

The Television Laboratory at wnet | 13 news

Summer, 1976

Summertime is traditionally a slowing down period for most television goes on, but not so for the *Television Laboratory*. As it moves into its fifth and most successful year as the nation's number one experimental TV center, an unprecedented number of projects and activities have been planned — made possible by the greatest number of grants since the Lab's beginning in 1972

Nam June Paik, as a Rockefeller Artist-in-Residence for five years, has three projects in the works. In production — a collaboration with choreographer and long-time friend *Merce Cunningham*, which Nam June describes as the ultimate collaboration between “dance person and TV person.” Also, a major work resulting from an invitational performance tour of Australia and Guadecanal with cellist and partner *Charlotte Moorman*. (The cello flew full fare). The work's theme — the immortalizing quality of television, or as Paik puts it, “TV is the ice box of time”

Rockefeller Artist-in-Residence **Ed Emshwiller**, has undertaken his sixth major work at the Lab. The last, entitled “*Family Focus*” (aired in New York May 2nd), was “*An American Family*” in reverse — the tapers being the tapes at times, current footage mixed with old 8mm family films and snapshots, then processed through the Lab's image-making facilities. The new work, tentatively titled “*Sir Faces*,” draws upon Mr. Emshwiller's vast backlog of style and technique, this time exploring the actor's space in television. He plans to experiment technically with WNET's new computerized editing system, and stylistically with character substitutions and temporal distortions. He forsees the finished tape as a series of encounters among six to eight actors, with a partially musical, partially narrative structure

A New Dance Work for Television Is Born at the Television Laboratory via the choreographic talent of *Twyla Tharp*. Ms. Tharp, one of dance's most innovative new forces, has been granted funds from the *National Endowment for the Arts*, and *The Corporation for Public Broadcasting* for the support of a six month stay at the Lab. Unlike past attempts to put dance on television, the Lab and Twyla Tharp are using the special personality of the medium as a third collaborative partner. *Don Mischer* will direct. And video documentarian *Joel Gold* is recording the entire creative process for possible inclusion in the telecast

The National Endowment for the Arts Quadrupled Funds for the Lab this year, providing a major grant for the residencies of six videomakers:

Tom Dewitt continues his explorations of TV's outer limits with three projects — The first, produced with additional funds from the *AFI*, is “*Zierot in Outta Space*,” a mime and animation extravaganza starring Tom's own creation, Zierot Le Fou. Also, “*Philosophy of Light*,” an outgrowth of Tom's previous “*Philharmonia*,” a sound and image symphony; and “*TV Young Again*,” an introduction to the new video era

Arthur Ginsberg created the ingenious projection sequences used during the Obie Award-winning *Chelsea Theatre* production of poet *Alan Ginsberg's “Kaddish.”* Now he is translating “Kaddish” to television. He has just completed taping Ginsberg's reading of “Kaddish” in the poet's own New York apartment and intends that in its video version, the poem will have neither the stage production's restrictions in physical form nor the abstractness of other video poems. The final piece will be a blend of sound and image, recreating the intense spirit of Alan Ginsberg's moving autobiographical work

Eliot Noyes Jr's first film was nominated for an Academy Award while he was still a student at Harvard. “*Glove Story*,” the title of his work at the Lab, is his first experience with videotape. As he describes it, “*Glove Story*” is a modern fairy tale, which delves into the fantasy of every day life. He has used, simply, two actors, an apartment, and an assortment of props, to tell the story taped with a porta-pak. Although the footage was taped at normal speed, the final 15-minute tale will be composed of a selected number of individual frames

Nam June Paik, who last year created "*Suite 212*," a collection of mini-portraits of New York City, has discovered the spin-off technique and created "*Suite 50*." It's his Bicentennial salute to each of the 50 states, being produced in collaboration with videomakers around the country. "*Suite 50*" is a fitting 200th birthday gift from the man who has often been called "The Father of Video Art"

Skip Sweeney, San Francisco-based video artist, calls his latest work, "*My Father Sells Studebakers*." The piece will be a complex mix of fiction and non-fiction elements, now being composed in San Francisco and New York. The tape explores the artist's often painful relationship with his now deceased father, and he hopes that the exploration will prove enlightening for himself and for viewers as well

William Wegman, videomaker and humorist, makes his short (less than one minute) black-and-white tapes behind closed doors either alone or with his dog, Man Ray. The props he uses are simple everyday objects, and his tapes reflect a wry humor and sharp insight into the means by which man communicates. However, trying to describe his latest project is like trying to explain what's funny about someone else slipping on a banana peel. But, as he says, "If you don't like it, it's short, and it's got to be over very soon."

Lab Director *David Loxton* has announced that these works now in progress at the Lab will become the nucleus of a **Major National PBS Series** intended for air in early 1977.

Video and Television Review Is Back for a second season. Based on the popularity and success of last year's major 26-week experimental television showcase, a new 13-week season of VTR was launched in April. The series has included such programs as *Ed Emswiler's "Family Focus," Tom DeWitt's* latest edition to "*Cathode Ray Theatre*," and *Beck on Beck*," three works by noted San Francisco video artist *Steven Beck*. At the end of June, a two-part program on the work of community video groups produced on location around the country by *Star Lizard Productions*. On *July 4th*, a repeat of the ever-popular "*Global Groove*" by *Nam June Paik*. *July 11th*, "*Lanesville TV*" a report by the smallest television station in the world. And on the *18th, 25th* and *2nd* of August, a special report on gallery and museum video hosted by *Russell Connor*. *John O'Connor*, TV critic for the *New York Times* has called VTR "an invaluable showcase for experimental video." VTR can be seen in New York Sundays at 11:30 PM. And beginning during the summer, VTR can be seen on the *Eastern Educational Network stations*. Funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

The New York State Council on the Arts Each Year Underwrites the short-term residencies of selected New York State videomakers. This year, eight new projects have been funded in the areas of video art and non-fiction television:

Known to public television audiences for their highly acclaimed half-inch documentary "*Cuba: The People*," the *Downtown Community Television Center* has been granted support from NYSCA and the *Corporation for Public Broadcasting* for post-production of their latest project, "*Chinatown: Immigrants in America*." The program was shot over a one-year period in New York's Chinatown, and examines the lifestyle of the Chinese immigrant. The DCTV were able to gain access to many places often declared off-limits to the media, including Chinese factories, homes, hospitals, and restaurants. The people themselves tell their own story, and in a broad sense, the program examines the whole American immigrant experience

Aside from documenting the new Twyla Tharp creation, **Joel Gold**, filmmaker and documentarian, is producing an intriguing tape which revolves around the concept of risk-taking. "*Video Odyssey*," is, as Joel Gold calls it, a "quasi-documentary" and a paradox of sorts — while the tape is about risk, it is also a vehicle for the documentarian himself to take a whole number of risks in its making.

The myriad of birth methods now available to expectant parents necessitates careful thought and decision. This was the experience of recent parents **Julie Gustofsen** and **John Reilly**, the wife-and-husband documentary team concerned enough to make a program about giving birth in America. The 60-minute color program examines some birth alternatives available in this country via the experiences of five couples. Also appearing in the program are *Margaret Mead*, *Dr. Frederick LeBoyer*, author of "*Birth Without Violence*," *Elizabeth Bing*, prepared childbirth expert, and *Dr. Stanley James*, neo-natologist. Funds, also, from the video group *Global Village*.

Well-known for her conceptual video art and gallery performance pieces, **Joan Jonas'** work at the Lab is a new step for her. For the first time, she will be experimenting with color video using a complex multiple-color camera set-up. The finished piece intends to explore the ways in which the video image can be related to one's own moods.

Philip Mallory Jones has produced his first work at the Lab entitled "*No Crystal Stair*." Mr. Jones, who is Director of the *Ithaca Video Project* has created a provocative piece exploring continuities in artistic expression between Afro-America and the Carribean Islands — interweaving old films, poetry readings, songs, and dance. "*No Crystal Stair*" was co-produced by *Gunilla Mallory Jones*.

It's not easy to get in touch with **Alan and Susan Raymond** these days. The documentary team, best known for their filming of PBS's "*An American Family*" series, spend their nights documenting nocturnal happenings in a

South Bronx precinct station and their days catching up on lost sleep. The project is a very valuable one, not only for the subject matter, but for the Raymonds' experiments with low-light level porta-paks.

Fans of "VTR" will know **Laurie Spiegel** as the composer of the series theme music. An accomplished composer of music straight and electronic, Ms. Spiegel is embarking upon her first video project which will explore the ways in which computer generated video images can be structured and composed similarly to a musical composition. She will also score the tape.

Two summers ago, **Bill Viola** got hold of a video projector and brought it to his studio above his home in residential Syracuse. He then made a videotape of his face, very close up, pressed against a pane of glass, banging on it and yelling. He video projected that tape on a rear screen stretched over two large windows facing the street and amplified his voice top volume. The effect was that of a huge colossal man trapped inside the house. His neighbors will never forget it. Now the videomaker, who likes to explore concepts of time, space and motion, is at it again. Presently, he is trying to obtain permission from city authorities to shoot off a rifle in the midst of a deserted Wall Street.

An 18-Month Extended Collaboration between the TV Lab and the alternative video documentary group TVTV, resulted in five unique broadcast projects, the last of which was the largest and most complex small-format project ever attempted. **Super Bowl**, the hour-long show which aired nationally over PBS in March, took its cameras past the game and into the event itself, dissecting all aspects of the Super Bowl from the fans and the players to the NFL, the media, and the influence of big business. Wrote *Marvin Kitman*, TV-critic for *Newsday*, "I feel 'Super Bowl' is the best reporting of the year"

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