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 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 videomakers 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.

By Deirdre Boyle

Deirdre Boyle, a lecturer, media consultant, and writer, is a member of the media studies faculties at the New School for Social Research and the Fordham University College at Lincoln Center in New York City. She is audiovisual consultant and a regular contributor on audiovisual matters to Library Journal
Of the hundreds of nontheatrical films and original videotapes released each year, only a small percentage of them—often ignored by critics, programmers, librarians, and producers. I’ve selected 31 works from among the winners of the American Film Festival, the Asia Video Festival, the Global Village Video and Television Documentary Festival, among others. (For specific awards see the “Medallography” which follows.) My selections are based on public and academic library collection interests, on how well films and tapes can disclose and the era in which we live. Notable are the 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, show how groups of women, 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 toward a better understanding of who we are today, how we got there, and where we may be headed.

**Labor**

Documenting the harrowing course of labor history in the United States, these tapes and films present a wealth of information on the number of outstanding film and video filmmakers. Films like the 1976 academy award-winning _The Battle of Amity Hill_ captured a growing interest among the public in who we are today, how we got there, and where we may be headed.

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The wind seems to be howling ominously these days, and several films and novels are now in the present—and to come. Body Count, an emotionally gripping film, stars Jon Hilton and is directed by Julie Gustafson. It presents youth's fascination with military service and work effectively within the existing system to effect change.

Trinity was the code name for that turning point—the moment of the bombing of Hiroshima. The Day after Trinity: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Bomb is a documentary that sheds light on the man who produced the first atomic weapon. The film traces Oppenheimer's life from his early days as a pacifist to his pivotal role in making the atomic bomb possible. The film covers the period from 1945 to 1954, and provides a glimpse of the complex character. Meticulous research and interviews are used to present the unfolding story of Oppenheimer's involvement in the Manhattan Project and his efforts to limit the spread of atomic technology.

The film retraces Oppenheimer's life, from his boyhood to his work in the Manhattan Project. It highlights his conflict between his efforts to limit the spread of atomic technology and his own role in creating the atomic bomb. The film explores the inner workings of Oppenheimer's mind and the impact of his decisions on the world.

The Day after Trinity: J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Bomb is a must-watch for anyone interested in the history of the nuclear age. It offers a fresh perspective on one of the most controversial figures in modern history.

In addition to Trinity, a new documentary about J. Robert Oppenheimer, and the Atomic Bomb has been released. The documentary, titled Body Count, explores the history of the atomic bomb and its impact on society. It features interviews with historians, scientists, and survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The film also includes footage from the Manhattan Project, the development of the atomic bomb, and its use in World War II.

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America's most recent intervention in another country's internal strife has come under attack at home again. In a 90-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. Congress 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, Costa Rican eye witness—Professor Elias Unger, president of the Revolutionary Democratic Front; former U.S. ambassador Morall Williams; Bishop at the University of California; Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas; the late La Raza; and a number of the Maryland 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 the continued American support of the current government. The award-winning film was a chilling report of terror, violation and sanctioned violence on the millions of people in Central America.

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Marathon Woman, Miki Gorman; The Juggler's success, and The Juggling Movie is a fine introduction to the sport. Explaining the trade, he leads to an audience comprised largely of children, the jugglers demonstrate increasingly difficult combinations culminating in a dizzying slow-motion display. The film's snappy editing, the jugglers' corny routines and exasperating sense of humor make this delightful film.

Films and video art

Visual poetry in film and video often throw viewers, expecting "movie" to mean a beginning, middle, and end. Since the everyday experience of dreams—with their changing directions and syntax of associations—is the nearest equivalent to this constant flux, the film and the audience are left in a state of suspended animation.

Dancers, like athletes, require enormous physical stamina, perseverance, training, and a talent that sets them apart from the bulk of mankind. Of these, only a few create their own dances. In her films, Martha Clarke records the choreographic process in Martha Clarke: Light and Dark. Documenting "creativity, hard work, and Chopa and Clarke's remarkable achievement is in making accessible the private region of the creative imagination at work.

Clarke's energetic, highly personal dance style is seen here as an extension of her personality. Before our eyes, her sources in literature, photography, and painting are transformed into dance and scored over with music. This process is not magical—trivial, in fact, the toiled hard work entailed in her choreography is revealed to the dance's take form. From solo studio improvisations in her New York City apartment, Clarke collaborative with musicians and costumers on lighting, scenery, and music, the choreography evolves into a story that is essentially true.

Clarke's work appeals almost exclusively to the art world. This is not really such an unfamiliar adventure. Clarke's "Intenting" is an allegorical filmed in which natural forms—clouds, continents, bodies of water—are subsumed into a dance. The shapes that drift pleasingly in space. The dance is not meant to fix this mountain rises or is it the belly of a woman swollen to give birth? A great wave is the focal point. While changing, a sense of forces inherent in all creation imbue these images, which coincide with sound, melody and earth. Completed posthumously, Beginnings is an electronic project that brings a peaceful meditation on life, love, and death.

Steina & Woody's "Squawk" is composed for and by the audience. The result is a dream image, where the increasing transitions and intimate close-ups, sound climaxes and subsides, like the ocean waves. The increasing pulses and the deadly blue violets, ever-present in the background, create a composition for the ear. With audio modulated by the video signal, an alpine landscape 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 soundtrack, with the camera dying in the sunstruck 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 beauty, the "creativity" of life's vital force.

Today 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 scientifically or electronically produced—is the unique art of the 20th century. I hope it is evident from the films and videos advertised here, in fine films and videotapes, just as it is in fine books, that these are "the highest and best feelings to which men (and women) have risen."
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.: City Educational Prods. Awards: American Film Festival, Grierson Award

Marathon Woman, Miki Gorman
65 min. color. 16mm. $795/$100. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Ellen Freyer. Dist.: Ellen Freyer. Award: American Film Festival

Martha Clarke: Light and Dark
54 min. color. 16mm. $850/$85. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Joyce Chopra & Martha Clarke. 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. video. $300/$25. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Robert Thurber. Dist.: Thurber Production Film Library. Award: American Film Festival

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

Presumed Innocent
60 min. b/w. video. $300/$75. 1979/80. Dir.: Abbie H. Fink. Exec. Dir./Prod.: Carol Anshien. Dist.: Community Cable Center. Award: American Film Festival

A Private Life

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

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

Sunstone
3 min. color, video. $175/$50. 1980. Dir./Prod.: Em 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

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 94117. 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, P.O.B. 40105, 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 10009. 212-582-4318

Electronic Arts Intermix, 84 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10001. 212-989-2116
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 10009. 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
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

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