

A Note from the Chair

Eric Cartier

University of Maryland Libraries

AV archivists in the Washington, D.C. area were twice blessed in the fall of 2016. The International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives annual conference took place at the Library of Congress, where participants explored the theme “A World of Opportunity: Audiovisual Archives and the Digital Landscape.” That five-day gathering was immediately followed by Play/back, a one-day symposium hosted by the National Endowment for the Humanities, where participants met to consider “ensuring access to

America’s rich audiovisual heritage.” Professional

meetings such as these tend to energize those who attend. They offer opportunities for collaboration, spark fresh approaches to ongoing challenges, introduce us to new tools and technologies, and help us to better communicate the value of our collections and our work. I hope ARCHIVES 2017 in Portland is similarly invigorating, that we benefit from what we share and learn in person, and that we are able to implement some novel ideas when we return to our institutions and day-to-day activities.

Sometimes a day’s work is all about the details, though,

like important administrative tasks including paperwork and wording. Thus the Steering Committee worked together with Felicia Owens, SAA’s Governance Program Coordinator, to implement changes the SAA Council made to streamline member affinity groups. We agreed to the switch from Recorded Sound Roundtable (RSRT) to Recorded Sound Section (RSS), approved the standard timetable for elections, reports, and meeting requests, and accepted the new standard SAA section logo.

To be truer to the section’s fundamental *raison d’être*,

Inside This Issue:

A Note from the Chair	1
Preserving Native American Languages Through the Understanding of Science and Technology of Tape-Based Media	2
Preservation of Colorado’s Born Digital Legislative Audio Recordings	5
Processing Born Digital Audio Archives of Music Producer Randall Dunn	6
News from Cornell University Library	7
Conversation Recovery in a Carnival Atmosphere: Legacy fieldwork, archival process, and digital access combine at Brooklyn Historical Society’s oral history portal	8
New Publication: Melinda Camber Porter in Conversation with Octavio Paz	11

however—to ensure RSS is a resource for SAA members “interested in the preservation and management of audio and audiovisual collections”—the Steering Committee considered a name change. If the membership agrees to put it to a vote and we get it on the ballot, RSS may be in need of a new logo soon.

You’d need to learn how to unpack a new acronym, too.

The 2017 RSS meeting is set for Wednesday, July 26th from 2:30-3:45pm in the Oregon Convention Center (room TBD). Besides election announcements, AV session information, and updates on resources and initiatives, our annual meeting will feature

Peter Hirtle, Associate Fellow of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. Peter will lead a discussion about AV copyright guidelines and the Section 108 project, which examined the use of copyrighted materials in libraries and archives. I hope many of you will join us!

Preserving Native American Languages Through the Understanding of Science and Technology of Tape-Based Media

Nicholas Wojcik, Curator/Archivist
Native American Languages Collection
Sam Noble Museum
University of Oklahoma

Many Native American languages are captured on decades-old analog (non-digital) media formats, including reel-to-reel tapes. Countless hours of stories, songs, conversations, dances, and other unique moments in Native history have been recorded on tape. These moments in time are consistently at risk of being erased, partially as a result of environmental impacts on analog media. The Native American Languages Collection (NALC) at the Sam Noble Museum in Norman,

Oklahoma, works to preserve such recordings through on-site laboratory services and by educating the community about the science and technology of tape-based media. The focus here is on the phenomenon known as sticky-shed syndrome, an issue of concern for all archivists working with audio collections.

Understanding tape construction allows us to better conceptualize how tapes function and can be preserved. Reel-to-reel

tapes measure ¼” in width and are typically wound and housed in a hard plastic or metal case. The tape’s primary layer is known as the substrate layer, which is coated with a thin, magnetic or carbon-based binder layer comprised of iron oxide – a muddy-colored chemical substance that records the magnetic signal, essentially holding the recorded content to the tape’s substrate layer.¹ Without this coating, there are no recorded sounds.

By nature, tapes have a

limited shelf life. Each time a tape is played, microscopic pieces of the binder layer can flake off. In addition, tapes react to moisture in the air, such as the high humidity of Oklahoma summers. The moisture seeps into the tape, forcing the iron oxide to liquefy and become runny, or swell, break apart and flake off the substrate layer, a phenomenon known as sticky-shed syndrome.¹ As a result, the recorded information may sound distorted, muffled, and damaged, or may be permanently lost altogether.

It is very difficult to see sticky-shed syndrome just by looking at a tape. However, an affected tape can often be heard for it will produce a loud, high-pitched squealing sound. Due to the speed in which tape players operate, if you try and play a tape with sticky-shed syndrome, trace amounts of the coating can fall off the substrate layer. The image shown here

was photographed in the NALC's audio laboratory and shows flakes of iron oxide that came off of a tape with sticky-shed syndrome. The flakes were collected from a reel-to-reel player during routine cleaning. It should be noted that the tape did not contain any content and was used for the sole purpose of demonstration of the effects of sticky-shed syndrome.



Flakes of iron oxide from a tape suffering from sticky-shed syndrome. Photo courtesy of Nicholas Wojcik.

To help prevent sticky-shed syndrome, analog tapes require special care. Some basic steps include storing tapes vertically in acid-free protective boxes or containers, and in a clean environment with little to

no shifts in temperature or relative humidity (roughly between 50 – 70 degrees Fahrenheit; relative humidity between 20 – 40 percent). An advanced measure is tape baking. In essence, tapes can be baked at a low temperature (125-130 degrees) in a specialized tape oven for up to 4 hours. This process attempts to reverse sticky-shed syndrome by

driving water molecules out from the emulsion coating, temporarily restoring the tape for approximately one to two weeks.² While the procedure is not perfect, it does buy enough time for the material to be safely copied to another tape or migrated to another format altogether.

The NALC houses hundreds of hours of original audio recordings that document the Indigenous languages of North America. In the NALC's efforts to help preserve these languages,

a continuous long-term project is the conversion of analog recordings to more contemporary media, including high quality preservation audio files and digital discs.

Since 2002, the NALC has partnered with dozens of Native American families, individuals, and groups to preserve their language recordings. This includes recordings in the Apache, Arapaho, Caddo, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Chippewa,

Choctaw, Comanche, Crow, Dakota, Delaware (Lenape), Iowa-Oto, Kansa (Kaw), Kiowa, Muscogee Creek, Omaha, Osage, Ponca, Quapaw, Seminole, Sauk, Shawnee, Tewa, and Tonkawa languages, among others. Tapes are properly cared for, treated, and digitized in the NALC's audio/video laboratory, where any size and speed of tape can be transferred. To make an appointment with the NALC to care for your valuable recordings of

Native American languages, or to learn more about the NALC's services, contact the Archivist, Nicholas Wojcik, at [language.samnoblemuseum@ou.edu](mailto:samnoblemuseum@ou.edu).

1 Norris, Sarah. 2010. Effects of desiccation on degraded binder extraction in magnetic audio tape. ARSC Journal, 41(2), 183-199.

2 Van Bogart, John W.C. 1995. Magnetic tape storage and handling: a guide for libraries and archives. https://courseweb.pitt.edu/bbcswebdav/institution/Pitt%20Online/MLIS_Pitt_Online/LIS_2214/MEISLIK/module%208/magnetic_tape_storage_and_handl.pdf.



NALC Audio Laboratory. Photo courtesy of Nicholas Wojcik.

Preservation of Colorado's Born-Digital Legislative Audio Recordings

Eamon Smallwood, Digital Media Archivist
Colorado State Archives

Colorado State Archives is in the process of preserving born digital audio recordings of Colorado General Assembly's legislative sessions. Beginning in 2002, the Colorado General Assembly began capturing all legislative session audio using Dictaphone's Freedom System Manager (FSM) audio recording system. These recordings were captured using an open source, and now unsupported, compressed WAV codec (G.723.1). This codec is not recognized by current media audio players and the only way to listen to these recordings is by using the media player built into FSM. This is additionally problematic because FSM was designed to run in Windows XP and Dictaphone has stopped actively supporting the software. In 2016, the National Historical Publications & Records Commission (NHPRC) awarded the Colorado State Archives a State Government Electronic Records Grant to convert and preserve the

FSM legislative recordings. A stated goal of this project is to provide improved public access to these important recordings.

We are currently wrapping up the first phase of the project, which encompasses converting all viable recordings from the compressed codec to WAV PCM. Part of this process included creating an inventory of all recordings with associated metadata.

Our initial hope was to pull all FSM metadata via an API. We were unfortunate to discover that FSM does not have an API, which meant going with plan B. Plan B was a 3 step process of capturing a screenshot of the FSM recording display, importing the screenshot to a PDF, and finally exporting the PDF to Excel. This process was not the most effective in terms of data integrity as digital artifacts are potentially added during each step of

The image displays three sequential screenshots of a computer screen, illustrating a three-step process for converting FSM recordings.
Step 1: Screenshot shows a screenshot of the FSM interface with a table of recording data.
Step 2: Import to PDF shows the same data being imported into a PDF document.
Step 3: Export to Excel shows the data being exported into an Excel spreadsheet.
 The table data is as follows:

Call ID	Start Time	Duration
10350	1/16/2003 7:34:27 AM	00:57:09
10360	1/16/2003 9:39:02 AM	00:24:30
10382	1/16/2003 1:30:30 PM	01:31:21
10352	1/16/2003 8:06:08 AM	00:24:04
10385	1/16/2003 1:33:25 PM	02:56:18
10357	1/16/2003 9:08:10 AM	00:03:26
10362	1/16/2003 10:32:58 AM	00:00:34
10363	1/16/2003 10:34:53 AM	00:00:20
10364	1/16/2003 10:35:18 AM	00:00:20
10365	1/16/2003 10:35:49 AM	00:00:20
10366	1/16/2003 10:36:26 AM	00:00:21
10367	1/16/2003 10:37:34 AM	00:00:36
10368	1/16/2003 10:38:45 AM	00:00:37
10369	1/16/2003 10:39:58 AM	00:01:11
10383	1/16/2003 1:31:12 PM	01:06:49
10391	1/16/2003 2:52:44 PM	00:57:07
10371	1/16/2003 11:00:32 AM	00:04:45
10372	1/16/2003 11:06:59 AM	00:34:04
10351	1/16/2003 8:00:49 AM	00:46:33
10386	1/16/2003 1:33:32 PM	01:10:51
10390	1/16/2003 2:50:12 PM	00:04:13
10384	1/16/2003 1:31:22 PM	02:23:35
10393	1/16/2003 4:02:05 PM	01:28:19
10361	1/16/2003 9:57:41 AM	00:43:15
10387	1/16/2003 1:40:32 PM	00:54:44
10389	1/16/2003 2:38:42 PM	00:44:33
10392	1/16/2003 3:25:16 PM	00:52:49
10394	1/16/2003 4:34:07 PM	00:59:03
10395	1/16/2003 5:35:06 PM	00:50:56
10353	1/16/2003 8:50:32 AM	00:00:21
10354	1/16/2003 8:56:31 AM	00:00:59
10356	1/16/2003 9:02:33 AM	00:18:45
10370	1/16/2003 10:59:28 AM	00:08:13
10373	1/16/2003 11:07:49 AM	00:12:26
10374	1/16/2003 11:20:51 AM	00:01:11
10375	1/16/2003 11:22:34 AM	00:01:56
10376	1/16/2003 11:24:45 AM	00:20:07
10378	1/16/2003 11:46:13 AM	00:00:21
10379	1/16/2003 12:49:58 PM	00:00:20
10381	1/16/2003 1:44:05 PM	00:00:22
10388	1/16/2003 2:07:41 PM	00:02:48
10395	1/16/2003 4:00:33 AM	00:14:15

Plan B. Screenshot courtesy of Eamon Smallwood.

the process. As such, the last step of this process was to conduct data cleanup in Excel to ensure artifacts were removed. While plan B is adequate for our initial inventory we are interested in developing a means for extracting the raw metadata from FSM.

Our team of archivists, while very comfortable with current digital technologies, lack the programming expertise to develop a solution on our own. We are investigating a partnership with Colorado State IT to develop a solution to extract the FSM raw metadata. We are encouraged as they have experience working with FSM, they previously developed a patch that allows the software to run on Windows 7. It is our hope that this collaboration will result in more direct access to the legislative recording metadata.

In the next phase of the project we will ingest the FSM audio recordings and associated metadata into our content management system, Re:discovery Proficio. During this phase of the project we

will investigate integrating a web accessible discovery layer to Re:discovery to aid and improve public access to the legislative audio content. This phase of the project is

slated to wrap in summer 2018, at which point the Colorado General Assembly's 2002-2012 audio recordings will be accessible online.

Processing Born-Digital Audio Archives of Music Producer Randall Dunn

Megan Mitchell, Freelance Audio Archivist

I was approached late in the summer of 2016 by Randall Dunn, a mutual friend in the Seattle music scene with whom I was acquainted. A musician/producer, DJ, and avid music fan myself, Dunn and I happened to cross paths and he learned of my area of focus in my studies at the University of Washington iSchool, which was a self-guided study of the practice of audio archiving. Dunn proposed that I organize, process, and catalog all of the born-digital audio recordings and ProTools sessions in his possession. The culmination of his nineteen-year career as a music producer and musician himself is spread amongst some fifty hard drives, many of which contain unreleased, rare, and sought-after material from experimental

music giants. The roster of artists Dunn has produced is wide-reaching, though he has managed to carve a niche within the experimental and noise communities. A brief sampling of the artists in his catalog include Sunn O))), Oren Ambarchi, Chelsea Wolfe, Marissa Nadler, Earth, Thurston Moore, Omar Souleyman, and Björk. I was honored that he approached me with this project, and we worked together over the course of a few months to develop a plan for implementation (which I would also develop into the Capstone project for the completion of my MLIS degree).

My project consisted of developing a cataloging schema for the collection, logging selected data from all

hard drives, and expanding upon a digital preservation plan document that I had designed from OAIS guidelines. The next phase of the project will involve Dunn's intervention; he'll select items of greatest value to him for migration to current ProTools session file formats, and I'll eventually be overseeing migration of the material onto two master spinning disk drives. The digital catalog is necessarily private and will not be published, due to the unreleased and unfinished projects of many of the artists Dunn has produced over the years. Armed with this catalog, however, Dunn is now



A sampling of some of the organized hard drives in the Dunn catalog. Photo courtesy of Megan Mitchell.

able to identify and locate many sessions of value to himself and associated stakeholders (artists, record labels, and fans), with the intent of releasing previously unpublished material for all to hear.

You can read a bit more about me and some of the projects in which I'm involved by visiting ManyManyWomen.com, an index of female/trans/non-binary composers in left-of-field music.

News from Cornell University Library

Tre Berney, Director

Digitization and Conservation Services

Cornell University Library

Cornell University Library's Collection Development Executive Group approved the use of library preservation funding for the next three-to-five years exclusively for the digitization of at-risk AV material. As part of a larger, campus-wide initiative with partners from IT@Cornell and Cornell's Lab of Ornithology,

a report was produced that can be found here: <https://dcaps.library.cornell.edu/initiatives/av> We continue to investigate large, digital storage options and are closing in on a central Cornell digital preservation service. The intended audience for such a service will span the University's needs, from

cultural heritage material to research data. [Digital Consulting and Production Services](#), Library IT and Cornell's [Research Data Management Services Group](#), are collaborating on metadata management options for a wide range of needs across campus.

Conversation Recovery in a Carnival Atmosphere: Legacy fieldwork, archival process, and digital access combine at Brooklyn Historical Society's oral history portal

**Brett Dion, Oral History Project Archivist
Brooklyn Historical Society**

As part of the Voices of Generations: Investigating Brooklyn's Cultural Identity project at Brooklyn Historical Society, our goals were to digitize, process, catalog, and make accessible over 400 interviews from BHS's earliest oral history collections that document the histories of Brooklyn's diverse ethnic and cultural communities. During the project, we've found that legacy oral history recordings can be subject to the same audio disruptions that occur with music recordings. In simple terms, we hope the original format holds a signal; one that conveys information as intended. In music, older recording formats like Edison's cylinders or a 78 rpm record carried a narrow bandwidth signal of the recorded live musicians, accompanied by a great deal of static, or white noise, that came out of imperfections in recording and playback. From the birth of recording

technology, the battle has always been: signal vs. noise. And "signal to noise" is the relative measurement of that battle.

To those archivists who have had to process and conserve photographs; noise enters into the equation as well. Think about the pristine 8" x 10" silver gelatin print and all it can convey about a person's face or an address in an era and place you've never once experienced firsthand. And then remember a photo in a newsprint clipping, with a loss of shading and depth from bleached pointillist ink and browning paper with foxing around the edges. That noise will color your perception of what's captured in the latter image, just as surely as that newsprint's organic decay.

Noise happens

When it comes to oral history recordings, we hear as wide

an array of audio capturing techniques as there are narrators with stories to tell. While some recordings make it to our ears without a glitch; the microphone placement, tape format, electronic machinery and digitization efforts can all create their own unique brand of disruption to the oral history interview. Most of those disruptions, or noise, never get so out of control that they block our ability to glean the information that we were meant to hear. A few interviews have their significant signal losses. There are meaningful points that we'll miss out on entirely, simply because the audiocassette tape was being flipped from the A side to the B side at the time of the interview.

The very few recordings that have significant losses can be exemplified by one interview that has the same disruption from

beginning to end: a hum of interference that was so loud that it overwhelmed the interview participants, as if they were speaking underwater. Whether this was via electronic interference picked up by the microphone or created on the recording device can't be determined, but it was on the extant audiocassette. Eventually, the recording was remediated enough by isolating the cycling hum at a particular frequency and then removing that frequency from the derivative mp3 file.

An equally vexing problem was discovered on the digitized preservation file and derivative mp3 copy of an interview in The West Indian Carnival Documentation Project records. Brooklyn Historical Society launched the project in 1994 to supplement existing photographs and histories of the event with personal narratives and life histories of Carnival participants. In cooperation with the West Indian American Day Carnival Association (WIADCA) and the Brooklyn Museum, the project attempted to document different

viewpoints from within the Carnival organization and the diverse participants. Since their creation in 1994 and 1995, recordings had not been fully processed and had been inaccessible to researchers.

The oral histories, photographs, and resources that make up the collection were compiled by a team including two community researchers, photographers from local Caribbean publications, graduate student assistants, scholarly advisors, and a community advisory committee primarily made up of WIADCA members. One narrator in this series of oral histories was interviewed mainly because of her experiences as a vendor at Brooklyn's Carnival. However, in the sound files, the narrator, Jay Thompson, and her interviewer, Maureen Mahon, were in a conversation that was almost entirely obscured by the sounds of children playing in a park or playground setting. I couldn't make out a word of what was being said for the better part of the interview and yet I had what appeared to be a

complete transcript.

How had the transcription taken place with this incomprehensible source material? My first consideration was to confirm that the two decades old analog recording was in the same condition as the four year old digitized files. To that end, I went into deep storage for the access copy of the cassette tape. In the playback of the tape, it took a few seconds to hear a dramatic difference. On the cassette, I could hear a spacious and dynamic, yet synchronized, separation between left and right channels. I was hearing a stereo recording on cassette, and yet the digital files were coming through in one channel: mono.

When I played that stereo audio-cassette on stereo equipment, I heard what I'd heard before; kids screaming and laughing. Those sounds were pervasive in the left speaker. They were on the right side as well, but there was also the pleasing sound of people in conversation. The oral history interview was there, recorded with a



Author's home analog-to-digital conversion workstation, using Yamaha cassette deck output via RCA cable to 1/8" inch jack into HP desktop computer running Cool Edit Pro version 2.1.1. Photo courtesy of Brett Dion.

stereo microphone that was capturing all playground on the left and playground and interview on the right! This was what the transcriber had heard, well enough to produce a transcript in the 1990s. When the recording had been digitized in 2011 or 2012, the audio cable connection or computer program settings had been configured to only transfer the colorful, but ultimately worthless, left channel: Almost all noise, very little signal.

Re-recording

Knowing that there was a flaw, I saw that I'd have to correct the situation so that proper auditing and archival processing could occur. I was able to re-transfer the audio-cassette with both channels intact. Concerned about preservation of the source material, I kept the left and right sound levels at the same proportion on the new preservation audio file. I didn't discard the left channel entirely on the derivative mp3 version we'd use for researcher and user access, but I did reduce the level by more than half. I also increased the right

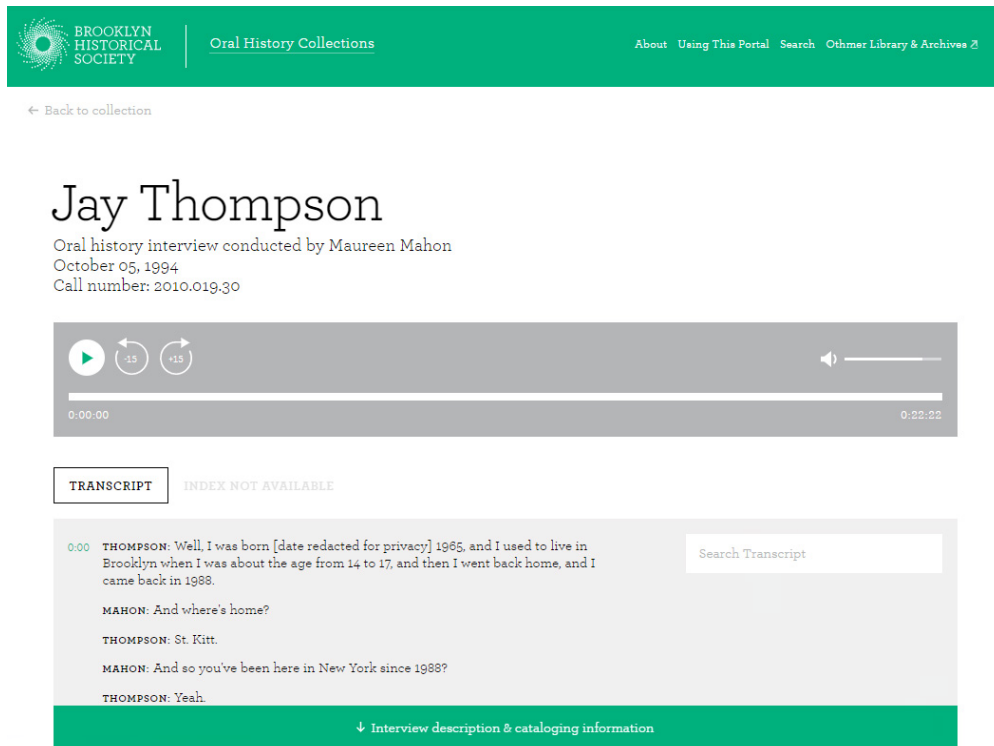
level significantly. Now we had a new recording with a comprehensible signal, with noise from the captured environment below that signal. The archival work on Voices of Generations then continued as planned.

Oral History Portal

Access to Brooklyn Historical Society's oral history collections was made possible through a generous grant by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) for Voices of Generations: Investigating Brooklyn's Cultural Identity and New York Community Trust as part of Voices of Crown Heights, a multi-year oral history project at BHS. As the Oral History Project Archivist I assisted and supervised an intern team to process the collections with a goal of improved accessibility via thorough description. Oral Historian, Zaheer Ali, and Managing Director of the Library and Archives, Julie I. May, were Project Co-directors. Researchers can now hear nearly 300 interviews from eleven collections at the Oral History Portal,

(<http://www.brooklynhistory.org/library/oralhistory/>)

an online access website that combines the detailed interview descriptions and the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer viewer to seamlessly intertwine a transcript or index with the listening experience. From thirty-four archived interviews in the West Indian Carnival Documentation Project records, twenty-eight—including Thompson’s—are available to researchers online, three others can be heard onsite at the Othmer Library, and a remaining three are restricted by the donors. For an overview of the West Indian Carnival Documentation Project records and descriptions of narrators and oral history



The screenshot shows the Brooklyn Historical Society Oral History Collections page for Jay Thompson. It includes a video player with a play button, a progress bar at 0:00:00, and a search transcript box. Below the video player, there are tabs for 'TRANSCRIPT' and 'INDEX NOT AVAILABLE'. The transcript shows a conversation between Thompson and Mahon. At the bottom, there is a green bar with a link to 'Interview description & cataloging information'.

Screenshot of the Jay Thompson interview with OHMS viewer application in the oral history portal at <http://www.brooklynhistory.org/library/oralhistory/>. Screenshot courtesy of Brett Dion.

content, please see our guide which is available online via our finding aid portal. Researchers can also visit

the Othmer Library to listen to oral history interviews during research hours Wed-Sat, 1:00-5:00 p.m. library@brooklynhistory.org.

New Publication: Melinda Camber Porter in Conversation with Octavio Paz

Joseph R. Flicek, Director

Melinda Camber Porter Archive of Creative Works

Melinda Camber Porter’s conversation with Octavio Paz took place in August 1983 at his home in Cuernavaca, Mexico. They discussed art, literature, poetry, writers block, and politics in Mexico, the

Americas, Europe, and his book, Marcel Duchamp. This volume also includes his 1990 Nobel Prize Lecture in English and Spanish. “If you think you’ve read this interview before [in the Partisan Review in

1986] you haven’t.” As the Partisan Review redacted much of the content. In this new volume, however, the interview is published in its entirety, and the results are wonderful. Empathy between Octavio Paz and Melinda

Camber Porter is established quickly. A professional diplomat, Paz's dual life as cultural ambassador and writer parallels Camber Porter's. Conversation about

includes Paz's 1990 Nobel Prize Lecture in both English and (the original) Spanish, as well as further information on the work of Melinda Camber Porter. Melinda

Camber Porter Archive wishes to share these conversations with the public to ensure the continuation and expansion of the ideas expressed in her creative works. For more information, please visit www.MelindaCamberPorter.com.

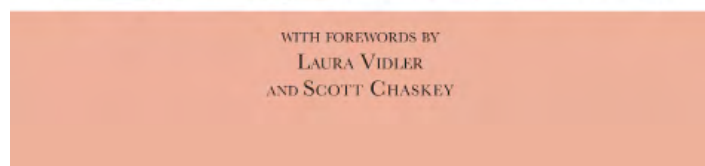
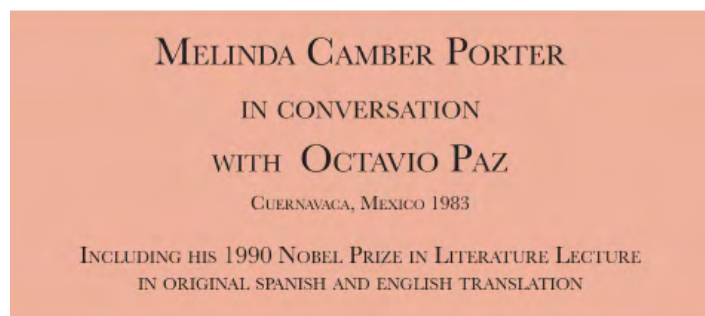


Image courtesy of Joseph R. Flicek.

Duchamp, Picasso, Camus, and Matisse—previously cut—appears here, as well as discussion of the classical Spanish poets that made-up Paz's early reading—Quevedo, Góngora, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (the subject of Paz's book, *Las trampas de la Fe*). In addition to a complete transcription of the interview, this volume

Camber Porter passed away of ovarian cancer in 2008 and left a significant body of work in art, journalism, and literature. With her background as a journalist for the Times of London, her questions explored the creative process used by many widely acclaimed cultural figures, filmmakers, and writers. The Melinda



THE SECTION SERVES AS A FORUM FOR DISCUSSING ARCHIVAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE CREATION, MANAGEMENT, PRESERVATION, AND USE OF AUDIO AND AUDIOVISUAL RESOURCES IN ARCHIVES AND OTHER CULTURAL HERITAGE REPOSITORIES.

THANKS TO NANCY MAYSMITH FOR PROVIDING THE LOGO FOR OUR ROUNDTABLE.

Editor: [Rebecca Chandler](#)