

**Decade of Diversity:
A History of 1970s British Experimental Film**

Patti Gaal-Holmes

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to demonstrate the diversity in 1970s British experimental filmmaking, and acts as a form of historical reclamation. The intention is to integrate films that have not received adequate recognition into the field alongside those that stand as accepted texts. In accounts of the decade structural and material film experimentation, taking place predominantly at the London Filmmakers' Co-operative (LFMC), has tended to dominate the histories, at the expense of overshadowing more personal, expressive and representational forms of filmmaking. This thesis therefore seeks to redress the balance by demonstrating that 1970s filmmaking was far more complex and diverse than has previously been acknowledged. It importantly also challenges the belief that more expressive, personal forms of filmmaking *returned* at the end of the decade, to argue that these were in existence *throughout* the decade. Evidence of diversity is provided through the range of approaches to filmmaking and individual films discussed. Written evidence of the 'return to image' thesis is also provided, demonstrating how this has problematically perpetuated a flawed account of the decade.

Relationships to the visual arts are closely considered as experimental filmmaking essentially emerged from this field, as opposed to the dominant, commercial cinema. Filmmaking is, however, also considered within the wider contexts of independent film production, particularly where intersections occurred with institutional or organisational frameworks. Theoretical, socio-political and cultural influences informing filmmaking have also been deliberated, as these significantly informed filmmaking. The framing of 1970s experimental (and independent) filmmaking within Marxist discourses has also been recognised as potentially supporting the problematic 'return to image' thesis, particularly as collectivist Marxist ideologies potentially militated against more personal, individual and expressive forms of filmmaking.

The first half of the thesis (Chapters One to Three) considers the institutional frameworks and organisational strategies informing and shaping filmmaking. This includes a focus on education, funding and film exhibition; as well as the efforts made by individuals and groups to ensure that experimental filmmaking received the recognition it required to develop and flourish. In the second half of the thesis (Chapters Four to Seven) more detailed studies of the films are made in relation to relevant theoretical or socio-political discourses contextualising filmmaking. These include discourses in the visual arts; countercultural influences and more personal expressive approaches to filmmaking; theoretical discourses related to experimentation with structure and material and feminist discourses related to women's filmmaking.

A range of methodological approaches has been used to uncover the diversity in filmmaking. The film texts themselves have provided the most singular evidence for proof of diversity. Both primary and secondary written texts have been consulted in order to facilitate an understanding of the films and recognise the theoretical and socio-political contexts informing filmmaking and to comprehend the complex nature of the field. The intention throughout has been to provide an understanding of this diverse, vibrant and rich history.

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DECLARATION

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACE – Arts Council England

ACGB – Arts Council Great Britain

BFI – British Film Institute

BFIPB – British Film Institute Production Board

C4 – Channel Four

FMOT – Film-makers on Tour

GLC – Greater London Council

ICA – Institute of Contemporary Art

IFA – Independent Filmmakers Association

LFMC – London Filmmaker's Co-op

NFT – National Film Theatre

LVA – London Video Arts

BAFVSC – British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection

RCA – Royal College of Art

DISSEMINATION

‘Experiments with Structure and Material’

School of Creative Arts, Film and Media - Research Day

University of Portsmouth, May 2007

‘Details in the Filmic Text: Considering Thriller and Light Reading’

1970s Culture and Society Conference,

University of Portsmouth, 1-3 July 2008

‘Some Acute Angles of Observation’

Wild Eye Symposium of Experimental Film Studies

De Montfort University, Leicester, 4 March 2009

‘Parameters of Practice: Annabel Nicolson’s 1970s Practice’

Centre for European and International Studies - Postgraduate Study Day

University of Portsmouth, 13 May 2009

‘Parameters of Practice: Annabel Nicolson’s 1970s Practice’

Expanded Cinema – Activating the Site of Reception

Central St Martins School of Art and Design, 20 May 2009

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Digression Three or Answer Number Four:

The course of history
was therefore not that
of a billiard ball –
which, once it is hit,
takes a definite line –
but resembles the
movement of clouds,
or the path of a man
sauntering through the
streets, turned aside by
a shadow here, a crowd
there, an unusual
architectural outcrop,
until at last he arrives
at a place he never
knew or meant to go.
Inherent in the course
of history is going
off course.

Robert Musil

