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'This isn't Charlie Rose': The Making of *On Art and Artists* and the Politics of Information Distribution

In 1974, the young and aspiring Chicago-based artists Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield began videotaping informal interviews with women artists. In the years that followed, as both Blumenthal and Horsfield completed MFA degrees at the School of the Art Institute and established the Video Data Bank (VDB) there in 1976, the two continued to collaboratively videotape interviews, formalizing the interview series under the name *On Art and Artists* (OAA). By 1982, when *New Examiner* writer Hedy Weiss reviewed the holdings of the VDB, she described the OAA collection as the very "heart" of the archive.¹ Today, among the VDB's extensive collection of historical box set compilations and new video art, *On Art and Artists* continues on as the major legacy forged by its two co-founders. Comprised of over 400 videotaped interviews and artist-made video portraits, featuring a range of internationally renowned artists, critics, architects, theorists, and art collectors, the OAA collection persists as one of the most unassuming yet vast archives of non-print artist dialogues in existence today.²

Although scholars and critics over the years have remarked upon the collection's rich

1 Hedy Weiss, "From the Horse's Mouth: A Look at the Video Data Bank," *New Examiner* (November 1982): 10.

2 For an excellent overview of the various formats of tapes included in the OAA collection please visit <http://vdb.org/oa> or refer to Kate Horsfield's introduction to the collection in *Feedback: The Video Data Bank Catalog of Video Art and Artist Interviews* ed. Kate Horsfield and Lucas Hildebrand (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006).

art educational value, and the tapes' ability to preserve the aesthetics of 1970s grassroots culture, much work remains to be done with respect to assessing the lasting political implications of the collection as a whole, and the various types of information (beyond the biographical) embedded within the act of its distribution. This essay argues for a different approach to *On Art and Artists*, one that delves into the social and political mechanics of the "artist interview"—as an object and form integral to the history of art—and the historically specific stakes of Horsfield and Blumenthal's distribution of the tapes to universities, museum libraries, and art festivals in the 1970s and 1980s. In what follows, I argue that the videotaping of artist interviews during this early period of the VDB's development was itself a unique and important act, contributing to the instrumentalization of artistic labor as a vehicle for ethical engagement, as well as the redefinition of "information" that occurred in the late 20th century.

Defined in the early 1500s as a formal meeting or face-to-face encounter, the meaning of the word "interview" originated from the French expression *entrevue*, and more specifically from the verb *s'entrevoir*—to see or visit one another.³ By the late 19th century, the term had become associated with the journalistic practice of interviewing, in the sense that the exchange was one of glean-

3 *The Nation*, January 28, 1869. Quoted in "interview" in online etymology dictionary. Accessed June 2014.

ing and exposing political or provocative material. According to a citation from *The Nation* in 1869, "the 'interview,' as at present managed, is generally the joint product of some humbug of a hack politician and another humbug of a newspaper reporter."⁴

Today, the standard definition of the "interview" builds from this journalistic sensibility by placing emphasis not on the experience of seeing one another on a personal level, but rather, on the accrual of data and its management. Reflective of this development, Merriam-Webster's contemporary dictionary definition of the interview reads as such: the interview is "a meeting at which information is obtained from a person, a report or reproduction of information so obtained," or, in a more specific context of business, is "a formal consultation usually to evaluate qualifications (as of a prospective student or employee)."⁵

While the interview as a historical object has long been a central component of the art historical record, consideration of the *artist* interview, as a particular type within the larger categorization of the genre, remains understudied. In the scholarship that does discuss the artist interview directly, authors tend to focus on the circulation of printed transcripts and texts, leaving out the medi-

4 *The Nation*, January 28, 1869. Quoted in "interview" in online etymology dictionary. Accessed June 2014.

5 "Interview," Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Online Dictionary*. Accessed June 2014. <http://i.word.com/dictionary/interview>.

um of video altogether and its impact on the process of data translation. In spite of this oversight, Iwona Blazwick's essay, "An Anatomy of the Interview," printed as an introductory essay to *Talking Art: Interviews with Artists Since 1976* (2007), accounts for the direct impact of new communications technologies, such as the Internet, upon the artist interview in more recent years.⁶

Although, as Blazwick explains, the artist interview has for centuries shaped the art historical canon, dating back to Giorgio Vasari's sixteenth-century *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptures, and Architects*, she asserts that the proliferation of the artist interview in the late 20th and 21st centuries is a pointed "manifestation of our ever-expanding capacity to translate the temporal into the material, the private into the public, and the individual into the icon."⁷ For Blazwick, as for many others, the blurring of such distinctions occurs as a result of information acceleration unfolding from the digital era of documentation at the end of the 20th century, an event making significant impact on the role and purpose of artistic production. In relation to this heightened sense of connectivity and the proliferation of images world-wide, Tom Holert also explains in his 2013 *Artforum* essay titled, "The Burden of Proof," that indeed, "now is the time" in contemporary art practice and art discourse when, "responsibility [itself] might be reframed as a heuristic and performative notion—an arena of indeterminacy, of possible experimentation," if we are to address the transformation of processing visual and textual information in an era of global visual culture.⁸ The concerns raised by scholars like Blazwick and Holert in relation to technologies of documentation, and the accelerated speed of information distribution, are at their base, rooted in the same anxieties that

6 Iwona Blazwick, "An Anatomy of the Interview," originally printed in *October* (1996), reprinted in Patricia Bickers and Andrew Wilson's edited volume *Talking Art: Interviews with Artists Since 1976* (London: Ridinghouse, 2007), 25.

7 Blazwick, 25. Patricia Bickers discusses Vasari and also argues that Paul Freart de Chantelou's account of Bernini's visit to France in 1665 is the artist interview prototype, in "Introduction," *Talking Art: Interviews with Artists Since 1976* (London: Art Monthly, Ridinghouse, 2007), 13–23.

8 Tom Holert, "Burden of Proof: Holert on Contemporary Art and Responsibility," *Artforum* (March 2013): 254.

catalyzed the initiation of *On Art And Artists* forty years ago. All are fundamentally tied to the question of how to share information in ways that confront the uneven planes of access. The privileging of certain figures, and the mobilization of networks that reinforce these hierarchies of knowledge production are, in short, the underpinnings of the politics of distribution.

I. The Information Era and the Stakes of the "Artist Interview" in the 1970s

Horsfield and Blumenthal's cultivation of a video archive of artist interviews in the '70s and '80s, which recorded a marginalized group of radical thinkers, and developed a new way of sharing information, offers insight into the larger social implications of information management, and the responsibility inherent within the politics of data collecting and distribution.

In a charming but brief "How-To" video produced for VDB staff in 2004, in anticipation of her upcoming retirement in 2006, Horsfield offers strategies for presenting the "artist interview" as a legible and accessible form. With her musical Southern twang, she faces the viewfinder, which she, for many years, focused on others. She speaks of practical things, such as microphone adjustment during OAA interviews, as well as how her move to Chicago from Texas, while in her twenties, informed her own trajectory as an artist. Clearly at ease, Horsfield's expertise attests to her experience as director of the VDB, a position she held singularly for two decades following the untimely passing of Blumenthal in 1988. She carefully emphasizes, however, for future VDB interviewers, that the "interview" format is a constructed story in which the interviewer and camera handler take an active part in shaping the emotional landscape of the content. "It's not like Charlie Rose," Horsfield insists, "it should be more dynamic."⁹

From the start, Blumenthal and Horsfield's efforts to create intimate portraits of women artists in the '70s sought to challenge TV's

9 Kate Horsfield, "How to Interview for OAA," April 2004. Chicago Video Data Bank. Non-circulating Training Video.

reductive packaging of subjecthood. Although the television series *Charlie Rose*, a talk show in which executive producer Rose interviews leaders, activists, and athletes among others, would have been considered somewhat radical in relation to the standards set by 1970s television, it stays close, nonetheless, to a formal structure in a controlled studio environment.

The early OAA tapes were low-tech, half-inch open reel, unedited, and produced using a Sony Portapak system.¹⁰ Upon its 1965 invention, the machine expanded the potential for amateur documentation of everyday encounters in non-official spaces. Horsfield and Blumenthal traveled to New Mexico, New York and California, and recorded interviews inside artist studios, apartments, and offices, thereby framing domestic spaces, otherwise deemed private, as part of the public sphere of information. Because of the informal setting and grittiness of the tapes, the OAA provided visual information that differed considerably from formats of artist interviews on television and in polished, glossy magazines. The close-up shots emphasized vulnerability of the subject, radically undoing the flattened veneer of the packaged talk show. In stark contrast to the perfect studio shot, the range of close-ups, and off-centered, poetic reframing of the body was readily legible as a gesture intended to critique television's stylized packaging of celebrity status, and who (and who was not) then considered talk-worthy. Black and white promotional cards, produced by the VDB in the mid-'80s, showcase the OAA's signature aesthetic through selected stills from the OAA tapes made in the following decade. In these postcards, dramatic framing of Barbara Kruger and Hollis Sigler, for example, tightly frame the artist's faces, accentuating their eyes and mouths. These stylistic decisions, reflective of both Horsfield and Blumenthal's ongoing commitment to artistic experimentation, exemplify the dynamism and emotional topography the two used as a model for the OAA.

10 Kate Horsfield, "Lyn Blumenthal: A Brief Work History," *Lyn Blumenthal: Force of Vision*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1989), 3.



Barbara Kruger; *An Interview*, Blumenthal/Horsfield 1980



Hollis Sigler; *An Interview*, Blumenthal/Horsfield 1983

Though exemplary of quotidian interviewing practices by 2006, when *Charlie Rose* first aired in 1991, it appeared decades after the initial hey-day of televised talk shows. During the development of *On Art and Artists* throughout the '70s programs such as the *Phil Donahue Show* and *The Late Night Show* topped popularity charts. Yet, the guests and organizers of these programs were not representative of the American masses. On the contrary, the majority of producers and protagonists on these talk shows—and the many that followed in the 1980s and 1990s—were predominantly white and male, and addressed a narrow range of topics. Likewise, the packaged persona of the white male artist was also the dominant figure imaged on television and in film.

Two iconic moving-image documents, a 1951 film of Jackson Pollock and the 1968 BBC interview with Marcel Duchamp on *Late Night Line-Up*, attest to such gender, class, and racial biases of talk-worthiness as defined by popular culture in the U.S. Produced for art world constituents by filmmakers Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg in 1951, the film of Pollock at work on his rural property in upstate New York received renewed interest when it accompanied his retrospective hosted by the Museum of Modern Art in 1967.¹¹ In order to bolster the

11 Fred Orton, "Jackson Pollock, Painting, and the Myth of Photography," in *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Re-viewed* ed. Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 166.

dramatic effect of Pollock's aggressive flinging of paint across a glass sheet, the filmmakers applied a post-filming voice-over of Pollock discussing his process, juxtaposed with a score of improvisational, experimental music. Seen and heard together, Pollock's flattened, almost robotic intonation, and assertively short declarations of uninhibited artistic creation aggrandized the mythic proportions of his public persona. The film's portrayal of Pollock presented him as an unaffected cowboy, similar to his previous framing by *Life* magazine in which he was potentially "the Greatest Living Painter in the United States."¹² By emphasizing his rugged masculinity through the imaging of forceful application of paint to surface, the filmmakers' special attention to the virile force of the paint's impact cemented the visual metaphor of virility.

Similarly, when Duchamp appeared on the BBC's *Late Night Line-Up* in 1968, he extended the popularized, packaged consumer object of heterosexual masculinity and whiteness to which the film of Pollock had contributed. Sitting across from the petite, female journalist Joan Bakewell, the televised interview positioned the older artist as an uncompromising innovator. Bakewell opened the interview with the following inquiry: "Marcel Duchamp, at the age of fifteen, you were painting pictures that looked very like [sic] the Impressionists; within a

12 "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," *Life* (August 8, 1949).

few years of that you challenged the whole of the artistic values that then existed. What did you so dislike about them that made you launch that attack?"¹³ Duchamp, in a suit and tie, captured from the shoulders up, shakes his head in agreement. A moment later, as the camera jumps to a full studio shot of both interviewer and interviewee, Duchamp's persona as a talk-worthy figure, legible not only as male but white and Western, codifies beneath the bright lights calibrated to capture pale skin on screen.¹⁴

Although these representations of Pollock and Duchamp differ in terms of aesthetic production and intended effect, together they exhibit the spectrum of legitimized images of artists in the sixties. Namuth and Falkenberg's filmic portrayal of Pollock, though unconventional in its use of disruptive syncopated music and paired robotic monologue, contributed to the conventionally accepted persona of the "Artist" as an autonomous, idiosyncratic, and aggressively masculine subject. Likewise, the exchange between Bakewell and Duchamp culls from and adds to long-standing cultural scripts in which the recognition of artistic genius is collapsed with the professed, overt rejection of previous generations of male artists. Because Duchamp is a man, his dismissal

13 "Marcel Duchamp BBC Interview," 1968, *Late Night Line-Up*, online.

14 For an insightful exegesis on the racism of television's aesthetic structuring of visual information refer to Richard Dyer's *White* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997).

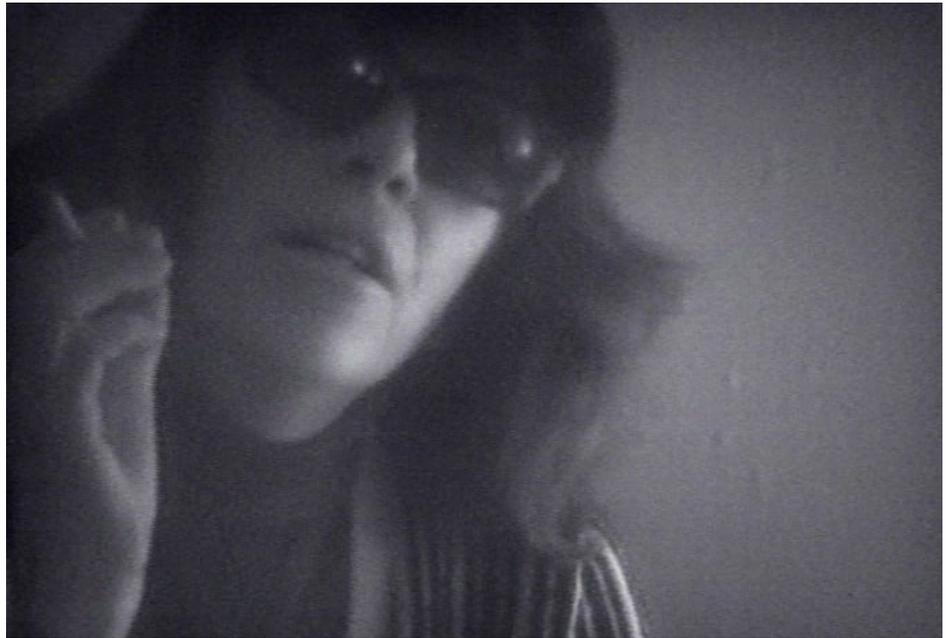
of art precedents registers as innovative, rather than reactionary on the basis of his gender or political agenda; had he been a woman, such aggressive experimentation would probably have been labeled “masculine” or defiantly “feminist.”

Above all, these formats for producing and disseminating biographical information about the artist by way of their performance of self, whether filmed for an art audience in the former, or the TV-watching masses in the latter, stand in stark contrast to the *OAA* series. Because Blumenthal and Horsfield imagined different audiences for their tapes of women artists speaking inside their private studios or homes, their reformulation of the artist interview produced a different kind of record.

Horsfield and Blumenthal’s decision to capture women artists on video intervened in processes of legitimization that determined and maintained which subjects were deemed worthy of interviews. In other words, *OAA* challenged a problematically homogeneous image of the artist. Reflecting upon the radicality of Blumenthal’s camerawork, Horsfield makes clear the necessity for a new set of aesthetics in the 1970s. She reminds contemporary viewers that, “We can look at television now and see close framing, but in the ‘70s everything was a perfect studio shot.”¹⁵

A 1974 interview with Abstract Expressionist painter Joan Mitchell provides insight into both *OAA*’s aesthetic sensibility and its engagement with the effaced identity politics articulated by the mainstream artist interviews, that the portrayals of Pollock and Duchamp had both contributed to and benefited from.

During the video interview, Mitchell appears in a sparsely decorated room. She leans across her bed, smoking cigarette after cigarette. Mitchell combatively answers Horsfield’s questions about her start as an artist and circles of influence in New York. Throughout the tape, Blumenthal adjusts the range of the camera’s viewfinder to capture a variety of shots: a close up of Mitchell’s



Joan Mitchell: *An Interview*, Blumenthal/Horsfield 1974

face, the painting by Franz Kline above her head, and spirals of cigarette smoke dissolving into the space of the apartment.

The artist’s responses to Horsfield’s questions display an attitude indicative of this particular historical moment—when the art scene of the ‘50s was a “boys club”—in which to speak of one’s position as a woman was to undermine one’s artistic status. At one point, Mitchell looks into the camera and asserts that, “I never felt I was competing with them [her male peers]... [it] never occurred to me.”¹⁶ Only five minutes into the conversation, the intensity of the exchange escalates when Horsfield inquires further about the support she received from Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline. Mitchell answers defensively in an aggravated tone: “Men have always encouraged me... you want to get into a feminist bit, right?”¹⁷ Mitchell’s agitated reluctance to speak about her experience as a woman artist preserves the predicament of women artists in a male-dominated art world. Horsfield, to this day, says it is difficult for her to watch Mitchell’s *OAA* interview, since the distrust

and discomfort of the interviewee remains accessibly raw and palpable in the tape.¹⁸

By recording informal—and sometimes uncomfortable—conversations, the early interview tapes included in *OAA* altered processes of conventional exchange. As discussed by Robert Storr, the early work of Blumenthal and Horsfield’s *OAA* series replaced the mythologized, idealized scene of the artist-at-work (like that of Pollock) with straightforward portraits of women in private spaces. Aesthetically, as Storr contends, “the very awkwardness of the Data Bank style underscored the authenticity of its project and, as much as anything, that frankness was an extension of Lyn’s anarchic temperament.”¹⁹ As he explains further, “Lyn’s genius was to break the frontal and essentially static format of talk show videography in order to explore the simultaneity of optical, auditory and even tactile events that take place during a conversation.”²⁰

What often drops out of the historical retellings or memories of the *OAA* collection, or the initial years of the VDB, is the larger cultural context and the debates surrounding information sharing and database

15 “Kate Horsfield, Interview,” *Women of Vision*, 103.

16 “Joan Mitchell: An Interview,” *On Art and Artists*. Blumenthal/Horsfield. 1974.

17 “Joan Mitchell: An Interview,” *On Art and Artists*. Blumenthal/Horsfield. 1974.

18 Kate Horsfield phone conversation with author. May 2013.

19 Storr, “Essays on Lyn Blumenthal”

20 Storr, “Essays on Lyn Blumenthal”

construction that dialectically informed the “packaged” look of information presented on television. Blumenthal and Horsfield’s decision to keep the label ‘video data bank’ as a designation for the collection reflects their immersion in theories of education and radical resistance circulating during the late ‘60s and early ‘70s in the U.S.

Television talk shows were not the catalyst for OAA, however. Fittingly, Blumenthal and Horsfield’s decision to collaborate grew from a period of intimate dialogue like that of the interviews they would later conduct together. The two met in 1973 during a trip to Colorado, and upon returning to Chicago, where they were neighbors, Blumenthal dropped by Horsfield’s apartment often to chat while the latter worked on her illustrations for children books. The two quickly developed a romantic partnership and collaborative work practice, before each enrolled in the MFA program at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago (SAIC) in 1974.²¹ It wasn’t until 1976, however, after Horsfield and Blumenthal graduated with degrees in painting and video, respectively, that they began envisioning their role maintaining the burgeoning library of videotapes at SAIC.

In its infancy, the VDB at SAIC was comprised of approximately 100 student-made tape recordings of visiting artist lectures and some experimental video art. Philip Morton, a pioneer in video technology and the first chair of the video department at SAIC, had amassed the tapes for student use and labeled their storage container in the SAIC library, “video data bank.” In the summer of 1976, Blumenthal and Horsfield wrote a proposal to create a more formal position for the organization of the tape collection. Their proposal is telling of the intersection of responsibility and art. They wrote:

“In order for the Video Data Bank to operate as a full-range facility it needs to become someone’s major focus. The way we conceptualize it at this point is that it requires more than the regular amount of energy that goes with whatever one assumes to be a

‘regular job.’ Assuming responsibility for the Data Bank has no connection with clock hours or even job title categories: what would you call us—teacher, artist, babysitter, janitor, curator, grant writer, technician, secretary? It has more to do with something someone *loves*.²²

Exposed to the term, “data bank,” by its coinage in the alternative publication *Radical Software*, a mouthpiece of the counterculture media movement, in 1970, Horsfield explains that the concept came from the counterculture’s need to make its own record.²³ This gesture was one of devotion. These efforts to disseminate information about video technology also resonated with, and borrowed from, the alternative video subculture’s overarching model of DIY education. The act was one of love and commitment, not only to the project at hand, but also to the larger cause of information sharing and its political stakes.

Like Blumenthal and Horsfield who imagined their role as full-time caregivers of such materials and their distribution, other video collectives forming during this period envisioned their missions in a similar manner. One such collective, the Videofreex, pursued a lifestyle of communal growth and artistic experimentation, and created an educational publication, the *Maple Tree Farm Report*. This report epitomized the type of earnest resources available to aspiring videographers. For the Videofreex, whose hand-drawn, Xeroxed newsletter educated readers on “tapeography” and served as a guide for aspiring video users, part of the endeavor of instructing others how to use video was one of politically charged revision. Indicative of the challenges facing the documentation and circulation of video technology, the Freex’s report reads, “There is no difficulty (technical) in plugging ½ inch equipment into cable. Let us know if you are

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22 Original proposal, dated March 31, 1976. Video Data Bank Archive.

23 Kate Horsfield phone interview with author. May 2013. *Radical Software* was founded in 1970 by Phyllis Gershuny, Ira Schneider, and Beryl Korot. Michael Shamburg and others involved with the Raindance Corporation eventually took over its editing. For further information refer to *Radical Software*’s official website: <http://www.radicalsoftware.org/e/>.

told otherwise.”²⁴ To be ‘told otherwise’—or be intentionally misled or misinformed—was to be undermined, often deliberately, by those who feared the impact of potentially revolutionary modes of connectivity. In other words, the maintenance of information, and the archiving or sharing of it, at a time when the landscape of knowledge was so heavily embroiled with political meaning, embodied a radical act of engagement.

The word and concept of the “data bank” did not belong to, or originate from, the counterculture. In fact, the language was one of bureaucratic dominion and federal governance. In 1965, the American government had submitted a proposal for a databank project known as the National Data Center.²⁵ Although the original proposal for the Data Center was economically motivated—a singular databank project would cut costs of information collecting—ensuing government hearings on the threats of computerized databanks in 1966 killed the bill. A 1967 article by Vance Packard, titled “Don’t Tell it To the Computer,” extends the hearings’ outcome to the impact of information sharing on the masses. He attacked the idea of a centralized government data warehouse, voicing a common fear of “falling under the control of the machine’s managers.”²⁶ The Center was ultimately defeated in 1969 when it was met with heavy resistance from polled Americans who feared that a singular databank of personal information would invade their privacy.²⁷ As historian Simson Garfinkel explains succinctly, the impact of the Center’s defeat was the government’s consequential formation of an “*idea* of data protection” for American citizens.²⁸

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24 Videofreex, “Everybody’s Wondering About Cable Television,” *Maple Tree Farm Report* no. 2 (Fall 1971). Box 73, folder 10, “Serials,” Irving Sandler Papers, Getty Research Institute.

25 Simson Garfinkel. *Database Nation: The Death of Privacy in the 21st Century* (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly and Associates, Inc., 2000), 13.

26 Garfinkel, 14. Quoted from Vance Packard, “Don’t Tell it To the Computer,” *New York Times* (8 January 1967), n.p.

27 As an indication of the overarching malaise of the American population, Jerry Rosenberg published the book *The Death of Privacy* in 1969 to great critical acclaim.

28 Garfinkel, 35.

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21 Kate Horsfield, *An Interview: The Early Years of the Video Data Bank and On Art and Artists*. Faye Gleisser.

Whether Blumenthal and Horsfield were aware of the proposed National Data Center, the contentious ownership of information and the ability to disseminate facts widely was at the foundation of changing notions of radical resistance. The *ideas* of privacy and the need to protect certain kinds of information from being effaced emerged simultaneously in dominant and counter-culture. The phrase "information society" had in fact begun to circulate like electricity throughout the U.S. in the wake of a series of lectures published by the scholar Clark Kerr almost a decade before the initiation of the Video Data Bank. Titled *The Uses of the University*, Kerr outlined the relationship of information, consumerism, and military intervention in 1967, by citing economist Fritz Machlup's studies on the increasingly entangled relationship of information and the economy. Kerr posited that, "Intellect has...become an instrument of national purpose, a component of the military-industrial complex."²⁹ Building from the theories of Kerr, authors of *Radical Software* proclaimed that, as of 1970, "Power is no longer measured in land, labor, or capital, but by access to information and the means to disseminate."³⁰

The very definition of the artist during the late '60s and early '70s became one mired in the construction of ideas and dissemination of information. With the advent of conceptual art and institutional critique, the exposure of stylized systems of information management became fodder for artistic pursuits. Perhaps the most iconic example of this impulse to position information as the subject of art's critique can be found in the well-documented and discussed exhibition *Information*, which opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970. This exhibition underscored how the representation of administrative knowledge and the durability of facts had become an urgent site of exploration and contestation for artists. According to curator Kynaston McShine, works in the show by artists, such as Hans Haacke, Adri-

an Piper, Vito Acconci, and the members of Group Frontera, "question our prejudices," by exposing the inadequacy of information systems, and denaturalizing the role of the museum in the display of its objects.³¹ This exhibition was also a self-conscious attempt to confront the impact of technology on gatekeepers of the art world. McShine mentions this anxiety in his catalogue essay, asking, "How is the museum going to deal with the introduction of new technology as an everyday part of its curatorial concern?"³² Most recently, the *Information* exhibition has been made the focus of Eve Meltzer's book, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (2013). In this text, Meltzer contends that the very term "information" is not only critical for coming to terms with American art practice in the 1960s and '70s, but imperative to understanding artists' "relationship to fantasies about contemporary technologies of communication and the politics that grew up with such fantasies."³³

Reflective of these shifts and their effect on popular culture, the authors of *Radical Software* proclaimed in 1970, the same year of the *Information* exhibition, that the provisioning of an "alternative history of the world" would ideally denaturalize the hegemonic ideologies then policing cultural and political institutions. In this sense, the notion of the "data bank," as a source for disseminated materials, offset and denaturalized the concept of information storage otherwise accepted as an objective and necessary component of institutionalized databases.

The Video Data Bank, and its role as a housing site for the *On Art and Artists* collection, is best understood when contextualized within the fraught symbolism of information management and changing definitions of American citizenship in the '70s. When

revisited within the context of database discourses, *On Art and Artists'* organization as part of a larger video "data bank" consequently serves as a kind of counter model. As media-theorist Mark Poster explains, "with databases, the individual is constituted in absentia" through a specific form of representation embodied in the database's collection of "facts," such as social security numbers and credit scores, that creates the performative effect of information."³⁴ Alternatively, Blumenthal and Horsfield's development of *On Art and Artists* within the VDB sought to cultivate the social subject through the presence, not the absence, of the individual as they articulated their relationship to cultural and historical ideas of art making in the real time of audiovisual documentation.

It is not merely coincidental, therefore, that Blumenthal and Horsfield's initiation of a databank of interviews occurred in the 1970s. Rather, this gesture is part and parcel of a significant conversation surrounding the idea of privacy and information management in the U.S. In 1973, for example, building from the landmark report issued by Elliot Richardson, Nixon's secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), Congress passed the "Code of Fair Information Practices," essentially a "bill of rights for the computer age."³⁵ Richardson's research built from the failed proposal for the centralized National Data Center, as well as in acknowledgment of the growing industry of personal identification information and credit reporting. As anxieties surrounding the treatment of personal information in databanks heightened, the circulation of personal information to the masses, via the format of the televised or filmic artist interview, became an increasingly popular, albeit unquestioned, medium of data. In response, the display of video was associated with the undermining of systems of data management and control.

Michael Shamburg, writing as an advocate for the counterculture epitomized by the efforts of *Guerrilla Television*, insisted that the "information environment" didn't have

29 Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 20. Quoted in *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Steward Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, Fred Turner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 12.

30 *Radical Software*. vol. 1, no. 1. (1970): 9.

31 Kynaston McShine, "Introduction to *Information*," from Alberro and Stimpson, *Conceptual Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 214.

32 McShine, 214.

33 Meltzer convincingly points to Robert Barry and Adrian Piper as examples of artists who confronted the political capacities of withholding as artistic strategies with political critique. Refer to her chapter, "The Dream of the Information World," *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 35-7.

34 Mark Poster. *The Second Media Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995), 90.

35 Garfinkel, 7.

to be one of dependency and addiction." Instead, he noted that although "Americans are information junkies," the use of "video tape, particularly portable video systems, can enhance survival and generate power in Media-America."³⁶ Above all, he concluded, "Information is simply not information unless it's applied, or processed."³⁷ Thus, to create new forms of information and disseminate it was considered a gesture resounding with revolutionary bravado and radical possibility.

It is significant that Blumenthal and Horsfield were involved in various models of peer-to-peer dialog during 1976, the year the OAA collection and the VDB as an institution began to expand. It was most likely from these programs and their successes that the importance of video sharing was made evident. One such interactive video festival, named the *Center Focus... A Video Event*, offered a rigorous schedule of screenings and video workshops in Chicago during the first four days of February 1976. Blumenthal, in collaboration with Greg Dawe, Jody Gillerman, Drew Browning, and Mary O'Kiersey, produced the festival under the title of "Video Tape Playback Data." During the days of the event, the VDB screened OAA tapes of Nancy Grossman, Louise Nevelson, Agnes Martin, and Ree Morton for the public, free of cost, in addition to screenings of Hermine Freed's work by Videopolis, a video resource and teaching center established in 1971 in Chicago by Anda Korst.

The promotional material for *Center Focus... A Video Event* captures the attitude of the program facilitators and provides a visual metaphor for the aim of their project, as well as their desire to target a specific audience attuned to the politics of information management. Showcasing Xeroxed copies of the organizers' identification cards on the promotional flyer, then including their Social Security numbers, the organizers made public their identification data, which would otherwise be kept secure and private in a government database.³⁸ This gesture

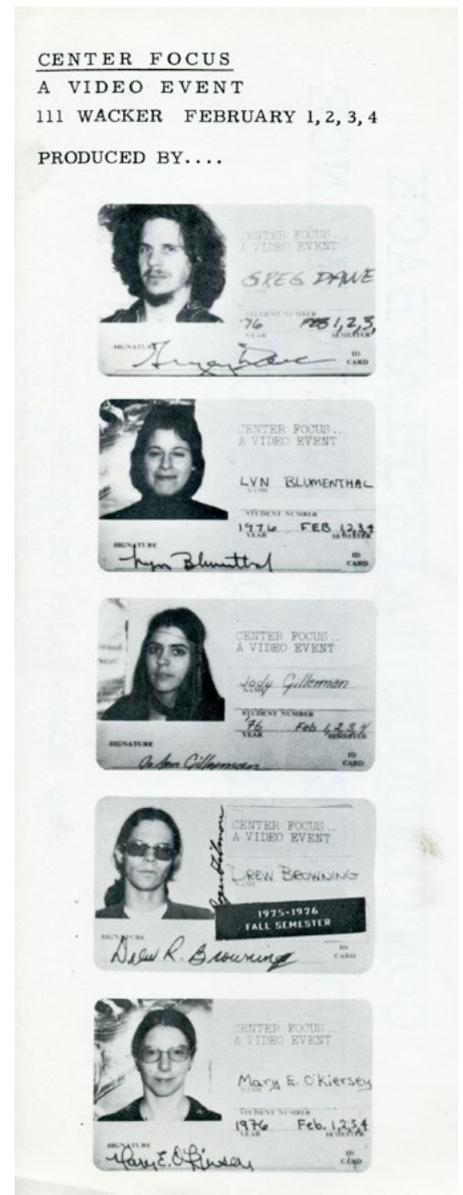
intentionally subverted privacy protocol by making public the confidential numbers assigned to American citizens to differentiate them in a database. Similarly, the purpose of the *Center Focus* program—to promote the distinct and radically public possibilities of video—intervened in and challenged received ideas about how, when, and where certain types of information could or should be deployed. This playful but subversive invitation to the event set the tone for the screenings, which embodied an ethos of resistance and disruption of conventional codes of sharing.

Peer-to-peer information sharing was promoted in 1976 beyond the video community, as suggested by another event, in which Blumenthal was also a participant, and Horsfield, an attendee. Developed as a fundraiser for the *New Art Examiner* and N.A.M.E. Gallery in 1976, a pool tournament organized in Chicago sought to bring together a constellation of art world members to generate new ideas and debates about art.³⁹ N.A.M.E. Gallery, a space established by SAIC alums in 1973 for the display and discussion of alternative art practice in Chicago, hosted the program. The facilitators staged conversations between various permutations of unlikely art world duos. Publicized with the tag line, "Come and see the Chicago art world decide its pool champion," the fundraiser paired dealers and painters, collectors and sculptors, critics and aestheticians, and collectors and the M.C.A. president (then Lou Manilow) in staged conversations. Blumenthal, labeled as an "installation artist," was pitted against Dennis O'Shea, generically named an "artist" without further delineation.⁴⁰ Each couple sought to assess the status of contemporary art through public dialogue using the notions of play and competition. The gritty and informal format of the event's flyer's, a hand drawn illustration of woman leaning over a pool table, a cat sitting on her hip, imagining a "five" ball, collapsed the visual

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personal information, and the politics of surveillance that continues to shape social relations, visual culture, and technologies of publicity in the present moment.

39 For a brief history of N.A.M.E. Gallery please refer to Bridget Esangga's essay, "Artist-Run Archive," available online: <http://my.saic.edu/?page=name>.

40 "Pool Tournament" Publicity flyer, addressed to Kate Horsfield. 2 June 1976. Video Data Bank Archives.



Center Focus... A Video Event promotional material, 1976

vocabulary of the handmade and low tech documentation, and embodied similar aesthetics as those used in the OAA collection. This event, its promotion, and other visual cues like it, lend further historical context to historian Jeanne Siegel's reflection that the artist emerged as a "truly public figure" in the '60s and altered the figure of the artist in the '70s.⁴¹

.....
41 Jeanne Siegel. *Artwords: Discourse on the '60s and '70s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988), 1. A brief but excellent discussion of the evolution of the artist interview appears in Patricia Bicker's introductory text in her edited volume, *Talking Art: Interviews with Artists Since 1976* (2007), 17–22.

36 Michael Shamburg. "Media America," *Guerrilla Television* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 11.

37 Shamburg, 1-2

38 The social security numbers were erased for the reproduction of this material as it appears in this essay, thereby underscoring and complicating the protection of

The notion of the artist speaking as a “public figure” developed alongside activism that celebrated the act of going “out into the streets” to pursue face-to-face encounters.⁴² For organizers of the art world, innovation was equally based on competitive and constructive camaraderie as a form of democratic responsibility. Tellingly, as the “flow of writing and talking” created by contemporary artists in the ‘70s increased, Ellen Johnson has made a link to the “direct outcome of artists’ own perception of their changing role in a democratic, industrial, and technological society” and the genre of the interview.⁴³ Blumenthal’s co-facilitation of the *Center Focus... A Video Event* and the first annual “Chicago Art World Pool Tournament,” exemplify this impulse towards public discourse, and the need for a network of idea and information sharing that worked beyond the established institutions of art museum, government, or corporate market.

Not coincidentally, authorship of the “artist interview” changed in the ‘60s and ‘70s, from the domain of the art critic to that of the artist. By cutting out the middleman of the art critic or journalist, artists such as Dan Graham, Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner and Sol Le Witt, answered to Americans’ so-called addiction to information. These artists began publishing articles about their own process in *Artforum*, often as independent works of art.⁴⁴ As a result, the voice and language of the artist became accessible as never before. By 1969, when Andy Warhol founded *Interview*, a magazine that transcribed words of the art world’s celebrities and juxtaposed them with glossy consumer ads, the “age of the interview” had debuted.⁴⁵

Warhol’s description of the interview sums up the rise in skepticism that accompanied

42 Franklin Rosemont and Charles Radcliffe. *Dancin’ in the Streets! Anarchists, IWWs, Surrealists, Situationists & Provos in the 1960s as recorded in the pages of the Rebel Worker & Heatwave* (Chicago: Charles H. Kress Publishing Company, 2005).

43 Ellen H. Johnson. *American Artists on Art: From 1940 to 1980* (New York: Icon editions, Harper & Row, 1982, preface), 18. Quoted and contextualized in Bicker’s introduction to *Talking Art*, 18.

44 Anastas, 81.

45 Anastas, “A Response,” 81.



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SUNDAY JUNE 6

11a.m. WALTER KELLY (dealer) vs. COREY POSTIGLIONE (painter)
12p.m. DENISE KUNKEL (video artist) vs. BUD HOLLAND (dealer)
10a.m. MIKE SEGARD (painter) vs. ELLEN LANYON (painter)
11a.m. PHYLLIS KIND (dealer vs. VERA KLEMENT (painter)
10a.m. VIRGINIO FERRARI (sculptor) vs. GEORGE LIEBERT (painter)
10a.m. LYN BLUMENTHAL (installation artist) vs. DENNIS O'SHEA (artist)
10a.m. TIM CROWLEY (painter) vs. WARREN MENAKER (painter)
12p.m. VINCE QUINLAN (artist) vs. HARRY BOURAS (artist, critic & teacher)
10a.m. ROLAND GINZEL (painter) vs. TONY GILBERTO (painter)
10a.m. JERRY SALTZ (painter) vs. SHELDON BERKE (painter)
10a.m. MICHELLE FIRE (artist) vs. ANN SALVAGGIO (painter)
10a.m. BILL COONS (painter) vs. OTHELLO ANDERSON (painter)
12p.m. JOSEPH SHAPIRO (collector) vs. TOM ZURFLUH (painter)
10a.m. LANI HAYES (dealer) vs. CAROL DIEHL (painter)
12p.m. FRANZ SCHULZE (critic) vs. VINCENT FRANCO (aesthetician)
11a.m. GUY WHITNEY (painter) vs. KATE HORSFIELD (installation artist)
11a.m. RALPH CINTRON (critic & filmmaker) vs. JOHN OBUCK (artist)
12p.m. KARL WIRSUM (painter) vs. DON SHAPIRO (collector)
12p.m. PAT McNABB (painter) vs. HAROLD HAYDON (critic)
10a.m. DEREK GUTHRIE (critic) vs. BARBARA SCHMIDT (painter)
10a.m. MARTIN PREKOP (sculptor) vs. RON ZEARNI (dealer)
10a.m. FRANK PANNIER (painter) vs. JOHN DOYLE (dealer)
11a.m. JOHNNIE JOHNSON (painter) vs. BARRY HOLDEN (sculptor)
10a.m. MIKE VERMEULLEN (critic) vs. SUSAN SCHULSON (printmaker)
11a.m. MARY JO MARKS (painter) vs. NORRY MILLER (critic)
11a.m. BOB RAY (sculptor) vs. BION SMALLEY (dealer)
11a.m. MARK ROGOVIN (muralist) vs. DEVONNA PIESZAK (critic)
11a.m. PETER BUTTERFIELD (painter) vs. JERRY PEART (sculptor)
12p.m. BILL WALKER (muralist) vs. RICK HOREVITZ (critic)
12p.m. TONY PACKARD (lawyer for the arts) vs. GUNNER PIOTTER (artist)
10a.m. FRANKLIN (collector) vs. LOU MANILOW (M.C.A. president)
11a.m. DAN RAMIREZ (painter) vs. JOHN BREITWEISER (artist)
11a.m. MICHAEL RABIGER (filmmaker) vs. LANNIE JOHNSTON (artist)

A FUND RAISING EVENT FOR N.A.M.E. GALLERY AND THE NEW ART EXAMINER

the increasing publicity of the genre during the late '60s. He explained,

Interviews are like sitting in those Ford machines at the World's Fair that toured around while someone spoke a commentary. I always feel that my words are coming from behind me, not from me. The interviewer should just tell me the words he wants me to say and I'll repeat them after him. I think that would be so great because

I'm so empty I just can't think of anything to say.⁴⁶

Warhol's reference to vacuity and disinterest is tongue in cheek. The artist is notorious for his own sculpted performance of vacuity in the '60s, which aestheticized “emptiness” as a subject and medium for the cultural critique achieved by his Pop idiom. Neverthe-

46 Gretchen Berg, “Andy: My True Story,” *Los Angeles Free Press* (17 March 1967), 3. Reprinted from East Village Other. Reproduced in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* ed. Kristin Stiles, Peter Howard Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 345.

less, his assertion that during an interview his words seemed to unfold from someplace “behind him” rather than from him encapsulates the pervasive belief that television, and its cookie-cutter framing and editing, turned those who appeared on screen into mere actors within the screenplay written by television producers and their patrons. Moreover, Warhol’s reference to Ford machines at the World’s Fair further reiterates the anxieties surrounding technology and information management, also articulated by McShine and the artists involved with the *Information* exhibition. Whether evading or troubling the notion of interiority in the era of television, Warhol’s commodification of the artist interview as an object for conspicuous consumption anticipates the turn towards the reassessment of the “interview” as a thing to make or produce rather than a collection of fixed facts.

While face-to-face exchange was promoted as an important form of activism in the ‘60s and ‘70s, the study of the types of information embedded within these encounters was simultaneously reconsidered within the realm of science. Linguist H.P. Grice argues in his 1967 lecture “Logic and Conversation,” that when speaking to one another, “we flout rules of conventional language, using irony, understatement, hyperbole, ambiguity, obscurity, and prolixity to imply things that are outside its scope. Such tendencies make the meaning of conversations both context-bound and indeterminate.”⁴⁷ Grice concluded therefore, that, “the meaning of conversations is not carried by what is said but only by the saying of what is said, or by ‘putting it that way.’”⁴⁸ Discussion of this study appears in the 2005 special topic issue dedicated to the “artist interview,” published in *Art Journal*. Although the authors addressed the under-examined politics of the interview as market-driven and performative, the focus remained on printed and

transcribed conversations, thereby missing out on the possibilities existent within a video archive of interviews for information sharing.

In an essay, which delves into the possibilities of different kinds of communication, and specifically the mode of exchange labeled “gossip,” Irit Rogoff emphasizes the importance of finding alternative forms of knowledge production, and recognizing their potential. Rogoff asserts that, “So conditioned are we by the hierarchical values of what constitutes serious cultural endeavor, that we either co-opt these small-scale narratives into the grand schemes of heroic activity or we allow them to slip into a kind of domesticated netherworld.”⁴⁹ Rogoff’s emphasis on the significance of small-scale narratives is instructive. The OAA collection does not circulate as gossip but its archiving of the technological advances and discourses of communication asks that we put into question how hierarchies of fact and fiction, or real and imagined narratives, define the cultural endeavor of engaging in a conversation.

According to Horsfield, the necessity for distribution of video as an alternative form of information that challenged the easy and reductive consumption of “facts” received in printed materials surfaced, first and foremost, in response to the lacuna of documentation of experimental artists, and specifically documentation of women artists. As Horsfield explains, “Before the seventies, artists didn’t speak publicly about their work. In the seventies, the NEA began supporting visiting artist programs. Mitchell and Agnes Martin were of an earlier generation, so it was important to record them, since their voices hadn’t been heard previously (and wouldn’t be heard otherwise).”⁵⁰ In short, the production of face-to-face encounters and ensuing cultivation of discussion put into practice the feminist agenda of non-hierarchical communication also mobilizing the OAA series.

Writer, artist, and feminist activist, Arlene Raven, in her 1976 OAA interview, refers to female artists’ gestures to fight their oppression “through supportive criticism and self-criticism,” a method of information sharing based on creating a community of thinkers and theorists.⁵¹ In more explicitly political terms, Cecilia Dougherty described Raven’s OAA interview, itself, as a “document that reads like a manifesto, a pure statement of ideology about feminist art education.”⁵² Blumenthal and Horsfield’s initiative to record women artists talking about their work promotes a pedagogy of connectivity, an unlearning of conditioned, legitimized forms of data-collecting in favor of something different—an embrace of alternative tones, forms, and scales of investigation.

This strategy grew from the wider pedagogy of feminist connectivity at play in the 1970s. In her 1971 film, *Growing Up Female*, Julia Reichert asserts that the methodology behind distribution is a core feminist principle. “The idea of collective action, not individual genius,” she explains is, “not just a business cycle, but a learning cycle. You learn to know your audience.”⁵³ Whereas more typical formats of artist interviews available at this time upheld structures of art world hierarchy (read: artist-curator, artist-collector, artist-editor dichotomy), the humility of artists assuming the responsibility of authorship by questioning other artists or critics about their practices on video allows the humanity of the effort to shine through in unexpected and irreproducible ways.

Paired with the unorthodox aesthetics of the videotaped interviews, Horsfield and Blumenthal’s mode of questioning interceded in the coded rhetoric of interviews that appeared in mainstream art criticism and talk shows. Notes from Blumenthal’s sketchbook, penned in red handwriting across

47 H.P. Grice, “Logic and Conversation (1975),” *The Philosophy of Language*. Ed., A. P. Martinich (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 175. This quote appears in “Against Criticism: The Artist Interview in ‘Avalanche’ Magazine, 1970-1976,” by Gwen Allen, Andy Warhol, Willoughby Sharp, Liza Bear, Edward Ruscha, W.R., Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Lawrence Weiner, and Yvonne Rainer. *Art Journal* vol. 64, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 55.

48 Grice, 175.

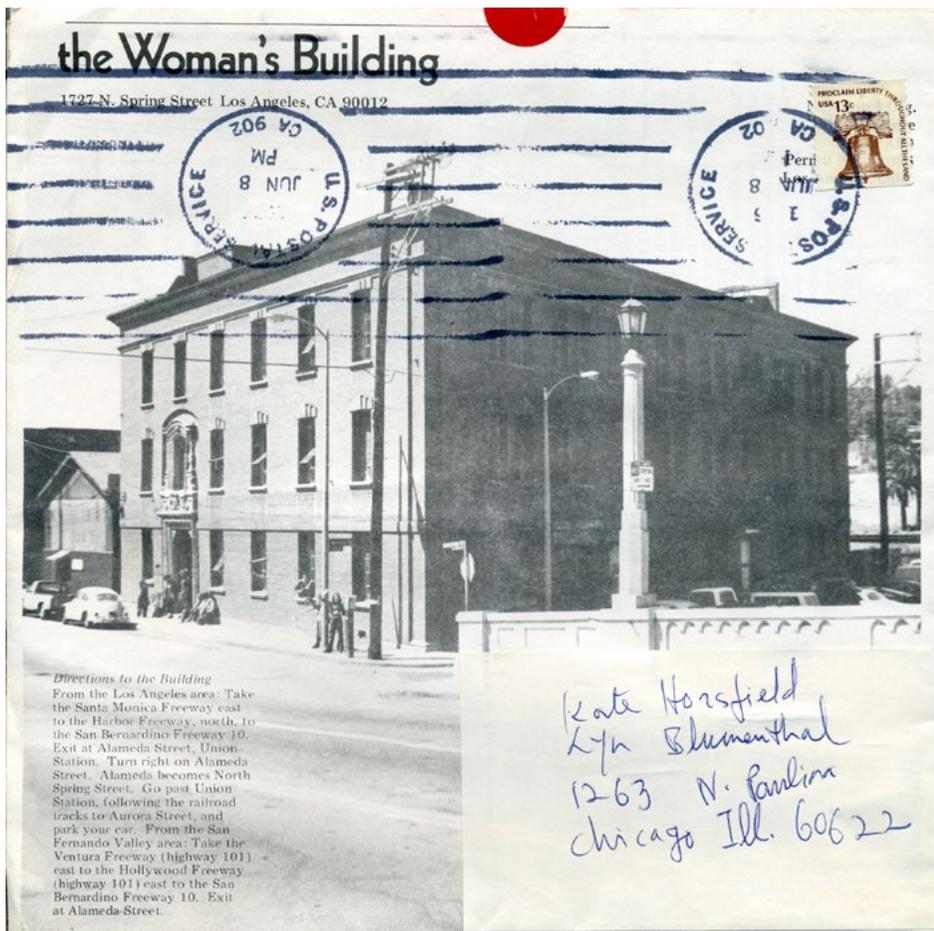
49 Irit Rogoff, “Gossip as Testimony: A Postmodern Signature.” In *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003), 270.

50 Kate Horsfield in conversation with author. May 2013.

51 “Arlene Raven: An Interview,” *On Art and Artists*, 1976. Video Data Bank.

52 Cecilia Dougherty, “Stories from a Generation: Video Art at the Woman’s Building,” From *Site to Vision: The Woman’s Building in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton (Woman’s Building, Inc., 2007), 289. <http://www.womansbuilding.org>.

53 Julia Reichert quoted in “Julia Reichert, Interview” *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*, ed. Alexandra Juhasz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 126.



Program of events for video program, summer 1976, The Woman's Building, Los Angeles

graph paper, illuminate the process of preparing for the OAA interviews. In preparation for the 1976 interview with art critic and scholar Lucy Lippard, Blumenthal lists a series of questions: "How did the women's movement change your approach to criticism? Definition of feminist art? In the intro to *From the Center*, you described a story about the time when you finally accepted your feminism... could you tell us how this happened?"⁵⁴ Further down the list, some of Blumenthal's questions have a line drawn through them: "What is the role of the art critic in a capitalist society? Whether L.A. should be absorbed into the male dominated art world."⁵⁵

The terms of exclusion that shaped the history of art, such as conventions of criticism, gender bias, and capitalist modes of

54 Lyn Blumenthal, sketchbook, Summer, 1975. Page unnumbered. Video Data Bank Archive.

55 Lyn Blumenthal, sketchbook, Summer, 1975. Page unnumbered. Video Data Bank Archive.

consumption, were tackled head-on during the interviews. In doing so, Blumenthal and Horsfield enabled their subjects to begin self-consciously locating their own practice with and against these seemingly impenetrable institutions. Artists, consequently, were positioned as art makers, but also as responsible art-citizens, tasked with understanding and redefining the institutions that had for so long shaped interpretations of their art. In this way, the OAA collection altered the frame as well as the conventional script of the artist interview. In hindsight, the OAA interviews' model of questioning also contributed to a larger shift occurring in the '60s and '70s when the artist's voice as a self-made entity was endowed with unprecedented cultural capital.⁵⁶

56 Rhea Anastas, "A Response," *Art Journal* vol. 64 no. 3 (Fall 2005): 81.

II. The Political Power of Archival Distribution

With the OAA collection, Blumenthal and Horsfield challenged more than the hegemony of television. Their practice as artists interviewing artists produced an altogether different variety of information than that circulated by art criticism in the mainstream art world. Not only did their work expose the politics of representation that determined who was or wasn't talk-worthy, but their methods of distributing the tapes, catalyzed by a feminist agenda, circulated marginalized voices in an alternative format by strategically reimagining the viewing and listening communities they wished to create through such distribution.

The commitment to analyzing an interview as more than an objective document formalized during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the pushback against multiculturalism and a larger critique of Anthropology. Critical race theorists began to approach the construction of identity through a co-articulation of self that interviewers and interviewees cultivated. Mobilized by the emergence of post-colonial theory and its critique of multiculturalism, staged by theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Audre Lorde, the historical object of the interview came under scrutiny as a document of privilege and inlaid power dynamics.⁵⁷

Much more than merely the recording of marginalized voices was at stake with the decision to interview women artists in the '70s. The larger, and much more difficult to achieve, goal was to shift the very frame through which women artists' actions and ideas were interpreted. Even more poignantly, certain risks were involved upon accepting the invitation to be video taped in any cultural setting. To agree to even be interviewed carried a set of political consequences for participants and viewers, based on who ultimately controlled the distribution or circulation of the material. In

57 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Other World: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988); *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of An Idea*. Ed Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1988).

one such example, African-American activist and Black Panther, Angela Davis's declined an invitation to appear on *The Dick Cavett* show in 1972—a well-known talk show that aired between 1968 and 1975 in New York, and hosted interviews with “big names” like Buckminster Fuller, Groucho Marx, Judy Garland, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and Alfred Hitchcock. Her decision points to the urgency of strategically navigating the systems of power and visibility informing public interviews.⁵⁸ If Davis had appeared on the show, she would have relinquished to the media executives her ability to control or manage her image and voice as a mouthpiece of the Black Power movement (she was to be paired with either the conservative William Buckley Jr. or William Rusher to have a “balanced” viewpoint). Davis's refusal to appear on this particular TV talk show, but agreement to participate in an interview while in jail with producers of the film *The Black Power Mixtape*, exposes the political implications present, albeit often elided, in choosing to speak in certain formats and contexts.

The invitation to appear on television posed various risks and outcomes for individuals of diverse backgrounds in the '70s. Shamburg addressed such concerns in his text *Guerrilla Television*, admonishing the televised interview's problematic linkage between fashionable consumer entertainment and radical politics, which emptied the latter of its critical edge.⁵⁹ While the stakes of appearing on a conservative-leaning talk show were too high for Davis, activist-artist and co-founder of the Yippie movement Abbie Hoffman accepted an invitation in 1968 to appear on *The Dick Cavett* show. Shamburg recalls, “as somebody (John Brockman actually) once said: ‘The revolution ended when Abbie Hoffman shut up for the first commercial.’”⁶⁰ This sentiment, regarding Hoffman as having “sold out” to the establishment by merely appearing on network

58 Peggy Phelan famously attends to the politics of visibility inherent to performance and suggests that invisibility can also be a form of power in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

59 David Joselit, “Yippie Pop: Abbie Hoffman, Andy Warhol, and Sixties Media Politics,” *Grey Room* (2002): 67.

60 Shamburg quoted in Joselit, 67. Shamburg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, 27.



Trinh T. Minh-ha: *An Interview*, Blumenthal/Horsfield 1989

television, points to stakes of the interview form and its proliferation during this period. As such, Horsfield and Blumenthal's efforts to construct an archive of interviews for and by artists tackled the hegemony of TV interview aesthetics and cultural scripts of questioning.

Through the lens of postcolonial critique, the interview reinforced certain relations of power and ways of seeing that were closely linked to a history of European colonialism. In the 1989 OAA interview, the filmmaker and artist Trinh T. Minh-ha articulates the ways in which the forces of ethnocentrism and colonialism often eclipse the politics of translation inherent within the (re)telling of histories. These concerns, among others, shape Minh-ha's own work as both an artist and post-colonial theorist. In her OAA interview, facilitated by Pam Falkenberg, Minh-ha discusses her decision to move to Dakar, Senegal, and the impetus for the production of her first film, *Reassemblage* (1982), which was meant to oppose the institutional knowledge of “Africa” depicted by the colonial administration. In addition to providing insight into the guiding questions that catalyze and sustain her films, this particular interview offers a meta-commentary on the

notion of the “interview” itself as an object shaped by cultural and political positioning. Speaking of her latest film (1989), *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, and the fictions shaped by her exploration and documentation of the interviews of Vietnamese women, Minh-ha simultaneously complicates her own relationship to the format of the interview in which she participates for the VDB.

By combining theory and practice through her confrontation of the “politics of the interview,” Minh-ha effectively invites viewers to take a more critical approach to the mediation of information, while also suggesting that conversations are invaluable tools for the construction of identity, public memory, and cross-cultural communication.⁶¹ The issue of representation, of course, extends beyond that of women, to all gendered, raced, or classed subjects—those marked as “other” in social and political realms. As Horsfield contends, “criticism and biography alone tend to isolate artists, transforming them into voiceless, iconic figures or mythic presences.”⁶² The OAA collection

61 “Trinh Minh Ha: An Interview,” *On Art and Artists Collection*, 1989. 32 minutes. Color. Video Data Bank archive.

62 Weiss, 10.

self-consciously sought to create a network of diverse voices. By inviting Falkenberg to facilitate the interview with Minh-ha as a guest interviewer, Horsfield and Blumenthal expanded the script and repertoire of questioning offered by the series. Unlike *Charlie Rose* or *The Dick Cavett Show*, which star a singular interviewer, Horsfield and Blumenthal's decision to diversify the pool of interviewers and introduce other perspectival points of departure, greatly extends the scope of their series. Invitations to various artists and art professors, such as Mary Jane Jacob and Steve Reinke, helped the VDB overcome geographical distances and the financial burden of travel that would have otherwise limited the rigor of the project.

When Blumenthal and Horsfield began videotaping women artists their effort was unique and extremely forward thinking. Only the Institutional History Division at the Smithsonian Institution Archives had begun developing its Oral History Program in an effort to supplement the written documentation of the Archives records and manuscript collection. While significant in its endeavor, these interviews were audio-recorded, and therefore cannot offer the multiplicity of unspoken information that the videotaped records of OAA offer. Alternatively, Electronic Art Intermix, an early archive of alternative media established in 1971, which had begun cultivating a collection of video art, contributed to the preservation of early art tapes, but did not amass video interviews. In this respect, historical precedents for a distribution of data recorded on video were few and far between, underlining again the unique aptitude for new modes of knowledge production that the OAA series shaped at this particular time.

Despite these innovative gestures, Blumenthal and Horsfield's artist peers at SAIC saw the duo's decision to create artist interviews, ironically, as too traditional, in comparison to video art practices.⁶³ As a result, the major-

63 Phone interview with Kate Horsfield, May 2013. For an excellent discussion of Chicago's role in the world of video art and video technology refer to "Gene Youngblood: An Interview" (2006) in the OAA collection. This interview offers unique reflection on the work of Chicago-based artists Philip Morton, Dan Sandin, and Bob

ity of attendees at early screenings of the OAA tapes were SAIC painting students, invested in the legacy of painting and portraiture. Yet, it is the subtlety of the OAA series disruption of hegemonic regimes of representation, and its entanglement with established forms of art historical discourse—the portrait, the interview—that allowed this collection to intervene without censorship. Indeed, radical potential "exists not in forms of 'resistance' but in non-branded strategies and tactics," those acts and gestures that mutate conventions of speaking out but do not get caught in the red tape of bureaucracy or shut down.⁶⁴ These are the claims made by scholars of civic engagement and radical pedagogy, Mark Cote, Richard Day, and Greig de Peuter, in their introductory text to *Utopian Pedagogy: Creating Radical Alternatives in the Neoliberal Age* (2007). Throughout this text, these co-editors attest to the fluidity and cacophony of meanings related to "civic engagement" and civic responsibility. Much like Holert's mandate for the use of responsibility as a heuristic or performative frame in artistic production and its interpretation, these scholars of social theory articulate the potential in the gestures of engagement so subtle that they appear familiar, much like that of the OAA collection.

It is through the OAA collection's infinite possibilities of distribution, and the VDB's continued project of reorganizing and representing the collection, that the series generates possibilities for accessing cultural and historical knowledge. Moreover, this positioning resonates with models of engagement today. Decades ahead of the current state of coalitional practice, the OAA collection anticipated politically engaged models of learning and teaching, like those outlined in *Utopian Pedagogy*, and set up by organizations, such as the World's Information Access Project and the Center for Com-

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Snyder and provides unique entry into the Chicago art community's role within the larger history of cinema and video. Presented here by Youngblood, the image processing technology that emerged in the city positions Chicago as one of the three integral sources of technological experimentation and creative fervor in the US during the 1970s.

64 Mark Cote, et al., "Introduction," *Utopian Pedagogy: Creating Radical Alternatives in the Neoliberal Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 125.

munication and Civic Engagement (CCCE). Today, the CCCE creates databanks in the '70s sense of the word (versus databases) as gestures of political activism and agency.

The goal of the CCCE, and others like it, is to combat "disarticulation," defined by Angela McRobbie as "the devaluing of coming-together."⁶⁵ Both the CCCE and the OAA collection seek to bring people together through information sharing, not in the utopian sense of community or idealization of consensus, but literally to help us see each other, and better understand how textual fragments and abbreviated images inform our lives within a larger system of representation.

Not by chance, the CCCE includes among its list of initiatives the "WTO Oral History Project," a data and interview archive documenting the activities of those who organized and participated in the public demonstrations at the World Trade Organization's ministerial meetings held in Seattle in 1999. The online overview of the archive asserts that this collection of interviews "sheds light on the behind-the-scenes cooperatives and relationships among social movement organizations involved in the protests."⁶⁶ For the scholars running this organization, this type of information is invaluable to the center's larger effort: "to understand the ways in which digital technologies are reshaping how and what young people learn."⁶⁷ The CCCE and the OAA interviews, essentially, create portraits of the processes and politics of information and information sharing over time.

Within their historical and cultural moment, however, the appeal of video and the documentation of artists for Horsfield and Blumenthal was specifically tied to the opportunity to create and expand a collective feminist consciousness. The wording of Blumenthal and Horsfield's application

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65 Angela McRobbie, "Feminism Undone? The Cultural Politics of Disarticulation," in *The Aftermath of Feminism Gender, Cultural and Social Change* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2009), 49.

66 "Mission Statement," Center for Communication and Civic Engagement. Accessed 7 June 2013. <http://ccce.com.washington.edu/about/index.html>.

67 "Mission Statement," Center for Communication and Civic Engagement.

for an NEA/AFI Video Preservation grant captures this sentiment through phrases underlining how they saw education as a politicized imperative, carrying serious stakes for the future of experimental thought. The application, submitted in 1986, tenders the purpose of VDB's early formation in the following terms: "The Video Data Bank Study Center was co-founded in 1976 by Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield who shared a conviction that *experimental video* (art tapes, as well as video documents of performances, artist interviews, readings and experiments in 'new technology' by its inventors—Sandin, Defanti, Etra(s), Vasulka(s), et al.) was the *sort of primary data* that should form an integral part of art education."⁶⁸ In addition to feminist art world models of radical or avant-garde connectivity and distribution, the theorization of cybernetic communication in the 1970s offers further historical specificity to the Video Data Bank's operating mode. As historian Fred Turner recalls, within the burgeoning cybernetics studies of the period there was a "a vision of a world built not around vertical hierarchies and top-down flows of power, but around looping circuits of energy and information... an ebb and flow of communication" was envisioned.⁶⁹ To produce a record of unheard voices, and propose new modes of organizing and processing the content, was a radical act of engagement. For Blumenthal and Horsfield this gesture was deliberately one by which they were able to "participate in the ideas of [their] generation."⁷⁰

A promotional letter on SAIC official letterhead, titled "1982/1983 Circulation Program," documents the rapid pace of the interview program, and highlights the geographical obstacles that Blumenthal and Horsfield faced in their efforts to distribute the OAA collection. The letter reads, "The Video Data Bank is offering a circula-

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68 NEA/AFI Video Preservation Grant Application, 1986. Prepared by Lyn Blumenthal. Video Data Bank Archive.

69 Fred Turner. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Steward Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 38.

70 Kate Horsfield quoted in "Kate Horsfield, Interview" *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*, ed. Alexandra Juhasz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 103.

tion program of its video tapes to groups and institutions within a 90-mile radius of Chicago."⁷¹ Listing several series in addition to the OAA titles, the VDB offers up access to the "video tape review" (the name given to the collection of video art tapes produced by local and national artists exploring various possibilities of the electronic medium, a collection established in 1982), and the Video Art Study Collection (including 20 video art tapes representing the "classics" of the ten-year history of video as an art form, made by "nationally recognized video artists who were instrumental in the development of video"). For individuals involved in the video community, Blumenthal and Horsfield's organization of the OAA collection and the larger collections of the VDB served as a groundbreaking model.

The earliest version of VDB's distribution system for sharing such primary data resembles a chain letter; the same tapes were passed on from one school to the next, with each participant responsible for shipping the contents on to the next venue in a timely manner. The point of this pilot project was to pair well known and emerging artist's work to help expand viewers' knowledge base. In the archive of the VDB, order forms for the OAA series capture the tone of the distribution system and its changes over several decades. Each phase of categorization rephrases the very ideas of the '70s generation through the VDB's repackaging of the OAA interviews. For example, one form offers varying options by which to request OAA tapes, ranging from, Contemporary survey A-C, Women in art, Painting A, Painting B, Aspects of Realism, Politics in Art, Sculpture A-B, Film, New Narrative, On Criticism, Photography, to Custom Series.⁷² On a different form, the arrangement of the tapes promotes an alternative set, this time comprised of categories such as, Formal Investigation, New Wave, Women/Political Perspectives, Contemporary Survey, and Art/Artist for the more specific inquiry.⁷³ These groupings reflect efforts to organize

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71 "1982/1983 Circulation Program," promotional letter, Video Data Bank, Archive.

72 "Blue Order Form," Video Data Bank, archival material, blue binder "1983"

73 Pink order form, n.d. Archival material, blue binder "1983." Video Data Bank.

the messiness of human exchange, but they also map and preserve a history of cultural and social taste. Each distribution set arguably provides insight into the types of topics that Blumenthal and Horsfield believed would spark interest in their art world contemporaries.

Moving image scholar, Jacqueline Stewart's current work on the racial politics of archival description sheds further light on the political efficacy of the OAA collection's categorizing strategies. As Stewart insightfully explains, the mere act of "description" in an archive—via subject headings or genre groupings—"creates surrogate identities for the documents and also imagines their audiences."⁷⁴ Such "controlled vocabularies" may appear to be innocuous, but they become the very structure for "hierarchies of knowledge" that privilege certain topics and figures, while burying others. In light of these politics of the archive, Blumenthal and Horsfield's early commitment to reorganizing information and cultivating new categories in the '70s and '80s shows them as front-runners of an ethically inflected practice of archival reform. This collection rendered accessible topics or objects such as "women in art" and "politics and art," otherwise buried in more heavily institutionalized libraries of knowledge, thereby enacting a model of engagement subversive in its relationship with the archive. These contemporary ideas have deeply informed today's current use of networks as well as the language used to develop their theorization.

For individuals involved in the world of video distribution, Blumenthal and Horsfield's circulation of the OAA tapes was considered a groundbreaking model. Attesting to this sentiment are the many events, workshops, and panels, to which Blumenthal and Horsfield were invited as representative speakers on the forefront of leading concerns of the times. They presented tapes of Judy Chicago (1974), Arlene Raven (1976), and Miriam Schapiro (1976) at Long Beach Museum of Art, September 4th–6th, 1983 as part of the

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74 Jacqueline Stewart, unpublished public lecture, "Black Films Under Intellectual Control: The Racial Politics of Archival Description," delivered at the symposium *Photography and the Archive in the African Diaspora*, Northwestern University, 22 May 2014.

"At Home: Video, Roles, Relationships, and Sexuality" event. Videos selected from VDB and the Long Beach Museum of Art were included in the program, along with work presented by featured artists, including Eleanor Antin, Suzanne Lacy, Joan Logue, Susan Mogul, Linda Montano, Maren Hassinger, and Hildegard Duane.⁷⁵ Blumenthal and Horsfield's participation in these sorts of programs, as both contributors and co-organizers, point to their influential role, and to the importance of the OAA collection to their positioning in the video community.

In another example, the Foundation for Independent Video and Film (FIVF), Inc., in New York City hosted a 1983 event at the Millennium Film Workshop, titled, "A Panel discussion on the state of independent video distribution to non-broadcast markets." Blumenthal and Horsfield were invited to speak as leaders in the field. In an effort to cultivate and enrich this developing effort and discourse, FIVF organized this panel so that aspiring video makers could "meet with some of the major distributors, learn what they have to offer and feed back to them what your concerns are in the current state of the art of video distribution."⁷⁶ Blumenthal represented the VDB, alongside Gregory Miller of the Kitchen Distribution Service, Lori Zippay (Electronic Arts Intermix), and Dara Birnbaum (video artist).⁷⁷ Questions potentially posed during the panel, as suggested by program coordinator Isaac Jackson's letter of invitation to participants, covered a series of concerns: "How and why are tapes selected over others? What are the advantages of using a distributor over self-distribution? What do you see as the difference between the distributors?"⁷⁸ While catering towards the practical and logistical coordinates of distribution, contested definitions of ownership, efficiency, and

75 "At Home" promotional flyer, 1983. VDB Archive.

76 "Beyond the Bicycle: A Panel Discussion on the State of Independent Video Distribution to Non-Broadcast Markets," *Foundation for Independent Video and Film, Inc.* "FIVF's June Video Program," 1983, Flyer/Correspondence. Video Data Bank Archive.

77 "Beyond the Bicycle: A Panel Discussion on the State of Independent Video Distribution to Non-Broadcast Markets," 1983.

78 "Letter to Lyn Blumenthal from Isaac Jackson, Program Coordinator," Correspondence, 9 May 1983. Foundation for Independent Video and Film, Inc. Video Data Bank Archive.

communication, underwrite these questions. At the intersection of distribution, technology, and artistic practice, VDB's distribution legacy offers a prehistory to what is today termed *informatics*, the "direct outcome of technological supercession that allows the vast transportation of information in virtual space."⁷⁹

As the '70s bled into the '80s, and the Reagan administration developed its platform of trickle-down economics, the status of art, criticism and the role of artists in popular culture shifted, thereby altering the need for, and status of, artist interviews. The opening paragraph of a 1983 catalog of VDB materials marks this shift, and the eclipse of contemplative studio practice by the pressures of the art market and celebrity culture, felt passionately by Blumenthal and Horsfield. The co-directors state here that, "the 'cultural situation' of the visual arts, is not, as a rule, well received," in part as a result of the separation of art from its audience through the rise of the successful careerist artist.⁸⁰ This separation, the VDB's material argues, occurs since art criticism "has been plagued by words" whose meanings are vacuous and ambivalent, or unstable "for different people in different places at different times."⁸¹ The OAA collection's self-conscious attempt to "bridge the gap between critical discourse and primary information" in the early '80s, preserves significant cultural specificity.⁸²

Responding to these interventions, by the early '80s the promotional materials for the OAA collection deliberately framed the interview series as a corrective to the violence of prosopopeia (the act of speaking for others). Blumenthal and Horsfield regularly grappled with this challenge and the struggle shaped the OAA project. Notes written in the margins of Blumenthal's sketchbook attest to the duo's consideration of such

79 Steve McCaffrey, "From Muse to Mousepad: Informatics and the Avant-Garde," in *The Darkness of the Present: Poetics, Anachronism, and the Anomaly* (2012), 76.

80 Introductory text to *Video Tape Review*, Video Data Bank publication (Chicago: Video Data Bank, 1983): 1.

81 Introductory text, *Video Tape Review*, Video Data Bank: 1.

82 Introductory text, *Video Tape Review*, Video Data Bank: 1.

factors. Beneath a heading "towards a definition", Blumenthal exhibits her thought process, listing in her sketchbook the words: "confessional, vulnerable, autobiographical, embarrassing, sentiment, emotionalism, permissive cynicism, literary generalism."⁸³ The purpose and conclusion of the list is open-ended—perhaps a brainstorming of feminist art work, but also fitting for the aspirations and achievement of the OAA series itself. The last question, posed on the overspill to the back, "Do you regard art criticism as fiction?" raises the stakes of these ruminations. This question points to Blumenthal's own struggle with creating fiction in the representation of subjects, a struggle that also informed the subject of her video art, mired in the misrepresentation of individuals and groups.⁸⁴

Blumenthal and Horsfield's awareness of fiction within the shaping of the history of contemporary art, and the interviewer's role in this construction, cannot be overstated. The urgency of this subject appeals to art historians and artists alike since, as Iwona Blazwick has argued, the artist interview is an "important genre of art history and criticism" because it is "based on exchange, contestations, and affirmation," consequently exhibiting how the "interviewer is [always] inscribed into art history along with the artist."⁸⁵ In an illuminating recollection of a 1988 series of interviews with critic Coosje van Bruggen, Bruce Nauman attests to the significance of the art interview in the retelling of artistic process and intention. Nauman explains, "I would tell [van Bruggen] something that had been very important to me, in terms of how to structure a performance or some art activity and she would

83 Blumenthal Sketchbook, 1975, Video Data Bank Archive.

84 Before her untimely death in 1988, Lyn Blumenthal exhibited her work in numerous exhibitions at the Kitchen, P.S. 1, the Biennale de Paris, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and was a member of the *Heresies* collective. In 1983, *Artweek*, critic Colin Gardner discussed Blumenthal's tape, *Social Studies* (part I), a twenty minute-long videotape, included in exhibition at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, alongside the work of Martha Rosler and Nancy Buchanan. See: Colin Gardner, "Addressing Political Issues," *Artweek* Vol. 14, no. 36 (October 29, 1983): n.p. Video Data Bank Archive. For a more comprehensive overview of Blumenthal's work refer to the essays in the exhibition catalog *Lyn Blumenthal: Force of Vision* (1989).

85 Blazwick, 26–27.

say: 'Oh, but it wasn't like that.' I said: It's the way I remember it. So she calls what I did a 'creative misreading or a creative misunderstanding.'⁸⁶ This notion of "creative misunderstanding" of information opens up an entirely different way of organizing or re-assessing the types of information embedded within the forty-year old OAA archive, one that diverges from the privileging of "facts" and instead reminds us of the very slipperiness of memory and the impossibility of fixed histories. Though such a review falls beyond the scope of this essay, it serves as a point of departure for reassessing the content and potential types of information preserved within the OAA collection as a whole.

Though the voice of the interviewer has been edited out in many of the more recent OAA tapes, in many of the early recordings, Horsfield's voice can be heard. Alternatively, as the handler of the Portapak, Blumenthal's aesthetic voice can be heard through the framing and camerawork. Beyond the OAA collection, Blumenthal also took control of her own position as an interlocutor within the larger context of video documentation and its role within the art world and the academy. In 1985, only a few years before her passing, Blumenthal chaired a panel at the College Art Association's annual conference. The panel, titled "Video and the Education of the Un-Artist," made reference to Allan Kaprow's iconic essay from the early '70s, which addressed the becoming of the Un-artist as a result of new information-sharing pressures. The panel co-chairs, including Martha Gever (of the Independent Foundation for Video and Film, Inc, NYC), Catherine Lord (Cal Arts), Antonio Muntadas (Center for Advanced Visual Studies, MIT), Robert Rosen (National Center for Film and Video Preservation, AFI), and Martha Rosler (then an art professor at Rutgers University) updated Kaprow's conversation. The panel sought to address "the relations between technology, social institutions, and culture" at this new historical juncture.⁸⁷

86 Chris Dercon, "Keep Taking It Apart: An Interview with Bruce Nauman," Parkett 10 (September 1986), reprinted in *Bruce Nauman* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1998), 100. Discussed in *Martha Buskirk, The Continuing Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 224.

87 CAA press release for panel. Session 9:30 am Saturday, February 16, 1985. VDB archives.

Blumenthal and Horsfield's efforts anticipated what has become a long-term conversation surrounding the management of information. Scholars and artists have struggled with the question of documentation for many years. Jeff Rothenberg writes on the scope of the problem surrounding the very obsolescence of technology in his chapter, "Avoiding Technological Quicksand,"⁸⁸ while, in 2003, the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum hosted a symposium titled, "Archiving the Avant-Garde" to address these questions and their ongoing saliency. The symposium was organized around the central concern that without strategies for preservation, many modes of art making today, such as Internet art, will be lost to future generations. Speakers presented papers addressing several questions as 'answers,' raising concerns verging on the philosophical elements of immortality and human connection. They asked: "Will the future experience these works as physical traces and documentation? Emulated media artifacts? Dynamic cultural events re-performed? All of these?"⁸⁹ The status of the artifact in art continues to be a main point of contention when the preciousness of art versus the preciousness of artists opens up debate in museums, galleries, and art publications. The privileging of the durable object as evidence exposes how institutions privilege certain forms of information over others—just one component in the larger politics of distribution that the OAA series confronted in the '70s and '80s.

Conclusion: Recognizing the Possibilities of Exchange

It is not surprising that viewers today tend to overlook the larger political implications or social dynamics always operating within an interview. As consumers of webcams, YouTube videos, and television, we've be-

come increasingly desensitized to the labor of producing video portraits, and the shaping of informational hierarchies. Eclipsed by the ubiquitous nature of editing software that seamlessly alters digitally rendered interviews or TV episodes, most viewers today understand that the visual and symbolic information of video documentation offers artificial interfaces, rather than facts or authentic experiences. As savvy cultural consumers, the acceptance of the non-reality of TV and films has become more and more ubiquitous. And yet, this apathy towards the cosmetics of visual culture increasingly effaces any shared sense of urgency to challenge such modes of presentation.

Analyzing the modes of questioning, paths of circulation, and the significance of its uses, offers only a few points of entry into understanding the OAA collection as a resource and model for transforming data into knowledge. By reconsidering the significance of the VDB co-founders' act of collecting spoken histories within their historical and cultural moment, we gain deeper entry into the content of the OAA series as a portrait of much more than its collective biographies and conversations. Through the lens of information sharing, then, the format and distribution of the "artist interview" highlights potential forms of connectivity that restructure exchange between and across individuals and institutions. Alternatively, by reassessing the OAA collection within emerging debates on data management, we can better understand the collection's engagement with shifting definitions of "information" that have characterized cultural notions of subjecthood over time, to better appreciate how this act reinvested the "interview" with its original sensibility—the endeavor of truly *seeing* one another.

We must ask ourselves, moving forward, what other kinds of information are embedded within the format of the videotaped artist interview as opposed to art criticism or television programming? How else has the "interview" form constituted our understanding or recognition of cultural participation and civic responsibility? How have historical processes transformed the interview into an obligation and object for art historical discourse and collecting? What myths

88 Jeff Rothenberg, *Avoiding Technological Quicksand: Finding a Viable Technical Foundation for Digital Preservation*. Council on Library and Information Resources. January 1998. Available online: <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/rothenberg/contents.html>.

89 Press release, "Archiving the Avant-Garde: Preserving Digital/Media Art," University of California, Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive. Event took place on 12 November 2003. Release accessed online 6 June 2013. <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/about/preserving-avantgarde>.

are preserved? What hopes? What kinds of processes should artists, activists, students, and scholars document now? And with what kinds of technology and methods of distribution?

The artist interview tapes within the OAA collection invite us to reconsider the historical weight of the “artist interview” as a complex, ideologically, and culturally conditioned object that accrues value and meaning over time. It also asks that we delve deeper into how this rich history of documentation and information has shaped the study of art as it exists and continues to invent audiences and publics today. Poignantly, the very mission of VDB to “improve equity in information access and create ongoing educational dialogue” resonates beyond art discourse, as this essay has contended, into the ethics of engagement.⁹⁰ Speaking with one another and documenting these encounters for future viewers and listeners delineates a form of activism with social and political consequences.

Blumenthal and Horsfield’s OAA project reminds us that the questions initiated by leaders in the video community, in the shadows of the televised Vietnam War and civil rights and feminist movements, bring to the fore the question of how media documentation reinforces cultural ideologies as a means of social control. These concerns continue to

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90 “Mission Statement,” Video Data Bank. <http://vdb.org/content/mission>.

haunt our political system forty years later. As a result, social scientists, scholars, and activists have more recently made a case for interventions that, although seemingly small, have the potential to evade conventional cultural law and alter the ground of political intervention by operating on a “lower frequency.”⁹¹ By recognizing how historical encounters are tied not only to the monumental impact of wars and economic crises, but also to intimate moments of resistance, community building, and ephemeral forms of expression, it becomes possible to track shifts in methods of resistance across a much wider spectrum of potential agency. In effect, by better understanding how the “artist interview” and its collection and distribution functions as a model for inquiry and engagement, we can continue to unpack these structures and undertake the ongoing assessment of the value of one’s ideas in relation to the ideas of others.

I believe that the key to sustaining such endeavors can be found in Blumenthal and Horsfield’s original proposal for the VDB, mentioned earlier. As part of their application to oversee the very small collection of SAIC videotapes in 1976, they wrote, “It

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91 Two methodological blue prints for this endeavor, among many others, include: Paul Gilroy, *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Fred Moten. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), among others.

has more to do with something someone loves.”⁹² Although the word ‘love’ may seem far from a discourse about political efficacy, civic engagement, and its visual manifestations, inquiry as care (and care as inquiry) lies at the center of artistic pursuit *and* our responsibility as engaged cultural consumers. Hedy Weiss’s 1982 description of the OAA collection, mentioned at the fore, as the video archive’s “heart” is not accidental but entirely apt.⁹³ The OAA collection offers us a better sense of the textured complexity that links responsibility and art through the form of the artist interview and its accumulation in a video archive. The *On Art and Artists* interview archive also stands as a historical and cultural portrait, one that not only maps the trajectory of relational encounters from the ‘70s to today, but also provides entry into the intimate process of radical thinking over the last forty years. It is critical that we continue to sit down with the OAA collection, and attend to it and each other, in order to understand the potential of various moments of exchange. We must continue this act of honoring and collecting conversations, no matter how seemingly small or subtle the gesture may at first appear to be.

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92 Original proposal, dated March 31, 1976. Video Data Bank Archive.

93 Weiss, 10.

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