

EVERY SUNDAY morning I turn to the *New York Times* Book Review section and read it from cover to cover. I'm sure I'm not alone in this ritual. I'd wager that most librarians avidly read some book review each week. I think it has to do with the irrepressible human need to understand; historians, novelists, scientists, poets, and economists, among others, provide some of the answers—or at least pose some useful questions—in books that help inform the tumultuous

Not for media librarians only . . .

The "Best" of the Best: Award-winning Films and Videotapes of 1981

age in which we live. And even if we don't read all the books reviewed, we know that they exist, that someone found them valuable, and that they will probably be found in the library.

Unless you're a school media specialist or a film librarian, chances are the only "nonprint" reviews you read are for Saturday night movies like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Reading about the best nontheatrical films and videotapes is not the daily, weekly, or even annual reading of most librarians. It's no wonder then that they are not held in serious regard by the profession: if you don't all know such works exist and that they have been critically acclaimed, then you won't find them in libraries.

We live in an age where images have become, in critic John Berger's phrase, "ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, and free." Immersed in such an image culture, we see without seeing, and McLuhan's dictum, "the medium is the message," becomes sadly inevitable. But film is not only escapist entertainment, and video isn't just unfunny sitcoms wrapped around commercials on a flickering tube. Like the writers mentioned earlier, many film and video makers are also prompted by the same human need to understand; using the media of the age, they, too, present answers or pose questions that reveal the underlying concerns, values, and mores of our times. Such unusual, creative, or informative programming is often excluded from or buried within the steady stream of banal images that constitute the fare of mass media. When libraries collect such works, they rescue them from the context of mindless entertainment so that they can be *seen* and judged, independent of the popular, commercial media that renders them invisible.

(see p. 30)

By Deirdre Boyle

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The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter (photo: Dorothea Lange Collection, The Oakland Museum); *The Willmar 8*

Of the hundreds of nontheatrical films and original videotapes released each year, a handful are awarded prizes by critics, programmers, librarians, and producers. I've selected 31 works from among the winners of the American Film Festival, the Ithaca Video Festival, the Global Village Video and Television Documentary Festival, among others. (For specific awards see the "Mediagraphy" which follows.) My selections are based on public and academic library collection interests and are calculated to show how well films and tapes can disclose us and the era in which we live. Notable are portraits of many real-life heroes—and anti-heroes—individuals trying to live with their principles or traditions intact, along with some measure of grace. Our anxiety is seen most acutely in works exploring the threat of global warfare and nuclear destruction. Yet not all is grim: films and tapes by women celebrating women are much in evidence in programs that reevaluate women's history, showing women as forceful members of society, as gifted craftspersons and creative artists, and as courageous defenders of their equality today. Some titles are bound to stir discussion, if not controversy, while others will simply inspire, delight, or beguile viewers. All lead us toward a better understanding of who we are today, how we got here, and where we may be headed.

Labor

Documenting the harrowing course of labor history in the United States has engaged the talents of a number of outstanding film and video makers. Films like the 1976 academy award-winning *Harlan County, U.S.A.* interested a national audience in the battles waged by America's blue collar workers for fair employment practices and the right to unionize. Several new films and tapes continue in this tradition. *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, a film by Connie Field, has walked off with many prizes for best documentary, including the American Film Festival's prestigious Grierson award. It provides an entertaining and

provocative view of the short-lived careers of working women during World War II. Five former "Rosies"—two welders, a burner, an ammunitions worker, and a foundry worker—vividly recall their lives before, during, and after the war. These women are gutsy, witty, and wonderfully articulate in recounting dangers on the job, their struggle for acceptance from male co-workers, and the sacrifices made to maintain their families during the war. Above all, they express their enormous pride in their work and the self-esteem they enjoyed from earning a "good" living.

Three of the women interviewed are black, and they say much about the combined discrimination against blacks and women in American industry. Their memories are interspersed with archival recruitment films, posters, ads, and music of the period, all extolling the popular myth of Rosie the Riveter, which appears in sharp contrast to the experiences of these real-life "Rosies." Just as the mass media shaped public acceptance of women in overalls and welders' masks, the media turned opinion around again at the war's close, sending women—whether they wanted to or not—back into the home or to the menial, low-paying jobs traditionally reserved for women. We learn that the highly-skilled and determined women we've encountered in the film could only find employment after the war as domestics, shop girls, waitresses, and cooks.

Field interviewed over 500 Rosies while researching the film and unearthed rare and telling archival materials for this compelling documentary. Since the problems of sex-role stereotyping on the job persist today, this excellent film illuminates more than America's past.

Working women dissatisfied with low wages and dead-end jobs are the subject of *The Willmar 8*, which documents the two-year strike of eight bank employees in a small Minnesota town. When a young male trainee was hired at nearly twice the women's starting salary, and they were told to train him, the bank manager answered their pro-

test by saying, "We're not all equal, you know." The outraged women formed their own union and went on strike in December 1977—the first bank strike in the state's history. These formerly apolitical, "ordinary," middle-class women found the courage, strength, and unswerving determination to persevere in their cause despite community ostracism, two fierce Minnesota winters on the picket line, personal financial distress, and the final court ruling against their claims. Directed and narrated by actress Lee Grant, *The Willmar 8* records a frustrating yet inspiring chapter in the history of women's struggle for economic and employment parity with men.

Women are not the only minority group to meet with labor injustices. Eastern European Jews fleeing oppression in the late 19th Century emigrated to the United States only to find sweatshop conditions as appalling as those they had left behind. Revolted by American materialism, these idealists became anarchists, forming a counterculture that would last until the echoes of the Yiddish language and culture fade away. *Free Voice of Labor: the Jewish Anarchists* documents their history and philosophy, told in the words of surviving anarchists and interpreted by historian Paul Avrick. The film, by Steven Fischler and Joel Sucher, blends interviews with historic footage of Ellis Island immigrants, vintage Yiddish feature films, and soulful Yiddish songs and poems, heard over period headlines and photographs. Ahrne Thorne, last editor of the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* (*Free Voice of Labor, 1870-1977*), speaks of the newspaper's role in relieving sweatshop conditions and perpetuating Yiddish literature, drama, and culture. Thorne, along with members of the paper's managing board, explains how these anarchists were dedicated to a society of voluntary cooperation and opposed to what they viewed as the twin repressions of the state and religion. They considered themselves individualists, federalists, and anti-militarists—not Communists. By explaining the economic, political,

cultural, and ethical background for a movement popularly equated with sheer terrorism, *Free Voice of Labor: the Jewish Anarchists* suggests how their spirit, culture, and individualism has contributed to the American culture and character.

Government unions on strike have been much in the news with the recent PATCO strike. *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered: Labor Struggle in the Post Office* looks at another union. This joint effort by Tami Gold, Dan Gordon, and Erik Lewis began when Gold's husband, a Jersey City postal worker then striking for safer working conditions, was fired in 1978. She picked up her camera to document their right to strike and the subsequent firings and stormy union meetings. A scene in a bar after a union victory communicates all the beery charm of working class television heroes, but this stereotype is quickly dismantled by the articulate, politically savvy postal workers who organize and fight effectively to secure their rights and their lives. The dramatic climax of the tape occurs with the death of Michael McDermott, a mail handler crushed to death at the Jersey City Bulk Mail Facility in 1979. This tragedy testified to the strikers' contention that dangerous, factory-like conditions prevail in the nation's post offices. The producers do not hide their partisan view—they capitalize on it to make a strong, clear case on behalf of the workers for safer working conditions, the right to strike, and more responsive union leadership.

Justice

The criminal justice system in America has come under scrutiny by the media. Viewers of public TV may be familiar with the British series "Circuit 11 Miami," which presented actual trials filmed in the Dade County courthouse where cameras are legally allowed. Robert Thurber's *Plea Bargaining: an American Way of Justice* was also filmed in Dade County. Unlike the multipart "Circuit 11 Miami"—which at times seemed uncomfortably voyeuristic, exposing real-life dramas as though they were episodes of "Perry Mason"—*Plea Bargaining* circles the lives of defendants and focuses rather on one aspect of the justice system, the behind-the-scenes negotiation of deals that occur in judges' chambers, prison conference rooms, and attorneys' offices. Thurber's sensitive *verité* camera work shows defendants—some of whom cannot read the charges against them or who do not speak the language of the court—urged to "cop a plea" regardless of their guilt or innocence. Their dilemma is great: if they plead guilty, they will be guaranteed a lower sentence or probation. If they plead innocent and go to trial, they will re-

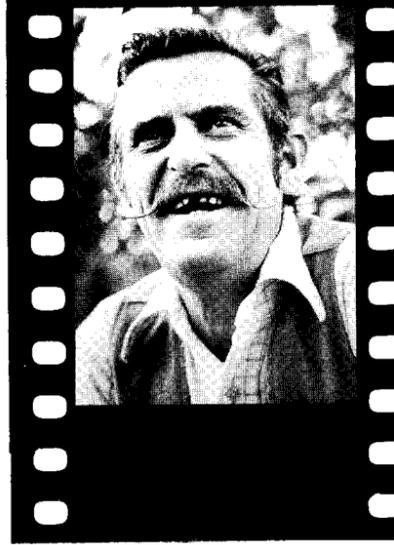
ceive the maximum penalty the law allows if found guilty. Given these odds, most plead guilty. *Plea Bargaining* shows this system to be, at best, a questionable tool for clearing court dockets and, at worst, a travesty of American justice.

Presumed Innocent, taped at New York City's House of Detention for Men on Riker's Island, exposes the plight of men accused of crimes and unable to raise bail. With bails set at anywhere from \$500–\$50,000, men can wait anywhere from three months to two years before ever coming to trial. "Where's the equality of the law for us?" one inmate asks, noting that 85–90 percent of the men are indigent blacks and Hispanics. Interviews with prison guards, legal aid lawyers, judges, prison doctors, the director of the Prison Reform Task Force, as well as prisoners and their families paint a one-sided, sad, and sordid view of criminal justice. Although video makers Claude Beller and Stefan Moore could benefit from a tighter editing style, they have produced an eye-opening view of how the poor are punished before they are even tried.

Also gritty is *MOVE: Confrontation in Philadelphia*, an investigative report on the eviction of a radical black political commune by Mayor Frank Rizzo of Philadelphia. Billed by the media as a "back-to-nature group," MOVE was a highly complex entity, and producers Karen Pomer and Jane Mancini document the intricate relationship of media bias, police harassment, and subtle economic motivation which led to MOVE's violent removal by the police in August 1978.

Shifting from newspaper headlines to television newscasts to mayoral press conferences to on-the-street interviews with community residents, Pomer and Mancini reveal how the media manipulated the news and how the black Powelton community in Philadelphia proved to be the real pawn in a political and media chess game.

Far from the smooth, controlled television esthetic, here is shaky camerawork, dizzying swish pans, and choppy editing. There is no correspondent to cool down the events by fitting them into a predictable format overlaid with continuous, controlling commentary. Instead, there is Pomer and Mancini, students when they began the tape as a class project. Turning what would otherwise be serious limitations to their advantage, the two young women make their youth, inexperience, and unimposing presence with small-format video equipment work for them, gaining the trust not only of the black community and MOVE supporters but also of the local media. The rough and jagged quality of their images grippingly communicates the raw immediacy of a volatile situation.



Moonshiner

Government

The Abscam tapes are only one of many video "studies" of congressmen in action. A wry and entertaining glimpse of how Congress works is afforded in *Mr. Vanik Leaves Washington*, a day-in-the-life of Ohio Congressman Charles Vanik on the occasion of his retirement after 26 years in office. Producer-director Jim Lindsay followed the droll representative from early morning breakfast to committee hearings, staff briefings, press conferences, role call votes, meetings with lobbyists on to an evening fund-raiser. With his cracker barrel humor—often at his own expense—Vanik is a beguiling guide. The cost-conscious, dependable, down-to-earth Vanik presents an old-fashioned contrast to present-day congressional style, changes which he laments have weakened congressional effectiveness and efficiency.

The tape follows the standard made-for-TV documentary format, with its seamless voice-over narrator who explains and interprets everything you see; as such, it could be viewed as a slick, surface view of Congress from a man with nothing to lose. What lifts *Mr. Vanik Leaves Washington* from run-of-the-mill TV fare and kiss-and-tell confessions is Vanik's undeniable charm and the talented crew, who capture some priceless moments on and off the political record.

A somewhat different working portrait of political life is presented in *Taking Back Detroit*. Here we encounter City Councilman Kenneth Cockrell, Criminal Court Judge Justin Ravitz, and political campaign strategist Sheila Murphy, three socialists dedicated to redirecting what they consider the unholy alliance of government and industry in Motor City. We learn how Cockrell and Ravitz formed a successful radical law practice in the late Sixties to assist Detroit's poor and working class, and then went on to form DARE, a citizen's group concerned about downtown development issues. With this base, Ravitz was elected a judge and Cockrell joined the city council, key positions for influencing the future of Detroit's low-income population.

Limited by state prohibition against cameras in court, we must content ourselves with seeing Ravitz addressing a prosecutor's meeting or participating in self-conscious interviews. Although we do see Cockrell and Murphy, his chief-of-staff, on the job as well as in formal interviews, they, too, appear distant, rarely permitting the viewer to get past the rhetoric to the heart of their cause. Despite this barrier, this is a fascinating glimpse of how counter-voices in a society can organize and work effectively within the existing system to effect change.

War

The winds of war seem to be howling ominously these days, and several films and videotapes explore war's past, present—and to come. *Body Count*, an emotionally searing videotape by Dan Reeves and Jon Hilton, ironically presents youth's fascination with military glory. This is a personal documentary and a cautionary tale based on Reeves' own surreal memories of Vietnam and the culture that led him there. The nine-minute tape condenses an eternity of images drawn from the collective memory bank of the first TV generation—old war films, military parades, Vietnam news reports, presidential press conferences, Matt Dillon at a shoot-out, Kennedy in Dallas, and *TV Guide*. Juxtaposed with Reeves' visual collage is Jon Hilton's haunting audio score, composed of machine gun fire, radio static, battle cries, drum beats, and comments like Johnson's disclaimer: "I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth into battle." Again and again the tape returns to its central image—children in battle, machine-gunned and falling backwards into a ditch in slow-motion agony. This dream-like sequence of boys playing at war poignantly evokes not only war's horror but the disillusionment of little boys grown up who discover—too late—that everyone doesn't get up and go home when the game is over.



Public Enemy Number One

America's most recent intervention in another country's internal strife has come under attack at home again. In a 60-minute film for PBS, Glenn Silber posed the question on many minds: *El Salvador: Another Vietnam?* First aired in January 1981, the film has since been updated to include Reagan administration policies, battle footage from the January offensive, U.S. Congressional hearings, and archival footage from foreign and U.S. television news coverage to explain United States military and economic policy in Central America since 1948. The revised title no longer asks a question.

The strength of the original film lay in its untangling of complex issues by eye witnesses—President José Napoleón Duarte; Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo, president of the Revolutionary Democratic Front; former U.S. ambassador Murat Williams; Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas; the late Ita Ford—one of the murdered Maryknoll nuns; guerrilla leaders; members of the national "security forces"; and Salvadorans from all classes. The accumulation of evidence for mass murders, suppression of civil rights, and flagrant abuse of power by the military junta as presented in the film called into question continued American support of the current government. The award-winning film was a chilling report of terrorism and sanctioned violence and an indictment of the United States for its support of a repressive government. The revision, *El Salvador: Another*

Vietnam (not viewed as of this writing), promises to give a more comprehensive view of the complex issues behind the civil war and the why's of American involvement.

Public Enemy Number One focuses on maverick war correspondent Wilfred Burchett, an Australian and the first Western journalist to witness the devastation of Hiroshima in World War II. In reporting later wars in Korea and Vietnam, Burchett was convinced the West was wrong, and his coverage of the "other" side of these conflicts branded him a traitor at home. For 17 years Burchett was denied an Australian passport, exiled to wander about Southeast Asia's stormy theater of war. Filmmaker David Bradbury captures not only the flavor of a war correspondent's life but Burchett's intrepid character. Bradbury follows Burchett about Southeast Asia, even into a guerrilla ambush. But by then Burchett had already fallen into a moral ambush far more difficult to escape—supporting the Pol Pot regime, which probably wreaked far more destruction in Kampuchea than the atomic blasts did in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This film raises important and difficult questions about the freedom of the press in wartime while also asking whether Burchett's fierce independence and radical views didn't finally lead to misplaced loyalties.

Trinity was the code name for that turning point in Burchett's life—the bombing of Hiroshima. *The Day after Trinity: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Atomic Bomb* is an unforgettable documentary about the man who played a pivotal role in making it all possible. The film traces Oppenheimer's life (1904–67), from boyhood sojourns on family land in Los Alamos, New Mexico, on to his inspired leadership of the Manhattan Project, and beyond to disillusionment as his efforts to limit the spread of bomb technology proved futile. Interviews with family, friends, and colleagues reveal the unfolding stages of Oppenheimer's prodigious intellect and provide invaluable insights into his compelling personality and complex character. Meticulous research, sensitive and probing interviews, family photos, clips from newsreel and TV reports, and previously classified film footage documenting the hectic war years at Los Alamos are all woven together to present, in penetrating and sober style, Oppenheimer's rise and fall and the Faustian consequences of the bargain he struck between science and the military.

Lifestyles

Every new decade brings with it changes in attitudes about what may best be summarized as "lifestyles." Some dramatic shifts are evident today



El Salvador: Another Vietnam?; The Day After Trinity: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Atomic Bomb; Body Count; Best Boy

in our views about the family as its members redefine their roles, relationships, and responsibilities to each other, and the family unit struggles to redefine its authority and responsibility vis-à-vis social institutions. *Home*, a four-part videotape by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, explores how four families approach some important moments in their lives. The tape opens brightly with the birth of a baby, not in the sterile atmosphere of a hospital but in a home-like clinic staffed by midwives. In contrast to this happy scene, we next encounter a bitter elderly woman ensconced in a nursing home by a family with "no room" for her. The third family is a newly merged one, formed by the marriage of two divorced blacks. The last family awaits death as a young son cares for his dying mother at home. Although the tape is flawed by occasionally banal camera work and tedious real-time editing, the four vignettes effectively argue the case for maintaining traditional family responsibilities and values rather than surrendering them to monolithic, impersonal institutions.

Another side of this argument is seen in Ira Wohl's *Best Boy*, the academy-award winning documentary about Wohl's retarded cousin. Philly is 52 years old and dependent on his elderly parents when Ira intervenes and encourages his cousin to move beyond his sheltered home environment to attend school, summer camp, and finally settle in a supervised community residence for retarded adults. Here we're shown an institution providing Philly with the independence and self-sufficiency he lacks at home, but not without our questioning at what expense to the feelings of Philly's widowed mother. Like *Home*, *Best Boy* is sure to get discussions going.

How to live well on less than \$2000 a year was the subject of 20-year-old Dolly Freed's book, *Possum Living*, and Dolly is the subject of Nancy Schreiber's film *Possum Living*. Dolly is an outspoken, ingenious, confident, and decidedly unconventional young woman. Though we see her supervising

meals, shopping for and storing provisions, gardening, and combing thrift shops in quest of her "no frills" way-of-life, it is the complex characters and relationships of the Freed family that command Schreiber's and our attention. When her parents divorced, Dolly decided to stay with her father. Out of work because of layoffs in the aerospace industry and unwilling to accept government assistance, Frank Freed decided to try living off the land. Dolly quit high school and joined her dad in improvising their living. Schreiber admits the implicit rivalry between Dolly and her mom without comment, including a dinner visit where her mother boasts, "You'll never be the cook your mother is." Glimpses of Dolly with her boyfriend appear, too, without comment, contributing further to the tantalizing puzzle of Dolly's personality. She is shown off at her best when promoting her book on "The Merv Griffin Show." The juxtaposition of Hollywood glamour and superficiality in the person of the smooth talk show host with Dolly's plain-spoken, forthright views on simplicity and economic self-reliance is both funny and richly illustrative of the wide margins defining life in America today.

Three young women who are very different from Dolly Freed are the focus of *Teenage Girls: Three Stories*, cinema verité portraits of girls living in one of New York's inner city neighborhoods. The bleakest life belongs to 14-year-old Paulette. Least articulate of the trio, Paulette's defeat and sullen withdrawal from her mother's sharp tongue signifies a deep discontent with her life. She comes from a poor, black, single-parent home: her mother had her first child when she was Paulette's age, Paulette at 15, and three more children in almost as many years. Paulette yearns to escape her mother's angry outbursts, but knows that marriage—the only "out" she can envision—would only lead her to a life like her mother's, perpetuating her unhappiness.

Sharon is an attractive, bright 17-year-old whose mother is dying of can-

cer. She coldly avoids her mother's gaze and touch and is cruel in her retorts. In one uncomfortable exchange between them, Sharon caustically complains about her mother's bad breath, refusing to acknowledge the truth. "I'm rotting," her mother blurts out, adding that it's the cancer, and not bad breath, that smells. Sharon's uncaring attitude scarcely conceals the fright and confusion of emotions stirred by her mother's "desertion" of her. Her answer is to leave first, not for a teen marriage, but to study in Israel.

The last teenager is Susie, an exuberant 15-year-old with less apparent conflicts in her life than her predecessors. It is not her mother but her older sister Rosa's husband who is the source of tension here. Rosa married while in high school and now lives at home with her baby and out-of-work, macho husband. Like Paulette, Susie knows at close hand the consequences of early marriage and is determined to live her life first and wait for the "right man" to come along. These three portraits are more like rough sketches, with unfinished, open-ended conclusions, intended by the producers to stimulate discussion. There is plenty of material here to spark serious thought.

Searching for a means of self-expression, a way of forming ties with the past and the future, women have often found the answer in quilting. *Quilts in Women's Lives* looks at this folk art and how it functions for seven different women today. For Grace Earl, "It's like love," and for Nora Lee Condors, "It's just like praying." Radha Donnell found herself suddenly being taken seriously by all the people in her life as she discovered her own voice in quilting. Whether displaying the exquisite quilts made by their grandmothers or their own beautiful handwork made for grandnieces, the women demonstrate not only the extraordinary diversity of quilts but the variety of meanings—from artistic expression to spiritual journey—which quilting provides.

Hamper McBee: Raw Mash is about a different American folk tradi-



Marathon Woman, Miki Gorman; The Juggling Movie; Martha Clarke: Light and Dark

tion. Hamper is one of the last of the Tennessee moonshiners and balladeers. "That's what slaps ya in the creek," he chortles after he chugalugs some home brew while demonstrating the dying art of making whiskey—and foiling the revenuers. In a sweet yet raspy voice, Hamper sings and tells tales, revealing the lost soul trapped beneath the waxed mustache, reddened face, and traditional male role he's inherited from his daddy and other men before him. Steam hisses, wood cracks, and fire crackles in this sensual conjuring of a backwoods bacchanal that ends explosively, courtesy of some dynamite furnished by the IRS, a humorous finale to more than just an amusing slice of regional life.

The harshness of rural life is the subject of *A Jury of Her Peers*, adapted from a story written by Susan Glaspell in 1917 about a farmer's wife accused of murdering her husband. While the sheriff and attorneys search the grounds for evidence, two neighbor

women gather together some of the woman's personal belongings to bring to the jail. As they sift through her few things, they begin to piece together the bleak and lonely life she led and the sort of man she was married to. They discover a motive in an incriminating clue and must decide whether to reveal or suppress this evidence. Filmmaker Sally Heckel successfully evokes the hard life of farm women in turn of the century America with authentic settings and understated acting and direction that are well suited for this spare yet powerful tale.

A Private Life is another fiction film, this one about an older woman who tries to establish a relationship with a man of similar age and background. Margot is a vital German-Jewish emigré living in New York City. She works part-time and lives for the future while her friend Karl spends most of his time writing his memoirs, wrapped up in the past. Their growing intimacy is abruptly severed when Karl's son invites him to live with him, and he leaves, unable to accept Margot's offer of love and renewed life. Directed by the distinguished Soviet filmmaker Mikhail Bogin, *A Private Life* is as much a film about the difficulties of relationships between men and women of any age as it is about growing old with dignity and a zest for living.

Sports

With few exceptions, sports history has focused exclusively on men's exploits. *Marathon Woman*, Miki Gorman profiles an extraordinary woman athlete competing in one of today's most popular sports. Miki says she came to everything late in life—marriage, motherhood, and marathons. She was already in her thirties when she decided to start running "to put on some weight." To everyone's surprise, the tiny, 90-pound Japanese woman developed into a world class athlete, twice winning both the Boston and New York City marathons and setting a world record when she was 37 years old. She explains how her mental strength developed while growing up in China and Japan, surviving a war, and emigrating to a new country for a better future. Here she met and married her husband, her staunchest supporter. After winning her first marathon, she discovered she was pregnant, and she continued running until a week before the birth. Compared to her 22 hours of labor, running a marathon is easy, she admits. Interviews with her coaches, competitors, and family fill in some of the background that makes Gorman such a determined and accomplished runner. In the final scenes, filmmaker Ellen Freyer follows Miki through the 1978 New York City Marathon, which she lost. Her strength and courage are

nowhere more admirable than in accepting defeat. Freyer's portrait is an inspirational one for women of any age.

The Olympics are the focus of Skip Blumberg's amusing videotape, *Earle Murphy's Winter Olympics*. Earle is a ski jumping fan and the U.S. team's chief meteorologist; it is through his wide-eyed enthusiasm for the sport that we see the games. He modestly explains his own creative role—how he filmed snow flurries to chart air currents and measured wind velocity by "borrowing" an artist's conceptual sculpture. Midway through the tape its focus becomes diffused by abandoning Earle's viewpoint and shifting to interviews with Olympic competitors, Lake Placid residents, and shots of practice and competition jumps. Though weakened by the loss of Earle in midstream, the tape springs alive again at its close as he triumphantly glides down the slope and jumps exultantly, a victory not only for the fiftyish weatherman but for all would-be Olympians in the audience.

Dance

Dancers, like athletes, require enormous physical stamina, perseverance, training, and a talent that sets them off from hardworking amateurs. Of these, only a few create their own dances. Filmmaker Joyce Chopra records the choreographic process in *Martha Clarke: Light and Dark*. Documenting "creativity" is difficult, and Chopra and Clarke's remarkable achievement is in making accessible the private region of the creative imagination at work.

Clarke's eccentric, highly personal dancing style is seen here as an extension of her personality. Before our eyes, her sources in literature, photography, and painting are transformed and recreated as dance movement. This process is not magical—trial, effort, the tedium of hard work entailed in any creative venture are required for her dances to take form. From solo studio improvisations in her New England home to collaboration with musicians and costumers on to lighting sessions in the theater, Clarke's ideas and once-isolated movements all come together in a Paris concert performance. The film's power derives from two creative artists in collaboration: it is influenced as much by Chopra's distinctive filmmaking style, with her clipped editing transitions and intimate close-ups, as it is by Clarke's choreography.

Dance has certainly been experiencing a renaissance in America, a phenomenon in part spurred on by PBS, TV series "Dance in America." Proving that one does not need an elaborate, multicamera recording setup to make video dance, Eva Maier choreographs her dances for one camera. *Blue Squawk* is composed for and by the

camera left propped on the ground. She dances here with an unusual *corps de ballet*—a flock of chickens pecking in the foreground. Seen far down the road, Maier slowly approaches, making marvelous cryptic gestures with her arms and legs, movements suggested by her "feathered" dance company. In addition to this wickedly funny allusion to *Swan Lake* and classical ballet, *Blue Squawk* also conjured memories of TV, seen as it is on the small tube. Maier's quirky semaphore gestures and deadpan humor recalled to my mind Art Carney "saluting the ball," a television resonance that enhances Maier's inventive video dance whimsy.

Highly coordinated movements are the key to the Pickle Family Jugglers' success, and *The Juggling Movie* is a fine introduction to the craft. Explaining some of the tricks of the trade to an audience composed largely of children, the jugglers demonstrate increasingly difficult combinations culminating in a dizzying slow-motion display. The film's snappy editing, the jugglers' comical routines and exceptional skill, and the filmed audience's squealing delight make this a delightful film.

Film and video art

Visual poetry in film and video often throw viewers, expecting "movies" and "TV" to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Since the everyday experience of dreams—with their own logic, symbolic language, and syntax of associations—is the nearest equivalent to watching film and video art, it's not really such an unfamiliar adventure.

Beginnings is an allegorical animated film in which natural forms—clouds, continents, bodies of water—subtly change, suggesting human shapes that drift pleasingly in space. The four elements combine and with this fusion a mountain rises or is it the belly of a woman swelling to give birth? A profound feeling for the generative forces inherent in all creation imbue these images, which conclude with snowflakes melting into the earth. Completed posthumously, *Beginnings* is Clorinda Warny's transcendently beautiful meditation on life, love, and death.

Sunstone is another allegorical animated work only in video, using the most sophisticated computer video animation equipment currently available. A solar disc is transformed as the tranquil features of a child-like face emerge: eyes blink, mouth opens, tongue flutters leaf-like until it lodges above the eyes forming a third eye. Suddenly the part-whimsical, part-mystical image cracks and shatters, later restored with brilliant solarized hues and recreated first as a rotating three-

dimensional wave-form pattern, then as the innocent face reconstituted amid thunder.

Shalom Gorewitz creates videotapes that are exquisitely realized moments of intense awareness. *El Corandero* (*The Faith Healer*) was originally shot in Andalusia, Spain, and post-produced using colorizers, synthesizers, and other electronic equipment. The result is a dream image, where trees, roads, weeds, and flowers are washed with Baudelairean colors. A cacophony of disembodied village voices accompanies the images, ebbing as flamenco music escorts a lone dog, ablaze with red and yellow light, into the wide and dusty street.

Steina and Woody Vasulka develop works that could only exist via video and the computer. Woody's work appeals almost exclusively to the intellect; they are often witty exercises that explore formal mathematical problems and illusions of space and time. *Artifacts II* opens with a single frame in which the overall-clad Vasulka stands in front of his kitchen stove and peers into the camera, bemusedly stroking his beard. This image is multiplied in real-time into numerous, postage-stamp likenesses which zoom in and out in rhythmical pulse. The grid-like image is further manipulated by flattening and elongating it, accompanied by the musical sounds produced by the video synch signal. In another sequence, his hand reaches out for a ball in which a feedback image—an infinite number of hands and balls—can be seen. Within this electronic crystal ball the images transmute, reverse left-right polarities, and alternate from black-and-white to color.

Steina's *Selected Treecuts* presents a different mood, place, and technology. Here she rhythmically alternates between black-and-white images of trees blowing in the wind to a computer memory of those trees rendered as a digital, grey-and-white mosaic, then back to the "real" trees, now seen in shimmering color. While drawing on the relationships between these three levels of visual abstraction, she also creates a composition for the ear. With audio modulated by the video signal, an om-like sound reverberates, building in intensity as the various visual images cut in and out and as the camera zooms in and out on them. The increasing alternation between scenes and their sounds climaxes and subsides, like the dying wind in the sunstroked trees. The experience of viewing this tape is something akin to having looked beneath the surface of the natural world and understanding, in all its nakedness and primal energy, the life force at work.

Tolstoy once wrote, "Art is a human activity having for its purpose the transmission to others of the highest

and best feelings to which men have risen." The art of motion pictures—whether chemically or electronically produced—is the unique art of the 20th Century. I hope it is evident from the works cited here that one can discover in fine films and videotapes, just as in literature, painting, drama, and music, "the highest and best feelings to which men (and women) have risen."

Mediagraphy

Artifacts II

9 min. color. video. \$175 purchase/\$50 rental. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Woody Vasulka. Dist.: Electronic Arts Intermix. Award: Ithaca Video Festival

Beginnings

9 min. color. 16mm. \$185/\$20. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Clorinda Warny. Dist.: Nat'l. Film Board of Canada. Award: American Film Festival

Best Boy

104 min. color. 16mm. \$1700/\$150. 1979/80 release. Dir./Prod.: Ira Wohl. Dist.: Documentary Films, Inc. Awards: American Film Festival, Academy Award

Blue Squawk*

3 min. color. video. \$100/\$35. 1980/81. Dir./Prod.: Eva Maier. Dist.: Eva Maier. Award: Ithaca Video Festival. *Comes with *Wrist Brakes*, 5 min.

Body Count

9 min. color. video. Inquire purchase/rental. 1981. Dir./Prod.: Dan Reeves. Sound: Jon Hilton. Dist.: Dan Reeves. Award: Ithaca Video Festival

The Day after Trinity: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Atomic Bomb

88 min. color. 16mm. \$950/\$125. 1980/81. Dir./Prod.: Jon Else. Dist.: Pyramid. Award: American Film Festival

Earle Murphy's Winter Olympics

30 min. color. video. \$200/rental inquire. 1980/81. Dir.: Skip Blumberg. Prod.: Skip Blumberg & Leanne Mella. Dist.: Skip Blumberg. Awards: American Film Festival, Global Village Video & TV Documentary Festival

El Corandero*

5½ min. color. video. \$200/\$50. 1979/81. Dir./Prod.: Shalom Gorewitz. Dist.: Electronic Arts Intermix. Award: Ithaca Video Festival. *Part of a series of five works, all on same tape

El Salvador: Another Vietnam

50 min. color. 16mm. Inquire purchase/rental. 1981. Dir./Prod.: Glenn Silber & Tete Vasconcellos. Dist.: Icarus Films. Awards: Global Village Video & TV Documentary Festival

Free Voice of Labor: the Jewish Anarchists

55 min. color. 16mm. \$800/\$80. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Joel Sucher & Steven Fischler. Dist.: Pacific St. Films. Award: American Film Festival

Home

90 min. color. video. \$215/\$90. 1979. Prod.: Julie Gustafson. Exec. Prod.: John Reilly. Dist.: Global Village. Award: American Film Festival

The Juggling Movie

10 min. color. 16mm. \$200/\$25. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Patrick Melly. Dist.: The Little Red Filmhouse. Award: American Film Festival

A Jury of Her Peers

30 min. color. 16mm. \$450/\$45. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Sally Heckel. Dist.: Texture Films. Award: American Film Festival

The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter

65 min. color. 16mm. \$795/\$100. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Connie Field. Dist.: Clarity Educational Prods. Awards: American Film Festival, Grierson Award

Marathon Woman, Miki Gorman

28 min. color. 16mm. \$400/\$50. 1980/81. Dir./Prod.: Ellen Freyer. Dist.: Ellen Freyer. Award: American Film Festival

Martha Clarke: Light and Dark

54 min. color. 16mm. \$850/\$85. 1980. Dir.: Joyce Chopra & Martha Clarke. Prod.: Joyce Chopra. Dist.: Phoenix Films. Award: American Film Festival

MOVE: Confrontation in Philadelphia

60 min. b/w. video. \$350/inquire rental. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Karen Pomer & Jane Mancini. Dist.: Temple University, Video & Film Distribution. Award: American Film Festival

Mr. Vanik Leaves Washington

28 min. color. video. \$500. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Jim Lindsay. Dist.: Storer Broadcasting. Award: American Film Festival

Plea Bargaining: an American Way of Justice

60 min. b/w. 16mm \$625/\$60. 1980/81. Dir./Prod.: Robert Thurber. Dist.: Thurber Production Film Library. Award: American Film Festival

Possum Living

28½ min. color. 16mm. \$450/\$50. 1980. Dir.: Nancy Schreiber. Prod.: Nancy Schreiber & Peter Polymenakos. Dist.: New Day Films. Award: American Film Festival

Presumed Innocent

60 min. b/w. video. \$300/\$75. 1979/80. Dir.: Stefan Moore. Prod.: Claude Beller. Dist.: TVG Documentary Arts Project. Award: American Film Festival

A Private Life

31 min. color. 16mm. \$425/\$50. 1980. Dir.: Mikhail Bogin. Prod.: Peter O. Almond. Dist.: Museum of Modern Art. Award: American Film Festival

Public Enemy Number One

50 min. color. 16mm. \$750/\$75. 1980. Dir./Prod.: David Bradbury. Dist.: Filmmakers Library, Inc. Award: American Film Festival

Quilts in Women's Lives

28 min. color. 16mm. \$450/\$50. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Pat Ferrero. Dist.: New Day Films. Award: American Film Festival

Raw Mash

29 min. color. video. \$270/inquire rental. 1978/80. Dir.: Sol Korine & Blaine Dunlap. Prod.: Sol Korine. Dist.: Center for Southern Folklore. Awards: American Film Festival, Global Village Video & TV Documentary Festival

Selected Treecuts

5:35 min. color. video. Inquire purchase/rental. Dir./Prod.: Steina. Dist.: Steina. Award: Ithaca Video Festival

Signed, Sealed and Delivered: Labor Struggle in the Post Office

44 min. color. video. \$250/\$75. 1980. Dir.: Tami K. Gold. Prod.: Tami Gold, Dan Gordon, & Erik Lewis. Dist.: Tamerik Prods. Awards: American Film Festival, Global Village Video & TV Documentary Festival

Sunstone

3 min. color. video. \$175/\$50. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Ed Emshwiller. Dist.: Electronic Arts Intermix. Award: Ithaca Video Festival

Taking Back Detroit

55 min. color. 16mm. \$700/\$75. 1979/80. Dir.: Stephen Lighthill. Prod.: Stephen Lighthill & Kristine Samuelson. Dist.: Available Light. Award: American Film Festival

Teenage Girls: Three Stories

58 min. color. video. \$350/\$50. 1980. Dir.: Abbie H. Fink. Exec. Dir.: Carol Anshien. Dist.: Community Cable Center. Award: American Film Festival

The Willmar 8

49 min. color. 16mm. \$700/\$75. 1980. Dir.: Lee Grant. Prod.: Mary Beth Yarrow & Julie Thompson. Dist.: California Newsreel. Award: American Film Festival

Distributors

Available Light, 72 Molimo Dr., San Francisco, CA 94127. 415-239-8852

Skip Blumberg, 69 Reade St., New York, NY 10007. 212-732-1725

California Newsreel, 630 Natoma St., San Francisco, CA 94103. 415-621-6196

Center for Southern Folklore, P.O. Box 40105/1216 Peabody Ave., Memphis, TN 38104. 901-726-4205

Clarity Educational Prods., P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417. 201-891-8240

Community Cable Center, 2827 Valentine Ave., Bronx, NY 10458. 212-365-2627

Documentary Films, Inc., 159 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. 212-582-4318

Electronic Arts Intermix, 84 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10001. 212-989-2316

Filmmakers Library, 133 East 58 St., Suite 703A, New York, NY 10022. 212-355-6545

Ellen Freyer, 112 West 15 St., New York, NY 10011. 212-924-5143

Global Village, 454 Broome St., New York, NY 10013. 212-966-7526

Icarus Films, 200 Park Ave. So., Rm. 1319, New York, NY 10003. 212-674-3375

The Little Red Filmhouse, 666 No. Robertson Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90069. 213-855-0241

Museum of Modern Art, Circulating Film Program, 11 West 53 St., New York, NY 10019. 212-956-4211

Eva Maier, 75 Chambers St., New York, NY 10007. 212-964-2054

National Film Board of Canada, 1251 Ave. of Americas, 16 fl., New York, NY 10020. 212-586-5131

New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417. 201-891-8240

Pacific St. Films, Inc., 22 First St., Brooklyn, NY 11231. 212-875-9722

Phoenix Films, 470 Park Ave. So., New York, NY 10016. 212-684-5910

Pyramid Films, P.O. Box 1048, Santa Monica, CA 90406. 213-828-7577

Dan Reeves, Box 215 RD #1, Burdett, NY 14818. 607-546-8534 or 607-272-1596

Steina, 1600 Old Pecos Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87501

Storer Broadcasting, WJKW-TV, 5800 S. Marginal Rd., Cleveland, OH 44103. 216-431-8888

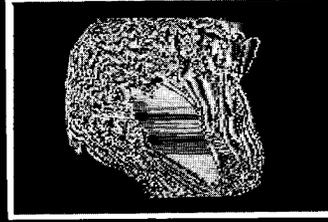
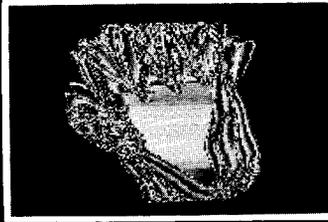
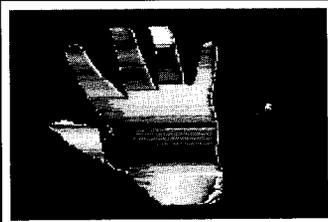
TVG Documentary Arts Project, Inc., 1697 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. 212-581-0649

Tamerik Prod., 237 Second St., Jersey City, NJ 07302. 201-656-8157

Temple University, Dept. Radio/TV/Film, Annenberg Hall, Philadelphia, PA 19122. 215-787-8483

Texture Films, Inc., 1600 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. 212-586-6960

Thurber Production Film Library, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417. 201-891-8240



From *Artifacts II*