Before I start I wanted to say that the research for this paper was done from my perspective as both a professional and an MLS student. I was interested from my experience working with the diverse archive of an alternative space to find a way to increase access to these materials, while not overshadowing my other work duties.

By now legacy and history of the alternative art spaces movement of the 1970s and 1980s in New York City is considerably well documented. What is not so universally understood or documented is the legacy of the special collections formed in relation to these enigmatic and highly influential organizations. These institutions have been forced to evolve and reinvent themselves over the years in response to a host of factors including the cyclical ebb and flow of the economy, the advancement of technology, and the continually shifting tastes and practices of the art world, as well as the consequent shift in audience and supporters. Very few alternative art spaces have completely retained their original identity; some spaces have unfortunately been forced to close, while others have transformed to provide very different kinds of resources and services.

Along with these transformations comes a decision regarding the organizations’ respective special collections. Not only have many of these collections shifted space physically, but also in many cases they have become re-dispersed and re-contextualized, often consumed by a larger collection or organization. While re-housing these collections is often a necessity that finds its own logical conclusion, there are some heavily weighted considerations that should be taken when making such a move, including practical, political and ideological implications for the materials.

I am particularly interested in considering three very different collections related to NYC alternative art spaces and their respective fates, Franklin Furnace Archive and The New Museum of Contemporary Art.
The Franklin Furnace Archive was founded in 1976 by artist Martha Wilson as an artist book collection as well as an exhibition and performance space.

Mission: To collect twentieth-century art in book form and related materials published internationally; to inclusively catalogue and preserve art in book form; to make accessible and interpret the importance of the permanent collection through computerizing the catalogue of the collection, and mounting exhibitions.

The FFA transferred its collection of artists books to the MoMA for sale in 1994 just prior to the organization's transformation into a virtual resource center.

The original collection included artists' books, periodicals, postcards, sound works, manifestoes and broadsides, but only the 3,500 artist book titles were transferred to the MoMA.

The FFA Artist book collection is now catalogued in DADA base, which is further accessible through NYARC consortium catalog.

Currently referred to as The Museum of Modern Art/Franklin Furnace Artist Books Collection, the provenance of these materials remains indicated and searchable.
The New Museum was founded in 1977 by writer and curator Marcia Tucker, and was dedicated to producing solo and thematic exhibitions of living artists.

The library at the New Museum consisted of artist monographs, exhibition catalogues, periodicals, and artist archives spanning the post World War II period to the present with more than 20,000 volumes.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the collection being the result of A Library Publications Exchange Program created in 1987, which allowed for the ongoing exchange of exhibition catalogues with 180 contemporary international museums and galleries.

The library collection supported the organization’s curatorial staff and open public use until 1992.

It was transferred to NYU in 2005 and divided among the Institute of Fine Arts and in the University’s central Bobst Library, including the Fales Library and the Fales Downtown Collection.

Similar to the Franklin Furnace collection the New Museum library materials will indicate provenance in catalog record and physically on volume so that the items can be unified by a search.

In its place in the new building is a modern reading room and resource center for public use. This digital catalog is linked to NYU libraries catalog.

Periodically volumes on contemporary art will be transferred from the New Museum to NYU libraries.
ABC No Rio founded in 1980 as a result of an exhibition critiquing the real estate crisis of the late 1970s called the Real Estate Show. A group of artists staged the exhibition in an abandoned building on the Lower East Side.

The zine library contains almost twelve thousand items, including independent, underground and marginal publications on subjects such as music, culture, politics, personal experience and travel.

The organization faced extinction numerous times related to financial hardships but has remained committed to developing its collection, and remaining open by appointment.

The ABC No Rio zine library maintains visibility through word of mouth and through professional affiliation with other grassroots resource agencies including Radical Reference.
While it is easy to understand efforts of organizations like ABC No Rio to maintain and promote their unique collection to their community of users, there are certainly advantages to relating a special collection with the holdings of a large library.

For one, retrievability is increased by proper cataloging as well as linking by subject, artist and institution rather than chronologically within a discrete archive or special collection.

Jacqueline Cooke, librarian at Goldsmiths College in London, said of ephemera collections of alternative art spaces, but I think it applies to all cultural heritage materials:

“Artworks, documentation of art, and administrative documents may be interrelated, and the catalog can make those relationships evident. Using hierarchical structures such as those made possible by Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR) or cross references, this structural principle can be applied... Ephemera are individually fragmentary, and possibly incoherent as source material. If library practices can be used to re-contextualize them by drawing out the relationships that ephemera have to other ephemera, or to other materials, or to art practices and ideas, then that will help to draw out their potential as sources.”

Furthermore, access is extended to more users. In the case of the Franklin Furnace archive those artist books are now accessible to anyone using the ARCADE catalog system.

We have also seen the community of users shift considerably in some cases, warranting a shift of collection. In the case of the Franklin Furnace archive the user had shifted from a community of artists seeking dialog and inspiration to a community of researchers seeking historical materials. In the case of the New Museum, it’s presumable that the cost of upkeep for a library wasn’t the only incentive for them to deaccession their holdings. Research on contemporary art is timely and has recently shifted and in the direction of the internet. The most valuable materials in the New Museum collection are now historical resources as time has progressed.

Within these collections are a host of primary source materials and limited-run publications that would be incredibly hard to acquire decades after they were produced.

In fact the initiative on the part of the MoMA and NYU in acquiring these collections indicates holes in their collections or an inability to forecast research needs when they were acquiring materials.

**Pros & Cons**

**PROS:**
- Larger context/ increased retrievability
- Shift of historical context warrants move
- Value of primary source and limited-run materials in filling holes in collection

**CONS:**
- End of an era or sustainable model
- Lack of access by community
- Integrity of collection compromised
This case study and paper informed a digitization project of all exhibition related material in White Columns archive, and their subsequent cataloging into an online presentation database using an open source archival software called Collective Access. So this is the ‘Archive in Progress’ companion to our website.
Here is an example record for a rare publication that is fully readable, and accessible through a number of different relationships in the record. As digitization will draw to a close in the next year or so, more serious discussions about transferring the archive to a library repository have begun.