis’s search for generative systems and deep structure principles along with his compulsion to list, circumscribe and map make describing his work as “algorithmic” hardly a stretch.

But in describing an algorithmic aesthetic, this panel will look specifically at Hollis’s work with computers letting larger observations on his work fall into place around this narrower focus. To many of us who knew Hollis, his work with computers was and remains unknown. From my own perspective, which was admittedly more remote during his last years, it seemed to me the computer had sucked Hollis into an unproductive vortex. Of course, all of us who worked with computers, especially in those awkward pre-PC days, were familiar with the “house of mirrors” effect of its narcissistic lure. So I am genuinely excited to have Keith Sanborn bring to light some of the concrete form of Frampton’s efforts. I hope that Keith will show that Hollis’s work, though mostly incomplete, was hardly unproductive. If not, Barbara Lattanzi will show us the product of Frampton’s thinking carried out by the next generation. Barbara will present some of her own works as a software artist, work that is both tributary and playfully sparring with Hollis’s.

All three of us share a personal history with Hollis as friend, teacher or mentor. It seems clear to me that even 20 years after his passing, he remains to each of us an important audience in conversation with our own work. So forgive me if I shift my introduction to some personal history.

My first exposure to a Frampton film was at the San Francisco Cinematheque in 1970 (and, it sometimes feels like that of my entire field), or I can make new works, letting old ones like Masstransiscope become forgotten underground movies. This is a pickle that’s hard swallow.

NOTES

1 This is a revision of a talk originally delivered at the 2004 AMIA Conference in Minneapolis for a panel titled Fixing the Moment: Preserving Expanded Cinema chaired by Andrew Lampert.


at what I later learned was the first public screening of Zorn’s Lemma. The Cinematheque at the time took place at the SF Art Institute in their large raked theatre and I remember a good-sized audience of a hundred or so was in attendance. I sat toward the back. Once the film began, I was so completely drawn into its unfolding logic, so thoroughly engaged in the ecstasy of the experience, I failed completely to notice the audience departing, assuming that everyone else shared my absorption. When finally, the screen filled snow white, I was astonished to discover only three people remained in the theatre. A year later I met Hollis in Ohio at Antioch College where I was a studying with Paul Sharits. Hollis showed Zorn’s Lemma and gave his premiere screening of Nostalgia. I projected the films and from the booth recorded the talk that followed on the reel-to-reel tape deck. I kept the tape and here for the first time are a few particularly emblematic excerpts from his talk that day: I'm trying to make things that are simpler because things that are simpler...uh... as you try to get simpler you find that you have a simplest thing and you try to find out something about your assumptions about why you thing its simple...uh...and your assumptions about why any quite simple thing is so are always so intricate when examined that you find yourself quite suddenly in a vast hall of mirrors wherein simplicities are intricate beyond imagining.

I think that there must be a way, for instance, in which it would be possible for a human being to limit himself to five elements chosen at random, and through those elements, through their manipulation, somehow, to imply and trap and suggest the most delicate nuance of anything you ever suspected let alone knew. This is a kind of formalist’s dream. Statements like these were common from Hollis. For me they were aphorisms of lasting resonance. I quickly took liberty with the recording and with a razor blade and a splicing block made a 10-minute audio composition titled A Formalist’s Dream. I mailed it to Hollis. Only recently, Marion Faller discovered the tape and returned it to me. Similar in spirit, perhaps, to the work Barbara Lattanzi will present today, here is a sample of my primitive attempt to respond to Frampton’s algorithmic aesthetic:

Then I thought about the order they should go in. If I tried to put them in some order I liked then I would be making poems and I didn’t want to make poems. So I decided that the ...I wanted them of course to be in random ordered and the most random order I could think of was the most traditional order which is that of the alphabet...uh...which treats all things of the world according to the first letters of their names and then the second letters of their names and so forth.

About...according to...all...and I didn’t...and so forth...and the...and making...could think...decided that...first...go in...I...if I...I like...in some...letters...letters...the most...names...names...of...of...of course...put them...order...order...order...order...I...poems...poems...random...random...so that I...that...that the...the...the alphabet...then...the most...then I...then I...the...the order...second...things...thought...the in...to the...traditional...treats...tried to...uh...uh...I wanted them...want to make...was the...which...which is...world.

During his visit to Antioch, Hollis discovered that the school owned a Kinescope, a device for creating a film print from videotape. Hollis had recently used the PortaPak video camera at SUNY Binghamton to create the tape that became the film we know as Travelling Matte. Hollis arranged to send me the tape and raw film stock and I made the transfer and shipped it all back to him. Little did I know I was beginning a career as a film preservationist and that 15 years later, after a chance encounter with Mary Lea Bandy, I would be in a position to deposit Hollis’s originals at the archive of the Museum of Modern Art; or today be waist deep in Hollis’s materials as I help prepare for a 2006 exhibition at ZKM in Germany on the work of Frampton and his ’70s colleagues at SUNY Buffalo, including Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Peter Weibel, Woody and Steina Vasulka, James Blue and Gerald O’Grady.

After the Antioch encounter, we kept in touch for the next few years and I moved to New York City just as Hollis was moving out of the city to a farmhouse near his friend Bob Huot in upstate New York. So I became his Manhattan crash pad, his summer carpenter and eventually his print supervisor at Filmtronics Lab. In this capacity I checked his prints, assembled them for distribution and, much to my pleasure and education, was often his first audience for newly completed films. In turn, Hollis became to me and perhaps remains so, even today, a first audience for my films. I also must mention that thirty years and three days ago from today he quite deliberately introduced me to the artist and writer Katy Martin with whom I have shared a life ever since. Thank you, Hollis.

My own work with computers began in 1967 when I was selected from my high school to visit IBM. I was taught some Fortran and challenged to write a program to solve a quadratic equation. I wrote it out by hand so a punch card operator could enter the code line by line into the mainframe machine. This took about a week. It produced a stack of cards about 6 inches high. There were no keyboards or monitors. The human/machine interface was nearly as primitive in those days as my inelegant algorithm for solving high school math. In 1967, when my high school principal
invited me to IBM, he proudly showed me a calculator he’d acquired, that is, an adding machine that could multiply and divide. It was the size of a large microwave oven. It’s hard today to remember how clumsy and primitive computers were at that time; and IBM and Apple wouldn’t introduce the PC for another 15 years-too late, I’m afraid, for Hollis. But nearly a decade earlier than this, in 1975, Bill Etra, as he did for Hollis, gave me limited access to something called a mini-computer, and for the next three years I coded first in Fortran then in C for a pixel program Etra provided that had been developed by Ken Knowlton at Bell Labs. The closest this program came to making pictures was to define a grid where each coordinate could be assigned a value of black or white. This suited my purposes and I completed my computer work in 1977 by generating a series of high-contrast 16mm mattes, shot frame by frame off a green terminal screen in the basement of Columbia Presbyterian Hospital with Etra’s “Mini-Computer” connected to a mainframe PDP 11-45. My films for the next 8 years grew directly or indirectly from this work and I’m sure that Keith asked me to moderate this panel, in part, because he was aware of these films.

At Hampshire College I am currently teaching a course titled Hand Made Films—a somewhat unconventional history of avant-garde film offering a modicum of hands-on experience in primitive photography, direct animation and hand processing. When I presented Vertov’s Man With the Movie Camera, as I’m sure many of you who teach Vertov do, I had the class read Annette Michelson’s introductory essay to Kino-Eye. “To this mostly freshmen class, belonging to a generation for whom the Russian revolution is of singular distant import, Michelson’s essay was hard going. As one student pointed out, she barely even talks about Man with the Movie Camera. So, as I do occasionally faced with such a response, I offered some close reading out loud. In one section of the essay, Michelson quotes from Alexei Gan’s manifesto on Constructivism, outlining its three fundamental principles: tectonic, faktura and construction. Faktura, Gans writes, is the whole process of the working of material, the working of material as a whole and not the working of one side.

One student remarked, “But to gain an understanding of materials from all sides would take years.” To which I replied, “No, a lifetime.” I realized suddenly that the very design of my course was thoroughly constructivist, that my inclusion of hands-on experience and the very title of the course itself were nothing if not a response to the notion of faktura.

Hollis’s work, as Barbara will soon mention in her talk, also falls under a constructivist spell. So as we come to appreciate the potential the computer offered Hollis as pure algorithmic form, we can’t forget the constructivist foundations of his thinking even if only in what Keith will refer to as Hollis’s “do-it-yourself attitude.” Are computers then, for Frampton, the promise of a dematerialized art, or are the metal and magnetic oxide remnants of his efforts a confirmation of his commitment to understanding consciousness, language and art as material?

Since I’ve become, in addition to an artist and professor, a film preservationist, I have the pleasure of knowing the material remnants of Frampton’s films intimately. They pose special problems in their preservation and restoration not the least of which is the necessity for understanding their algorithmic logic. Palindrome for instance is badly cyan dye-faded—what’s referred to as red shift. The film has lost its brilliant luster and my experience of watching it is now devoid of the ecstatic pleasure of seeing film’s material unveiled. The film remains merely an illustration of its principal of organization. My extensive records of Frampton’s materials show there is an internegative for this film stored in the archive of the Museum of Modern Art, but I find no reference to a camera original. I know Hollis made the film from the end-fragments of 35mm strips from the lab where he worked. These he re-photographed in 16mm and assembled with freeze frames and dissolves on an optical printer. The images are a kaleidoscope of half-developed and solarized chemical residue—a constructivist celebration of film material from all sides. But the film is also, in its structure, a language game—pure structure, immaterial. Now, I don’t know the condition of the internegative in storage but if it has deteriorated and not just the existing prints, then I’m worried if the film can be saved.

Recently Marion Faller sent me several boxes of Hollis’s un-archived reels and I was charged, as I often am, with the job of inspecting and cataloguing them. To my delight I discovered a reel labeled Palindrome Preliminary Materials, the 16mm Ektachrome color reversal “original” from which he generated the internegative in storage at the Museum of Modern Art. Now, the puzzle from a preservationist perspective is: If the
More prosaic puzzles have emerged in my work on Frampton films. In the process of preserving *Nostalgia*, for example, I once took an inquiry from a lab technician concerned because the sound track seemed to be out of synch with the picture. Now, anyone who knows *Nostalgia* knows this to be a widely celebrated feature of the film so I assured the lab this was an intended effect. While the question from the lab showed appropriate professional care, privately I was stunned. I imagined some future technician color-correcting *Wavelength* to eliminate its inconsistent tint: or another reinstating color to the first reel of the *Wizard of Oz*. These acts would be failures to understand the generative rules of the art object being preserved. Temperature and humidity control are important, I thought, but how fragile is the material culture of cinema when disconnected from its algorithmic aesthetic. So, though Frampton’s work—ever in its ambition to map consciousness—is always based in materials, the material legacy of his work is in jeopardy if the algorithm aesthetic of its generation is not also preserved.

As Barbara and Keith guide us to understand Hollis Frampton’s pioneering trek into the virtual, we can only speculate whether Hollis was retracing the constructivist path to a kind of immaterial productivism and factography; conscious of a post-structural critique of the relations of knowledge to power; or if instead he was continuing undeterred in his efforts to describe a map of human experience based in the material. The physical evidence of his productive life suggests Hollis himself may not have known.

**NOTES**

1 This is an introduction to a panel with Keith Sanborn and Barbara Lattanzi presented at the conference *Gloria! The Legacy of Hollis Frampton* held at Princeton University, November 5-6, 2004.

2 Transcript of a clip from Hollis Frampton’s talk at Antioch College.

3 Transcript of an alphabetized section from *A Formalist’s Dream*. The relation this bears to Michael Zyrd’s revelations on Public Domain is uncanny. Michael Zyrd talked about discovering, after a great deal of fruitless speculation and study, that the principle of organization for Public Domain was not a hidden narrative but the alphabetic order of the titles in their Library of Congress listing.


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**A Self Preservation Guide for Film-/Video-Makers**

by Bill Brand with Toni Treadway

Most artists and filmmakers are better at making art than keeping track of the art they make—especially films and videos. Even if we know we should take better care of our work, we are stopped in our tracks by what we think is too enormous, too time-consuming and too costly an effort. We feel we must make a choice between producing new works and preserving old ones. But doing only a little, or a little at a time, can go a long way toward preserving our work and can actually help set the conditions for completing new projects. With only a little effort we can make it a lot easier for others to preserve our work in the future.

We may not want to think about it, but left unattended, our work is likely to become irreparably damaged or decayed, lost or ignored. We all need to pay attention and take action, whether our work currently has no public recognition or even if it’s been exhibited widely and is represented by a gallery, distributor or agent.

With this in mind, here is a simple guide written for artists with the goal of encouraging us to take whatever steps we can to preserve our work. Excellent and detailed guides are available on the Internet and we encourage you to consult them in conjunction with this guide for a more thorough understanding of the subject. However, while most of these guides are written for archives and libraries, this one is written especially for artists and filmmakers.

It is certainly best to have your work professionally archived. But there is much you can do on your own, without relying on the limited resources and vision of major institutions. Moving image preservation is a new and constantly evolving field and advice, even from the top experts, is constantly subject to revision. But once you understand some of the basic principles, applying common sense will give the best results.

This guide is divided into 5 sections:

- Locate, List and Remove From Harm
- Inspect, Label and Improve Containers
- Annotate and Place
- Distribute and Imagine
- A Case Study

It is better to do something than nothing. If you can only do one thing, start with the easiest or the most urgent task. Do some of this for only some of your work, some of this for all or work, or if you can, all of this for all of your work. But do what you can even if only a little bit at a time. Take care of the most urgent needs first.
Start with these immediate tasks:

**Locate, List and Remove From Harm**

1. Locate your films. Do you know where they are? Make a list of the general locations where originals, prints and other materials and documents can be found (e.g. bedroom closet on Chestnut Street, ex-husband’s garage in Rochester, Film Lab in Minneapolis, Art Storage in Fort Lee, NJ, Museum of Modern Art).

2. Move originals, prints and other materials to a relatively cool and dry location from especially unsafe places such as basements, garages, attics, under sinks, on window sills, near radiators or heaters. For magnetic materials such as video tapes, audio tapes, magnetic tracks and computer disks move them away from magnetic fields such as those produced by heavy-duty electrical cables, stereo speakers, electrical equipment and transformers.

3. Retrieve originals or printing masters from laboratories. When labs go out of business or change ownership they often throw out or lose the films in their vaults.

4. If your work is stored at a commercial storage facility, check on it regularly to make sure the facility is still in business or is maintaining the standards you expected when you placed your work there.

5. Make a list of your films, installations and video works, if you don’t already have one. Look through old program notes, résumés, exhibition calendars and reviews in order to remember what projects you’ve done.

6. Identify someone who will care about your work should you leave it behind when you move or die. Let that person know where your films are kept and give that person a copy of your list of works.

7. Find a friend, intern or archivist graduate student to help you with these tasks. It may give you a headache to even think about doing this work, but others actually relish the opportunity to dive into and make order out of dusty boxes.

If you can do more, here are the next steps to take:

**Inspect, Label and Improve Containers**

8. Open the boxes, cans or drawers and inspect the materials. Identify each item and confirm that the labeling on the can or box conforms to what’s inside. Include obvious information like title, artist name, date, gauge (e.g., 16mm film), reversal or negative, original or print, a-wind or b-wind.

8.1. If the identifying label is on tape or gummed paper, copy the information directly onto the container with a permanent marker. Gummed labels and tapes dry up and fall off. We’ve seen boxes of films with nothing but a pile of detached labels on the bottom. Identify the reel by labeling the head leader. A permanent marker, such as a Sharpie, is good but even better is an indelible ink pen, such as a Staedtler. (See above).

8.2. If there is no identifying label and you can’t figure out what the item is by looking at it, then label it “unknown” with a note about where you found it and the current date (e.g., “unknown-1/17/06 found in box with _My Big Movie_ outtakes”).

9. Replace the containers that are dented or rusted. (See 12 for further discussion about containers.)

10. Remove the plastic or paper laboratory bags around your films. Harm can come to film sealed in a container, including a plastic bag. It does protect it from dust, but it also prevents the escape of acetic acid and this can accelerate acetate deterioration, sometimes called “vinegar syndrome” (see following page). Some archivists think you should also remove from the container any paper items such as notes to the lab, timer and printer notes or paper timing tapes since these are most likely acidic. But since it is also very important to keep the paper records associated with the film because they contain vital clues for future duplication, printing or archiving, we are recommending that you DON’T remove the paper trail. Keep them with the film.

11. Separate magnetic tracks from picture materials because these are especially susceptible to “vinegar syndrome” and may accelerate the acetate deterioration of the other reels in the lab can with 16mm original reels and papers. Plastic bags removed. A: A&B rolls, B: Optical negative track, C: Film timer’s cue sheet, D: Printer light control punch tape, E: Notes to timer from filmmaker, F: Chart of fades and dissolves for timer. 

**Acetate Decomposition: Vinegar Syndrome**

Acetate base film is subject to the so-called vinegar syndrome. The term ‘vinegar syndrome’ is taken from the distinct odor that is given off by deteriorating acetate film. Vinegar syndrome results from a chemical reaction that takes place at the molecular level that can cause serious and irreparable damage to film. When combined with moisture, heat, and acids, the plastic support in the film begins to release acetic acid. The process is an autocatalytic one, meaning that once the degradation begins it starts to ‘feed upon itself’ and the deterioration process begins to snowball. When film reaches its autocatalytic point the acetic acid released by the film grows exponentially, and with it the potential problems for the film. Climate is an important determining factor in the deterioration because humidity affects the amount of water absorbed by the film and heat supplies energy for the chemical reactions. Even more important is the “micro-environment,” a term used to describe the conditions inside the film can. Vinegar syndrome appears to be contagious, so any film suffering from it should be stored apart from “healthy” reels.

The vinegar smell is the most obvious indicator of decaying acetate film, but it is by no means the only one. The condition of the film can be evaluated by using acid detector strips (e.g., IPI’s A-D Strips); this approach provides an objective way to determine the state of preservation of the materials and their needs to be further stabilized. White powder on the edges of the film may indicate plasticizers loss. Because of the molecular breakdown of the plastic base, in advanced stages of deterioration the film becomes brittle and shrunken. Films with shrinkage of more than 1% could be damaged by projector mechanisms, so should not be projected. There are techniques for re-dimensioning film (restoring it to a less-shrunken state), but these are temporary measures that can permanently damage the film and should only be done in a lab situation as a last-ditch method to enable a new negative or print to be made.

**Acetate Decomposition-Advanced Stages of Decay**

The typical pattern for acetate decay is:

1. Vinegar odor
2. Shrinkage
3. Cupping: the film retains a curve. It will not lie flat, but instead appears wavy.
4. Crazing: the emulsion cracks and the image appears as a crazy mosaic.
5. Appearance of white powder on edges (from binder deterioration, this is the plasticizer separating from the film).
6. Film becomes square on reel.
7. Film is no longer flexible and the emulsion flakes off from the base.

*From Film Forever, The Home Film Preservation Guide*

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**CLEANING**

(only after a full inspection)

If the film is dirty or moldy, it can be cleaned gently by hand using a lint-free cotton cloth and professional motion picture film cleaner. Don’t use this method if there is perforation damage. Put the film cleaner on the cloth and run the film between the folded cloth, holding it firmly with your fingers. Wind slowly through the film so the film cleaner has evaporated before it is wound onto the take-up reel.

It is important not to use water or any other fluid on film, as they could remove the emulsion. Use the film cleaner cautiously; wear clean rubber (not latex) gloves (dishwasher style, not powdered medical gloves), and clean the film in a well-ventilated area. Use only a clean soft cotton cloth that will not scratch the film. Replace the cloth as soon as there is a noticeable build-up of dirt on it.

*From Film Forever, The Home Film Preservation Guide*
12. Replace ordinary cardboard boxes or sealed containers with vented cans or acid free boxes. Be sure to transfer any labeling information from the old containers to the new ones.

13. Consolidate “outtake” reels into larger containers to save shelf space. Be sure to transfer any labeling information from the old containers to each consolidated item.

14. Isolate materials that are moldy or smell like vinegar when held at arm’s length by placing them in a separate area at least 20 feet from other film, video or audio materials. “Vinegar syndrome” is the common name for acetate decomposition and it is caused by chemical changes that take place in the acetate base of film. This can irreparably deteriorate the film. Heat, moisture and a sealed container work to concentrate the acetic acid released by the deteriorating acetate, accelerating the process. Just opening the can to let in new air can help. A bit of vinegar smell may not mean the immediate demise of your work, but it should move up on your priority list. However, you should deal right away with a film that has a strong vinegar odor. (See “Acetate Decomposition: Vinegar Syndrome” in box below for dealing with mold and vinegar syndrome.)

15. Build or purchase inexpensive sturdy shelves from a building supply store and set them up in a cool, dry location. If necessary install a dehumidifier. Purchase acid free boxes, or “Rubber Ware” style plastic containers and drill vent holes on two opposite sides. Group your films or tapes in these containers by title, chronology, genre or medium and place them on the shelves.

Still ready for more? Do this:

Annotate and Place

16. Expand your list of works to include notes about each title or project.

16.1. Title, color or b/w, sound or silent, format (e.g. 8mm, 16mm, Hi8 video), total running time, collaborators or important cast, crew or artistic contributors.

16.2. Original gauge, film stock or video format and sound elements and what laboratory was used for making prints (e.g., “6mm, Ektachrome 7242 color reversal, shot at 18 fps but projected at 24 fps, printed to Kodachrome print stock at Filmtronics Lab, NYC, 1976”).

16.3. Printing masters, if any (e.g., internegative or reversal).

16.4. Video transfers or masters when done, what lab, what element the transfer was made from (e.g., “Transferred to 3/4 inch U-Matic video master in 1980 at Tapehouse, NYC from Kodachrome answer print. 10 VHS dubs made from video master”).

16.5. Location of original and master materials including video masters.

16.6. Location of prints or copies.

16.7. Notes about artistic intent, production history or context, especially any non-standard aspects such as intentionally visible splices, color or exposure, long sections of black or white leader, unusual instabilities or features of the image that might get “fixed” by someone in the future who doesn’t know your intent.

16.8. Ideas about future use. Suggest if the work must be shown intact or if it is okay to excerpt it in another work, update it or remake it. If you place it with an institution you can specify use.

16.9. Description that might be used in a catalog, program notes or show announcement.

16.10. Exhibition history-where and when was it screened publicly.

16.11. Bibliography-books, catalogs, reviews and articles that discuss or mention the work.

17. One of the most important factors in storing films and videos is maintaining proper temperature and humidity (40°-54° F. and 30%-50% relative humidity). Since few of us on our own can meet this standard, the closer we can get the better. A room that is fairly dry and stays at room temperature is a huge improvement over a humid basement or a hot attic. A simple way to monitor the physical environment where your work is stored is to purchase an inexpensive temperature and humidity gauge and watch it. You can get one at most hardware stores for only a few dollars. Even if you can store your work in a controlled environment, it may be in danger if that environment places the work where no one can find it, or where no one knows or cares about it. It is just as important to consider accessibility and the appropriateness of placement as it is to consider environmental controls.

18. Imagine that tomorrow you get squished by a bus. What would happen to your work? Here are some suggestions for helping those you leave behind care for the products of your creative life.

18.1. Make a will that specifically mentions your films and videos. You can specify your wishes for each individual work or in general for all of it together.

18.2. If there is someone or an institution you would like to be in charge of your work after you’re gone, let them know while you’re alive.

18.3. Leave enough notes, labels, workbooks and artistic directions to enable your designated person to find, understand, catalog, preserve and disperse copies of your films. An archivist can never have too many notes, reviews, programs, technical sheets, stills, interviews and other background on a film if they have to preserve it.

19. You may be able to place your work in an archive or museum that has better storage conditions than you can provide for yourself. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you consider placing your work. We’ve got no answers here, just questions.

19.1. Is it more important for your work to be with the collection most appropriate to the kind of work you make, or is it better to place it with the institution most likely to survive economic difficulties, changes in cultural fashions or technology?

19.2. Should we be grateful if a museum or archive wants to accept our work for safekeeping? Should we be expecting to sell our work to these cultural institutions for financial gain or for the benefit of our heirs? Even if we’re not selling it, what conditions or commitment can we expect that the work will be maintained, preserved, distributed or exhibited?

19.3. Do we have relatives (parents, spouses, partners, siblings or children) that we hope will expect that the work will be maintained, preserved, distributed or exhibited?
have relatives who might be negligent, uncaring or greedy? Or finally, do we want to protect our loved ones from having to deal with the work we’ve made and the people who may make a claim on it one way or the other?

19.4. Should we keep all the work together in one place or is it better to disseminate it to the institution most appropriate for each particular work? Will spreading it around serve as insurance against the decline of any one institution?

Get the work seen: Distribute and Imagine

20. In conclusion, a work is not preserved if it sits on a shelf and no one ever sees it. While you are logging, inspecting, repackaging or relocating your films, think about what you can do to get them seen by placing them with distributors, suggesting curators exhibit them, or by transferring them to a contemporary format like DVD. The more they are seen the more likely they are to be remembered and preserved. Even if the work is best seen as a projection in its original format (e.g., 8mm or 16mm), making it available on video, DVD or online streaming can help generate interest in seeing it in its proper form. Furthermore, if your work is distributed, it is less vulnerable to a catastrophic event, such as a fire or flood.

21. Whether you’ve taken only the first urgent steps or have completed a more thorough reorganization of your archives, you should sit back a moment and think about your work as a collection. Try to imagine it well organized, safely housed, carefully labeled and appreciatively placed, restored and exhibited. Try to imagine someone helping with the tasks outlined in this guide. Picture your work being appreciated and viewed by audiences you may not currently have. Even baby steps in thinking and acting now can make all the difference in saving your work and making it possible for others to preserve and enjoy it in the future.

A Case Study

22. As a case study, let’s say someone has offered to purchase a new print of an old film. Imagine that even if they aren’t offering to preserve it, you want to do all you can on your own even though it could cost you more than you’ll earn from the sale of the print. Let’s say you have a 16mm color reversal film with an optical sound track. You have one print at home and one print with a distributor. You have located the original A&B rolls and the optical negative track.

You have even found the workprint and several cans of outtakes. The film was shown a few times in group shows when it was completed decades ago but it has not been exhibited since. You can’t just make a new print from the A&B rolls because reversal print stocks are no longer manufactured. So here are the steps to take:

22.1. Locate and identify originals, masters, outtakes and originating materials such as mattes, drawings, scores, production stills, notes to labs and letters to collaborators.

22.2. Inspect originals, masters, outtakes and originating materials to identify variations or versions and evaluate the condition of each element.

22.3. Create an inspection log with digital photographs of the “before” condition and evaluations for “vinegar syndrome,” shrinkage, splices, etc. Also copy into the log any information from the can and leader.

22.4. Re-can and label original and master materials, outtakes and prints. Replace shrunken leader or attach new leader if none exists. Save the paper work you find in the can with the A&B rolls including any old notes to the lab, the timer’s handwritten or typed timing notes, the paper computer timing tape, and the printer log often taped to the inside lid of the can. These can be crucial clues for making new prints. If the lab that made the old prints still exists, it is possible the lab can still use the old timing numbers. But it is more likely that the old records will only be a guide—although an important one—for creating new prints. This is because new film stocks act differently than the old ones or the lab may need to compensate for fading in the original. You also may want to make the corrections you couldn’t manage or afford when you first made the film.

22.5. Create a polyester base preservation optical track and magnetic safety track from the best element. Your lab will help you evaluate which element is best. The most likely element to be considered the best is a 16mm or 35mm magnetic track master or DAT safety track. The next best element will most likely be a positive optical track from a good print. The least likely to be the best element is the optical negative track used with the A&B roll originals.

22.6. Give a lab the original A&B rolls and your best print as a reference for exposure and color timing. If your prints are faded or damaged, the workprint might be the best reference element.

22.7. Make a polyester base color internegative from the A&B rolls, then a positive print from the new internegative and the new optical negative. 8

22.8. Inspect and approve the first answer print from the internegative.

22.9. If necessary, recommend corrections.

22.10. If necessary, inspect corrected print.

22.11. Order release prints.

22.12. Make a high quality video master (Digital Betacam or High Definition) from the preservation internegative. Make a DVD master from that and distribution copies from the DVD master. 9

22.13. If a museum, archive or library is paying for all this work, perhaps through a grant, they will expect to own the internegative. You may want to make a second internegative and optical track and video master for yourself.

22.14. Place and label the master materials and prints in vented archival containers.

22.15. Write a preservation history that describes each step that was taken and the rationale for the decisions that were made.

22.16. Place the internegative and a reference print in an archive or appropriate storage location.

22.17. Exhibit the film. The creation of new preservation negatives and prints can be an occasion for exhibition and critical attention for the work.

Notes

1 The idea for the essay came from years of shared experience with Toni Treadway and from a specific conversation we had at the 2001 conference of the Association of Moving
Image Archivists in Portland, Oregon, which focused especially on the problems of small gauge film preservation. Toni was instrumental in organizing that conference.

2 For “preservation basics,” see the National Film Preservation Foundation Website at http://www.filmpreservation.org/; see also, The Home Film Preservation Guide at: http://www.filmforever.org/
Independent Media Arts Preservation (iMAP) “Preservation 101” at: http://www.imappreserve.org/pres_101/index.html
and Brodsky and Treadway at: http://www.littlefilm.org

3 It is probably more efficient to work in a dedicated period of time such as a solid week or two with a crew of helpers. But rather than wait for an opportunity that may never come, it may be more realistic to do a bit at a time over an extended period.

4 Take care of the most vulnerable materials first, not necessarily the oldest. For example, Ektachrome films from the 1970’s–especially those processed at drug stores or small labs—are at particular risk of fading and cupping while older films on Kodachrome in cardboard containers stored at room temperature have proven remarkably stable. Anything with a strong vinegar smell is definitely an urgent matter and should be put at the top of your list. Move it away from other films and consider having it professionally handled and copied.

5 In the US there are several graduate programs for Moving Image Archiving including NYU Moving Image Archiving and Preservation program, the UCLA Moving Image Archiving Studies program and the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation at the George Eastman House. For a more extensive listing of schools, go to:
http://www.loc.gov/film/schools.html

6 If writing this is too complicated or difficult, make an audio or video recording of yourself talking about it. If you can’t get someone to transcribe it, keep the video or audio tape with the film elements.

7 If the original was negative instead of reversal, you would make an interpositive and a duplicate negative from that. If the film was black & white the interpositive is sometimes called a fine grain positive. If the original is regular 8mm or super-8 you would optically blow it up a 16mm or 35mm internegative.

8 Digital duplication of film is not currently considered preservation but this is gradually changing. It may soon be possible and desirable to scan film at the original frame rate and store the information as high resolution, uncompressed data. But this is currently a complicated and controversial subject beyond the scope of this essay. However, making a high quality video master at this time is a relatively inexpensive and valuable way of helping preserve a film by making it easier to study and distribute in another form.
Colorlab salutes Bill Brand for a 30 year creative life in film. We’re all so happy you’ve only just begun!

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