Shingen's enemies, the Lords of the two rival clans, exhibit the same tendencies. Both instinctively "feel" Shingen is dead, yet they reinterpret this feeling as their own strong desire for his death. In other words, they see it as a wish fulfillment, as if they were interpreting a dream. When one of the Lords finally learns that Shingen has been dead for three years, he performs a strange ritualistic dance, chanting "Life is a dream, a vision." As in the case of the grandson, their interpretation is not wrong; it is merely partial. Like dreams, these intuitive signs in humans are overdetermined. The evolutionary development in mammals of dreaming sleep helped to further the dominance of brains over genes. As the dreaming mechanisms grew increasingly complex in humans, the brain developed new ways of processing sensory images from the past and generating new combinations of signs for directing the future.

Both the human power of interpreting signs and the surviving influence of Lord Shingen are vividly demonstrated in Kagemusha's nightmare. It occurs shortly after Shingen's death and while Kagemusha is still resisting his role as double. In the dream we see Kagemusha against a vivid multicolored sky, walking through stylized waves whose substance is dust rather than water. Suddenly Lord Shingen materializes, and Kagemusha rushes back and forth in desperation. The final image is a close-up of Kagemusha's feet submerged in water. When he awakens from the nightmare, he says: "I was surrounded by thousands of enemies." Although we did not see any enemies in the dream, we conclude that he sensed their presence and that's why he was running. At this point in the film, we might see the nightmare as a reflection of his debut performance as Shadow Warrior, in which he was surrounded by soldiers; the expressionistic visuals link the two sequences. Such an interpretation might lead us to conclude that Lord Shingen has now become Kagemusha's Shadow. By the time we reach the end of the film, we realize the dream was prophetic. Both the visual images and the verbal commentary foreshadow the climactic battle in which Kagemusha is surrounded by thousands of enemies, and in which he joins his Lord in a watery grave. The prophetic nature of the dream is also underlined by the mysterious rainbow that appears in the sky just before the battle. Not only does it evoke the multicolored sky in Kagemusha's nightmare, but the Takeda Clan generals explicitly interpret it as a sign of Lord Shingen's presence and as a warning against their offensive strategy. Just as the scene with the flute taught us how to listen to the sound track, this rainbow scene instructs us in how to interpret expressionistic colors and lighting effects throughout the rest of the film. It may lead us to reinterpret Lord Shingen's role in the nightmare—not merely as Kagemusha's Shadow or as a prophecy of the Shadow Warrior's coming death, but to indicate the survival of the Lord's spirit and his continuing influence over the way his clan interprets human experience. One instinctively feels, if only Kagemusha had understood the dream, perhaps he could have prevented the defeat of the Takeda Clan. But then we recall the words of the generals on the eve of battle: "By the time we interpret the moves of the enemy, it may be too late to act."

The same may be true of dreams. Yet unlike battles, dreams contain only the images of action, not the actions themselves. The same is true of both movies and history. Kagemusha emphasizes this distinction, for it is an historical reconstruction that foregrounds, not even the images of actions, but the human process of interpreting them.

—MARSHA KINDER

NOTES

1. For a discussion of this pattern in Throne of Blood, see my article entitled "Throne of Blood: A Morality Dance," Literature/Film Quarterly (October 1977), 339-45.
2. I realize I am taking a risk in making this claim since 20 minutes have been cut from the American version of the film and I have not seen the original.

RIGHT OUT OF HISTORY


Right Out of History is a feature-length documentary about the making of "The Dinner Party," an art piece conceived by Judy Chicago and worked on by hundreds of people. It is the extraordinary accomplishment of this film that, gently and with subtle wit that enriches the exceptionally high quality of its camerawork and editing, it succeeds
in bringing together the work itself, the relationships and personal development involved in the process of making it, and the reactions of those who see the finished piece. Like “The Dinner Party,” Right Out of History integrates thousands of people—the hundreds who worked on it and the thousands of women whom research discovered as candidates for the 999 names on the tiles of the Heritage Floor and the 39 who were given places at the triangular table. It brings together centuries of time, from a primordial age of goddesses through the five years it took to make the piece and the film. Director Joanna Demetrakas sees this as very American: “A melting pot where everything comes together. A melting pot of feminist history.”

The financing (the film cost about $50,000) also involved hundreds of people in Demetrakas’s work-in-progress. With very little grant money forthcoming ($10,000 at the beginning, which gave her heart to go on, and $4,000 near the end that will help her get out of debt personally), most of the support came from 40 or 50 small screenings set up in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, where Demetrakas showed short segments or, later, rough cuts, to sympathetic audiences, mainly of women who knew the project or Demetrakas’s work and might be interested in supporting the film. Demetrakas found this extraordinary process painful, but also enlightening. “It was very uncomfortable because people were always commenting on the flaws—How are you going to fix this? What on earth will you do about that? But it was also enlightening. It showed me what really worked. It influenced the editing because I saw the power of certain sequences.”

A painter for many years, Demetrakas spent time in Paris after art school, and there she fell in love with movies, especially with the rhythms of New Wave and other experimental editing, which made the films of Truffaut, Godard, Antonioni, and Buñuel “Something a painter could love because they were so textured. The cuts and camera
work were more like the way the eye sees . . . seeing as the eye moves.”* Her personal film-making began with editing, she thinks for two main reasons. First, editing was the only point in the film-making process where you handle the physical film. Demetrakas didn’t want to let go of that, and still doesn’t. Second, she felt safe in the editing room. “There’s always been a mystique about women and editing—that they could do it—so the editing room seemed like the right place.” But she always believed she would direct: “I was a painter—the one who actually did it.” For some years a union editor, Demetrakas is now trying to put together her first package to direct a commercial feature, using her own screenplay, a rich, multi-layered story about a grandmother who teaches her granddaughter the difference between sex, love, and passion. The screenplay resolves toward the wholeness, integrity, and emotional fulness which are of central concern in the “Dinner Party” film as well.

Demetrakas describes her approach to making Right Out of History: “I do a kind of responsive documentary. I respond to what I see, but I also have to respect the integrity of what I’m filming. You have to maintain your own integrity and the integrity of what you see—that’s the balance, that’s the dance.” Camerawork and editing reveal the film-maker’s choices and sensitivity in handling the material, yet leave the film clearly centered on the subject matter. A typical sequence involves a long or medium shot of several people or an individual concentrating closely on some task, followed, by an extreme close-up of hands working needle and thread, pencil, clay, or brush. In an early sequence, a woman teaches Judy Chicago to coat lace with porcelain glaze, one of the many traditional skills she acquired for the piece. Later, we see her hands darting quickly to coat the lace, draw it on a string, and place it correctly on the Emily Dickinson plate—“with layers of frozen lace surrounding her core.” In the next shot, the plate comes out of the kiln with a big crack through the middle, and we understand that all that painstaking work must be done again and again. In another sequence, we see Chicago delicately brush-

* For detailed biographical information, see “Recording a labor of art,” by Linda Gross. Los Angeles Times (Sept. 1, 1980), Part V, p. 7.
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understanding that the art establishment’s deep resentment of the piece was temporarily obscured by the flood of women who have come out as artists in the last few years, and by the passionate reactions of thousands of people to the project. As she speaks, we cut to a shot at the museum where the camera is positioned behind a small girl who stands back alone, staring in fascination at the “Dinner Party” table while the crowds move slowly in front of her. Cut back to Chicago as she analyzes the museums’ rejections with these words: “It means—you can’t play here.”

In a later sequence, Demetrakas uses editing to uncover the humor, modesty, and emotional integration which marked the art-making process at its best. The place settings had to be attached to the table, which meant that bolts had to be put through the embroidered runners. The needle-worker primarily responsible for each runner had the task of placing the bolts. Then the runner had to be cut away at those points. As one of the women begins to snap away at the embroidery that has obsessed her for years, the film cuts to an extreme close-up of the scissors at work, and we have a kinesthetic reaction—our bodies tighten and you can hear the indrawn breath of the audience. After a few seconds, the sound track gives us a woman’s plaintive voice: “Honey, that does not feel good . . . that is hard to do.” Another beat. Cut to a medium shot as a voice offers a little comic relief: “This is the fun part. You get to peel it back and look at the holes.” Everybody breaks up.

The film’s concern with the relationships and personal development of those making the piece is expressed dramatically in a number of confrontation scenes. One of the most intense involves a man who was doing video for the project; apparently several people were pressing him to reveal himself more personally, to allow others greater access to his emotions. He was arguing that his entire professional experience had moved him away from this; he had learned to express nothing publicly. In this sequence the goals of the project’s work processes are revealed as revolutionary indeed—nothing less than the re-introduction of the personal and the emotional in work, in art, and in human contact.

But the focus is certainly not on re-educating men. Above all, this film is about the relationships and hidden accomplishments of women, past and present. In one sequence, a woman complains that Chicago demands too much reading, too much thought, not enough action. Chicago, in her role as leader/tyrant/inspiration, angrily replies that only those who understand history can change it. She shouts her impatience at “How fucking ignorant women not only are, but insist upon being!” Each time I’ve seen the film, this moment brings applause from the audience. The developing relationships between Chicago and all the others provides one of the film’s unifying themes.

In one sequence, a ceramics worker complains that one of the important ceramics designers—a man—doesn’t have to fire the kilns or do other drudge work, that the set-up is not fair. Chicago replies, rather glibly, that things are never perfect and she never promised fairness. The other woman asks quietly: “Isn’t that what we’re trying to change?” Chicago comments no further; we infer that she has accepted the unfairness in order to finish the piece. The other women must decide to do so or not. The personal growth of this ceramics worker provides another thread that draws the film together. Here she presses Chicago to take her analysis of the situation to its limits, and later it becomes clear that she has taken over most of the responsibility for the production of the plates. One of the most endearing qualities of this film is to introduce, indirectly and subtly, in various contexts, elements of a developmental line of imagery or character, without announcing the linear quality or symbolic importance of the elements; thus the audience can slowly create the unfolding significance, as the ceramics worker must have herself in this instance.

The last 15 minutes of the film focus on the fin-
ished work and the reactions of those who see it. The film begins giving us access to "The Dinner Party" as a whole with the overhead shot of the Heritage Floor that I mentioned earlier. Breathtaking in its radiance, it gives us our first taste of the pleasures we might have in looking at the piece even if we knew nothing of its processes. A little later, the camera looks at the whole piece from one of the points of the triangular table, and we see it abstractly, a piece of high art, an extraordinary assemblage of many media. It combines the spatial power of sculpture; the special, compelling strength of the image, as in painting; the glistening, almost decadent thrills of jewelry and precious stones; and the unique combination of imitation, utility, and autonomy that can be developed in ceramics. Then the camera tracks slowly along one side of the table, moves in for details, continues tracking. This highly controlled shot was created by someone pushing an old, wooden museum dolly that carried its own umbrella lighting. The sequence suggests the experience you might have as you move along the piece yourself, combining wholeness and detail in your vision. (The effect of experiencing the piece as you move through it was Demetrakas's primary goal in her 1973 documentary about Womanhouse, an earlier group work led by Judy Chicago where she and others transformed the interior of a house into a space wildly expressive of various aspects of women's lives.) Then the film cuts to a very high overhead shot of the whole table, shimmering and pulsating in its physical beauty and in its culmination of everything personal, technical, and aesthetic that the film has shown us so far.

"The Dinner Party"'s combination of craft and art, of history, politics, and aesthetics has been a problem for many viewers and critics. Demetrakas's choice of viewers' reactions reveals these problems and absurdities. One political type in tiny black glasses thinks feminism is a distraction from the true goals; another man feels trapped by the circular imagery; another points out that if you don't like vaginas, you won't like "The Dinner Party." One elegant, middle-aged woman wearing big round beads justifies to a friend the use of the vagina as a central image in the piece, arguing that it's what all these goddesses, heroines, and martyrs have in common (and, of course, it is the common image that has been virtually excluded from the symbol system of technological civilization.)

One of the film's most pervasive themes is the power of transformation. Right Out of History opens with the image of a butterfly and closes with Chicago describing how she transformed her isolation as a woman artist. (She has devoted years to bringing out hundreds of unknown women artists; she worked alone for a year and a half on "The Dinner Party" before she realized what her vision actually entailed.) We see a montage of many women working on the weaving, the embroidery, the ceramics, and a little later, we see a shot of the studio jammed full of people, all concerned with another change—the transformation of history, the reintegration of powerful women into historical spaces that must be forced open to make room for them. For example, one of the research sequences reveals that Katherine Green Whitney (not her husband) actually invented the cotton gin. Since women couldn't hold patents, her husband registered it, and she disappeared right out of history.

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Summer 1980

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Throughout the film, we see many images of women whose skills were developed far beyond their expectations, like the woman who made hundreds of perfect tiles for the floor when no tile company would undertake the job. She then confesses, a little embarrassed at seeming to praise herself, that she did get "a sense of satisfaction" from the job. Or my favorite, the woman who struggled against Chicago's insistence on discipline because, a victim of her own stereotypes, she thought that focus meant limitation—then she found out that focus means expansion, that intense concentration can take you to the infinite center of anything.

The film also reveals another important and closely related transformation within the world of art itself: the transformation of traditional female crafts such as needlework and china painting into high art, and the expansion of the audience for such techniques. Such an effort involves breaking down some of the art world's most cherished categories. In addition, as I suggested earlier, the insistence on vaginal imagery exerts a pressure against convention that some find intolerable. If the world of "legitimate art" is expanded to include these media and images, then the control of the spaces, materials, and rewards of art-making might also be transformed.

As Chicago remarks early in the film, in one of its resonances "The Dinner Party" represents an ironic version of one of the world's most famous traditional images of martyrdom—The Last Supper—but since women are themselves the plates, they are closely linked, not with the consumers, but with the consumed. It is the triumph of the piece and of Right Out of History to build on this profoundly ironic awareness of violence, not a complaint but a transcendence, a metamorphosis that is subtle, personal, and successful as art and as documentary.

Right Out of History has been screened as a feature in the Pacific Film Archive, at theaters in Boston and Houston, and filled the house for two nights of excited audiences in LA where the theater has rebooked the film. It almost makes its booking costs in long runs as well, which is amazing in the absence of any conventional advertising. It has been accepted at the London, Berlin, and Neon (Switzerland) film festivals. It has recently been bought for broadcasting by the BBC. As we reflected on the film's rejection by LA's 1979 Filmex, Demetrakas suggested: "It has a kind of unpretentious quality...some people don't see what it is...don't see its universality."

From the feature film, Demetrakas takes the length of History, the exceptional quality of its camerawork and editing, and its highly controlled surface. From the documentary, the film gets its basic stance of detailed, nonfictional investigation of something significant in the world, where you have to be present to catch the accident of the cracked Dickinson plate or the confrontation between Chicago and the ceramics worker. Demetrakas rejects the scientific or educational "objectivity" of the conventional documentary, offering instead not storyline or fiction, but the personal vision of the independent filmmaker. Like the phenomenon it documents, Right Out of History involves a wide-ranging and original process of generic integration, creating an expanded audience for the documentary.

—BEVERLE HOUSTON

LAST OF THE BLUE DEVILS

Director and producer: Bruce Ricker. Editor: Thomasin Henkel. 35mm distribution: Lloyd Kohn/Nightfall, 8033 Sunset Blvd., Box 233, Los Angeles 90046. 16mm: Direct Cinema Ltd., Box 69589, Los Angeles 90069.

Like dance film, movies concentrating on jazz performance have often evoked a tension between the subject's control over his materials and the filmmaker's formalizing impulses. Until recently, jazz has been ill-served by the movies, a few shorts excepted like Gjon Mili's Jammin' the Blues (1944) and Roger Tilton's Jazz Dance (1954) which was shot in part by Richard Leacock. Even in these films, the directors held the reins tight. Mili isolates his artists against big, high-fashion cycloramas. Tilton accelerates the frenzy of a New York dixieland beer bust with flashy editing.

Alternatively, jazz musicians have momentarily appeared in the middle of Hollywood features,* but for the most part this great music, when docu-

*Although hardly complete, a full rundown on documented jazz performances will be found in David Meeker, Jazz in the Movies: a Guide to Jazz Musicians 1917-1977 (London: Talisman, 1977).