heavy visuals '69

Electronic Cinema and Experimental Film

Selected landmarks of the 1969 avant garde

Wednesday, September 23, 2009

Northwest Film Forum

Co-presented by The Sprocket Society

Seattle, WA

All films in this evening's program were released in 1969.

All films are presented in their original 16mm format, with the exception of *Le Labyrinthe*, which was originally produced in 35mm then reduced to 16mm for limited circulation.

Due to archival restrictions, we are not permitted to edit and combine all of the films onto larger reels, though we have done so where possible. This necessitates an unusual number of pauses as we rethread for the next movie. We hope you will forgive the somewhat disruptive viewing experience in the spirit of helping to preserve these rare works for future audiences.

1969/16mm

16mm film played an essential role in the evolution of cinematic art at this time. In the pre-VCR late '60s, independent 16mm movies and the cooperatives, loose networks, and freaks that helped distribute them were the YouTube of the time. Many award-winning and extremely influential films and artists were seen exclusively on 16mm, and it was the obvious format of choice for documentarians of every stripe.

Please join us for our next 1969/16mm program on Wed., October 14, 2009 at the NW Film Forum – *Focal Points: Documentary Shorts of 1969*, a schizoid collection of disparate styles and subjects, from the Black Panthers to Pentecostal Christians to the Kuchar Brothers.

Our projector this evening is a theatrical-grade Eiki EX-6000, with a new 1,000 watt lamp.

Some Suggested Reading

Jud Yalkut. *Electronic Zen: The Alternate Video Generation* (unpublished manuscript, 1984).
    Download as PDF or RTF from http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Artists10/Yalkut,Jud/
P. Adams Sitney. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002).
    Illustrated. First published in 1974, it has appeared in several revised editions.
Gene Youngblood. *Expanded Cinema* (E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970). Illustrated. Download as PDFs from
    http://www.vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF_ExpandedCinema/ExpandedCinema.html
Robert Russett & Cecile Starr, eds. *Experimental Animation: Origins of a New Art*, revised edition (Da
    Capo, 1988). Illustrated. Originally published as *Experimental Animation: An Illustrated
    Anthology* (Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1976).
Woody Vasulka. *Eigenwelt der Apparate-Welt: Pioneers of Electronic Art* (Ars Electronica, 1992).
    Download as PDFs from http://vasulka.org/Kitchen/PDF_Eigenwelt/Eigenwelt.htm
Wheeler Winston Dixon. *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary History of 1960s American Experimental
    Cinema* (State Univ. of New York Press, 1997).
Scott MacDonald. *Canyon Cinema: The Life and Times of an Independent Film Distributer* (Univ. of
    California Press, 2008).
Florian Matzner & Nam June Paik, eds. *Nam June Paik: Eine Data Base* (Germany: Edition Cantz, 1993).
    Catalog for the special exhibition at the 45th International Exposition of Art, German Pavillion,
    Vienna Biennial, June 13 – October 10, 1993.
William Moritz. "Digital Harmony: The Life of John Whitney, Computer Animation Pioneer," *Animation
    World Magazine*, issue 2.5 (August, 1997). Available online at
    http://www.awn.com/mag/issue2.5/2.5pages/2.5moritzwhitney.html
The Vasulka Archive – http://www.vasulka.org/
The Early Video Project – http://www.davidsonsfiles.org/
A Kinetic History: The EAI Archives Online – http://www.eai.org/kinetic/

Invocation of My Demon Brother
Kenneth Anger

11 min / color / sound
Optical printing, superimposition
Soundtrack: improvisations on a Moog synthesizer by Mick Jagger
Print source: Canyon Cinema

"The Shadowing forth of Lord Lucifer, as the Powers gather at a midnight mass."
"An assault on the sensorium."

In 1967, after the theft of the irreplaceable master print of the nearly-completed *Lucifer Rising*, Kenneth Anger took out a full-page "in memoriam" ad in the *Village Voice* proclaiming his own death, then announced he would no longer make films. Two years later, he released *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, a full-blown assault saturated with occult ritual, complex symbolism, superimposed imagery, all combined with the infamously merciless score by Mick Jagger, playing an early Moog synthesizer.

The film's cast includes renowned Satanist, Anton LaVey (as Satan, of course), and Bobby Beausolei, who gained infamy later that very year as an associate of the Manson Family. Convicted of murder and originally sentenced to death, he continues to serve a life sentence without parole in California. (Anger claims it was all because of a curse he cast on him.)

After this film Anger put away his camera, ostensibly forever. Yet 11 years later he released another film — a spectacular "reincarnation" of the lost *Lucifer Rising*. After things soured with Jimmy Page, Anger made peace with Beausolei, who recorded the soundtrack in prison with a band comprised of other inmates.

DVDs: *The Films of Kenneth Anger, Volumes I & II* (Fantoma)

Our Lady of the Sphere
Lawrence Jordan

10 min / color / sound
Multi-plane cut-out animation, optical printing
Print source: Canyon Cinema

[*PROGRAM NOTE:* Due to circumstances beyond our control, we will not be presenting this film tonight.]

"Of all my films, this is the most popular to date. Unfortunately, it is also the most cartoon-like and has an almost-visible storyline: the young boy's travels through terror, death, and the Underworld. My own conception of the circus sequence in the film connotes the world's weakness for striking up the band to cover tragedy, as when someone falls from a high wire in the circus. I did achieve certain special "break-throughs" with *Our Lady of the Sphere*, in that the flat surface was broken with forward and away zooms, but this is a simple thing. In the process, I had to relinquish certain subtle and more tenuous relationships between moving components (characters and objects), and also the highly artificial (and more interesting) gravitational formulations and inventions of such films as *Duo Concertantes* and *Hamfar Asar*." – Program notes for *Millenium*, New York City, 1980

DVD: *The Lawrence Jordan Album* (Facets Video, 2008). A 4-disc set, with illustrated booklet.

Moon 1969
Scott Bartlett

15 min / color / sound
Video tape, video signal processing and mixing, kinescopes
Print source: Canyon Cinema

Scott Bartlett, working at the time with Tom DeWitt, merged film and video in a way that had never been done before, fusing the acid-drenched psychedelic sensibility of the Summer of Love with then-futuristic and highly rarified TV technology.

In 1966, Scott Bartlett made *Metanomen*, using "negative images, polarization, TV techniques, computer- film, electronic patterns." Two years later, working with DeWitt in a purloined Bay Area TV studio, he made the extraordinary *OffOn* (1968), using kinescopes, videotape, signal processing. This went on to screen in 16mm all over the world, and win several awards.

Moon 1969 (originally simply *Moon*) had started out as a remake his earlier *A Trip to the Moon*, but it evolved into something completely different. It was completed two months before the Apollo 11 landing in July.

"Moon is...a product of the New Surrealism, all the more wonderful for the fact that we do not actually see the moon... The film contains some of the most spectacular manipulations of video techniques Bartlett had yet achieved...." (Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*.)

Except for 1971's award-winning *Serpent*, Bartlett would largely abandon videographic and electronic cinema during the '70s, while continuing to make experimental and personal films. In the late 1980s, his collected works were released on three VHS cassettes by Facets Multimedia in Chicago. *OffOn*, preserved by the Pacific Film Archive, can be seen on the first *Treasures of the American Film Archives* DVD box set.

VHS: *The Films of Scott Bartlett: Volume 1-3* (Facets Multimedia, 1988) 50-55 min. each.
DVD: *Treasures of the American Film Archives* (vol. 1) (National Film Preservation Fund, 2000). The
      film *OffOn* (1968) is included.

Beatles Electronique
Jud Yalkut and Nam June Paik

3 min / color /sound
Filmed video output, video processing & synthesis, electromagnetic CRT distortions, kinescopes
Soundtrack: "Four Loops" by Kenneth Werner
Print source: The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"*Beatles Electronique* was shot in black-and-white from live broadcasts of the Beatles while Paik electromagnetically improvised distortions on the receiver, and also from videotaped material produced during a series of experiments with filming off the monitor of a Sony videotape recorder. The film...is accompanied by an electronic soundtrack...derived from four electronically altered [audiotape] loops of Beatles sound material." (Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*.)

Electronic Moon no. 2

Jud Yalkut and Nam June Paik

4 min / color / sound
Filmed single-source video output, video processing
Soundtrack: music by Debussy
Print source: The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"In *Electronic Moon no. 2* the combination of music, videotape and film synthesize a new sensation forming a true modern day film-haiku." – David Bienstock, Late Curator of Film, The Whitney Museum of American Art.

"It has one of the best breasts I can recall." – *Show Business* magazine.

Jud Yalkut and Nam June Paik

Nam June Paik is widely considered to be the first video artist, beginning his experiments in 1963 while living in Germany. He was a close friend and collaborator with John Cage, deeply involved in the Fluxus art movement, and a celebrated prankster.

In these filmed works and improvisations, Paik had withdrawn into the lab and was experimenting with new ways of manipulating the video signal itself. During 1968-1969, Jud Yalkut filmed and reinterpreted Nam June Paik's constant experimenting in a rapidly-made series of mini-shorts. In 1969, Yalkut combined these into a 45 minute collection titled *PAIKPIECES*. These two films, *Beatles Electronique* and *Electronic Moon no. 2*, are drawn from that collection.

The following year, in 1970, this work inspired Paik and Shuya Abe to build the first video synthesizer, piecing it together from cannibalized gear from disparate systems. This led in turn to a series of landmark, brilliant, and often hilariously bizarre works of video art. Incredibly, some were even broadcast nationally on PBS. This evening's films are a fragmentary glimpse at the genesis of that creative and technological revolution.

Born 1938 in New York, Jud Yalkut was in the '60s part of the American collective USCO, a group of artists and technicians that gave performances and built environments. He was extremely active in the East Coast avant garde art scene as a filmmaker, writer, teacher, and collagist. In later years he settled in Ohio, where he has taught and continued to create and exhibit visual art.

Excerpts from "Electronic Zen. The Underground TV Generation" by Jud Yalkut
August 10, 1967, *The West Side News* (NYC, later renamed *The New York Press*):

"You cannot exclude anyone from TV," declares Paik, "so really delicate important subjects like politics, philosophy, sex, and avant garde activity are not shown. But videotape can supplant commercial broadcasting with highly selective programming to be played back anytime at all. When you have a screen 3-D color videotape recorder, it will kill *Life* magazine just like *Life* killed *Collier*.

"Like radio ham operators, we will have amateur TV. Combinations of Xerox with videotape will print everyone's newspaper at home. The video-record will become cheaper and easier than videotape for mass production, with no threading and instant playback. As the collage technique replaced oil paint, the cathode ray tube will replace the canvas...

"Medical electronics and art are still widely apart; but these two fields can also change each other's fruits, e.g. , various signals can be fed to many parts of the head, brain, and body, aiming to establish a completely new genre of DIRECT-CONTACT-ART. The electromagnetic vibration of the head might lead the way to Electronic Zen."

Binary Bit Patterns
Michael Whitney

3 min / optically colorized B&W / sound
Digital computer-generated imagery, printed onto microfilm, then optically treated.
Soundtrack: a guitar-tape composition by Whitney and Charles Villiers
Print source: private collection

 Binary Bit Patterns "was made on a PFR-3 programmable film recorder manufactured by Information International, Inc., in Santa Monica, California. The PFR-3 is a specialized visual subsystem driven by the Digital Equipment Corporation's small PDP-9 computer. It is a hybridized microfilm plotting system built specifically for reading film into the computer or recording information on motion-picture film. There are 16,000 possible X/Y coordinate points on the three inch face of the PFR-3's cathode-ray tube. [It was] produced with a program developed by one of the firm's employees..." (Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*.)
 Michael Whitney is one of three sons of John Whitney Sr., the legendary pioneer of computer-assisted filmmaking. Along with his brother John Jr., he created a number of influential multi-screen projection events, as well as some of the first digital computer animation ever made in the world.

Le Labyrinthe
Piotr Kamler

12 min / color / sound (originally 35mm)
Multi-format animation: Alexeieff pinboard, line drawings, rotoscoping, optical printing.
Soundtrack: an original *musique concrète* composition by Bernard Parmegiani
Special prize, Melbourne Festival 1973
Print source: private collection

 "Man in the face of society. A struggle between mankind and the specters that hound him."

 Born in Warsaw, Poland in 1936, Piotr Kamler studied graphic arts at the Warsaw Fine Arts Academy. In 1960 he won a scholarship to study at the École de Beaux-Arts in Paris. There he met Pierre Schaeffer and began what proved to be a life-long career as an experimental animator.
 "Between 1960 and 1975, Pierre Schaeffer, the famous inventor of *musique concrète*, presided over the Research Service of French TV & Radio (ORTF). Under his direction, this Service de la recherché produced countless experimental films and videos; largely animations and abstract works, but also documentaries and live-action films. How many exactly is difficult to say – the scholarship is threadbare, even in French.
 "Schaeffer had already led the GRM (Group de Recherché Musical) to preeminence as a centre for creative electronic music; it was the composers working in those studios who were to score all the works produced by the Research Service of the ORTF....
 "Kamler's cinema is among the most unlikely bodies of work in contemporary film. ...[He] produced a dazzling series of 15 abstract films and animations, all of which were paired to electronic soundtracks by the premier composers of the GRM: Francois Bayle, Ivo Malec, Robert Cohen-Solal and Bernard Parmegiani...."
 - Jim Knox, program notes for "Concrete Cinema: GRM (Le Groupe de Recherches Musicales) Films," July 13, 2003, Liquid Architecture 4 festival of sound art (Melbourne, Australia)

DVD: *Piotr Kamler: A La Recherche du Temps* (aaa Studios, 2007).

Hermann Nitsch: An Introduction to the O.M. Theatre
Stephen Gebhardt

9.5 min / color / sound
Print source: The Film-Makers' Cooperative

"A document which describes Nitsch's performance at the University of Cincinnati, April 4, 1968. The ritual of the beginning is transformed into utter chaos and exhaustion at the conclusion of the performance." – S.G.

Excerpts from "Artist 'Hogs' Festival Act," *University of Cincinnati News Record*, April 9, 1968:

> "The Hermann Nitsch Experience went on as scheduled Thursday night despite the death of Martin Luther King and the trouble obtaining a legal carcass for the performance. The Spring Arts Festival Committee obtained a legal carcass from a non-municipal slaughter house thus removing any doubt as to the legality of the performance. Nitsch perfers to work with a goat carcass but considered the 200 lb. pig as a suitable replacement.
> "The Art Festival's program with 'Jud Yalkut's festival films' was postponed Monday night until Tuesday due to the National Day of Mourning…
> "Nitsch performed last Thursday night for a near-capacity crowd which ended up in a meat tossing melee… The Director of the University Center, Joan Cochran, was upset with the mess that had been created in the Great Hall…"

Born and raised in Cincinnati, OH, Gebhardt was an architecture student with an interest in urban planning who became a filmmaker while in college. He founded the U.C. Film Society in 1961, which later developed the legendary Spring Arts Festival. He taught film in the U.C. Graduate School and Antioch College and made films commercially until he moved to New York City to manage the newly created Anthology Film Archives at The Public Theater and to pursue a career in filmmaking.

In 1969, he made Legendary Epic Yarns and Fables, a series of short interview films with prominent avant garde and underground cinema artists. (We will screen his film about the Kuchar Brothers here on Oct. 14, 2009.) He also filmed recording sessions for a jazz opera, *Escalator Over the Hill* by composer Carla Bley and poet Paul Haines, with Don Cherry, John McLaughlin, Sheila Jordan, Gato Barbieri, and others.

In 1970, he began a 3-year relationship with John Lennon and Yoko Ono where he made their films and ran their attendant company, Joko Films. Among the films he shot and directed was what proved to be Lennon's final live concert appearance.

He directed the concert film *Ladies & Gentlemen, The Rolling Stones*, made during their 1972 US tour supporting *Exile On Main Street*, which was released theatrically in 1974 to specially prepared theaters in quadraphonic concert volume sound.

Beginning in 1974, he developed a friendship and what he describes as "a student/mentor relationship" with Harry Smith, assisting him in the making of the epic multi-projector film, *Mahogonny*.

Gebhardt later returned to Cincinnati to teach. His later films have included the documentaries John *Twenty to Life: The Life and Times of John Sinclair* (2004), and *Bill Monroe: The Father of Bluegrass Music* (1993). He is a member of the artist collective, Musicus Media.